

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ZHANG AILING:

A CRITICAL STUDY

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation is a study of Zhang Ailing's life and works and aims to provide a comprehensive overview of her literary career. Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang 張愛玲, 1920-1995) is a significant figure in modern Chinese literary history, not only because of her outstanding artistry and modernist vision, but also because of her diverse contributions to the course of Chinese literature.

The study follows the conventional chronological order of her life and is divided into eight chapters, together with an introduction and a conclusion. The first and the second chapters examine how Zhang's family experiences and wartime impressions contributed to the formation of her anti-romantic vision and how they influenced her subsequent creative writings. The third and fourth chapters analyze the significance and implications of her early works, written before she embarked on her literary career, and of her English-language cultural critiques and film reviews published in *The Twentieth Century*.

Chapters five and six focus on the two major genres of Zhang's creative writing: short stories and informal essays. Her short stories, with their exploration of the individual psyche in a modern urban context and their sense of disengagement and irony, can be considered as one of the earliest manifestation of modernism in China. Her essays show a strong sensuality and sympathetic understanding, as well as an identification with femininity and with everyday life. Showing a similarity to other modern Chinese women writers in her concern for detail, Zhang sets herself off by a uniquely witty and humorous

tone. Her use of poetic diction and splendid imagery also serves as a striking contrast to the insipid style of most of her contemporaries.

Chapter seven traces the development of Zhang's novels, which in turn reflects changes in her life and personal psychology. Chapter eight examines Zhang's career as a screenplay writer, translator and academic scholar.

The concluding chapter deals with Zhang's contribution to the course of modern Chinese literature, through an investigation of her legacy in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland China.

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## Introduction

This dissertation is a study in English of Zhang Ailing's life and works, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of her literary career. Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang 張愛玲, 1920-1995), was one of the most significant figures in modern Chinese literature. Her modernist insight into human nature, as well as her stylistic and formal inventiveness, set her apart from most of her predecessors and contemporaries. She was almost unique in going against the trend of social criticism that largely dominated the Chinese literary scene from the May Fourth era onwards. While most modern Chinese writers, in what C. T. Hsia terms their "obsession with China,"<sup>1</sup> viewed fiction as a tool to "save the nation" and believed that all social evil could be eradicated by a perfect political system, Zhang focuses on the blindness, vanity and greed lying deep inside the human heart. In contrast to her contemporaries' neglect of literary artistry in their eagerness to get their messages across, her works excel in psychological sophistication and in the use of poetic diction and splendid imagery. Despite her isolation from the literary trends of her time, Zhang became one of the most original writers in modern Chinese literature.

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<sup>1</sup> "What distinguishes this 'modern' phase of Chinese literature alike from the traditional and Communist phases is rather its burden of moral contemplation: its obsessive concern with China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity." C. T. Hsia, "Obsession with China: the moral burden of modern Chinese literature," in *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971, 533-534.

Zhang enjoyed great popularity in Shanghai in the forties, right after the publication of her first collection of short stories, *Romances*. Her rise to prominence can be partly explained by the exodus of “progressive” writers from the foreign concessions to the north, which led to a vacuum in the literary scene that was filled by the leisurely Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School of popular romance. Zhang’s works, with their sophistication and artistry, appealed to an educated, urban readership who found in them a more satisfying alternative to these sentimental stories. Another significant factor was that the Japanese government, as demonstrated by Edward Gunn’s detailed study of the occupation period, was never strict in their literary control. They accepted all kinds of literature as long as it was not anti-government, and in fact promoted literary activities with the hope to make the city more prosperous.<sup>2</sup> In his “To Zhang Ailing from Afar,” Ke Ling (柯靈) comments,

The fact that Zhang Ailing rapidly reached a splendid peak in her literary career and managed to win wide popularity in Shanghai made me happy on the one hand, and worried on the other. The reason was that the situation then was so peculiar that one couldn’t tell day from night. It was not worthwhile displaying dancing skills . . . [However,] when I hold up my fingers and count, there was actually no place at all for Zhang in all stages of modern Chinese literature, despite its scope. It was not until the fall of Shanghai that she was granted a chance . . . The fact that the most splendid days of Zhang Ailing’s literary career lasted merely two years

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome muse: Chinese literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945*, New York: Columbia Press, 1980, 11-56.

(1943-1945) was predestined. It was one chance in a thousand years, “pass this shop and you won’t find another ahead.” Whether it was a lucky chance or not, is really difficult to say.

(張愛玲在寫作上很快登上燦爛的高峰，同時轉眼紅遍上海。這使我一則以喜，一則以憂。因為環境特殊，清濁難分，很犯不著在萬牲園跳交際舞……我扳著指頭算來算去，偌大的文壇，哪個階段都安放不下一個張愛玲，上海淪陷，才給了她機會……張愛玲的文學生涯、輝煌鼎盛的時期只有兩年（一九四三——一九四五），是命中注定，千載一時，“過了這村，沒有那店”。幸與不幸，難說得很。)<sup>3</sup>

As Ke Ling indicates, Zhang’s initial popularity lasted only a short time, and the main period of her creative life was also relatively brief. In fact, although in the sixties Zhang was able to produce such an important work as *The Rice-sprout Song*, her most productive period ended with the war. From the mid-forties to the mid-fifties, she basically remained silent. She was either neglected as a non-progressive writer lacking revolutionary zeal, or treated as controversial for publishing under the Japanese regime. Also for these reasons, she was not given the kind of scholarly attention that she deserved. Apart from Xun Yu’s (Xun Yu 迅雨, Fu Lei 傅雷) “On Zhang Ailing’s Fiction” (Lun Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo 論張愛玲的小說), published in 1944, which

<sup>3</sup> Ke Ling, “To Zhang Ailing from afar,” in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing (于青) & Jin Hongda (金宏達), Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1994, 5 & 10.

praised her artistry but criticized her concentration on everyday passions,<sup>4</sup> there were virtually no serious studies devoted to her works until 1961 when C. T. Hsia, in his *A History of Chinese Fiction*, made the ground-breaking claim that she should be placed among the best modern Chinese writers.

Hsia's critical appraisal of Zhang triggered a heated controversy in Taiwanese literary circles. While critics such as Wang Tuo (王拓) and Tang Wenbiao (唐文標) insisted on chiding her because of her lack of social concern,<sup>5</sup> Zhang became more and more the focus of formal analysis by academics. Among such works, Shui Jing's (水晶) *The Art of Zhang Ailing's Fiction* (Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo de yishu 張愛玲小說的藝術), first published in 1973, stands out as a landmark in the history of modern Chinese criticism, in its comparative approach and its detailed analysis of Zhang's individual works.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Xun Yu (傅雷), "On Zhang Ailing's fiction," in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, 115-130.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Tuo, *Zhang Ailing and Song Jiang* (Zhang Ailing yu Song Jiang 張愛玲與宋江), Taichung: Landeng wenhua shiye gongsi, 1967. Tang Wenbiao, *Chop suey on Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing zasui 張愛玲雜碎), Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1967. Tang Wenbiao ed., *A study of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing juan 張愛玲卷), Hong Kong: Yiwen tushu gongsi, 1982. For criticisms on Tang Wenbiao's research method, see Yin Zhengxiong (銀正雄), "An evaluation on Tang Wenbiao's criticisms of Zhang Ailing's early fiction" (Ping Tang Wenbiao de lun Zhang ailing zaoqi de xiaoshuo 評唐文標論張愛玲早期的小說), *Book reviews and book lists* (Shuping shumu 書評書目) 22 (Feb. 1975): 67-74, 23 (March 1975): 41-50. Wang Di (王翟), "Reading *Chop suey on Zhang Ailing*," in *Book reveiws and book lists* 42 (Oct. 1967): 51-55. Zhu Xining (朱西甯), "Early awakers, late awakers, and non-awakers -- on *Chop suey on Zhang Ailing*" (xianjuezhe, houjuezhe, bujuezhe tan Zhang Ailing zasui 先覺者、後覺者、不覺者——談《張愛玲雜碎》), *Book reviews and book lists* 42 (October 1976): 67-93.

<sup>6</sup> Shui Jing, *The art of Zhang Ailing's fiction*, Taipei: Dadi chubanshe, 1984.

Despite her fame in wartime Shanghai and Taiwan, Zhang went unheeded in Mainland China because of her disengaged political stance. Her influence on the Mainland was essentially null, until the re-publication of her works and the appearance of a few brief biographies in the late eighties. In contrast to her importance in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States, her influence on the Mainland has remained slight.

In the fifties she made her way to Hong Kong and the United States, where she continued to receive scholarly attention. Apart from C. T. Hsia's chapter in *A History of Chinese Fiction*, Edward Gunn's *Unwelcome Muse* (1980) also devotes a section to Zhang, in the chapter on wartime anti-romanticism. From the late sixties onwards, Zhang has been the subject of a number of Master's theses and Ph. D. dissertations in the United States and Canada. However, these works concentrate mainly on the translation and formal analysis of individual short stories.<sup>7</sup> An overall investigation of Zhang's life and works as a whole remains to be done.

My dissertation represents an effort to fill this gap and to provide an introductory study for scholars interested in this topic. In view of the fact that the vast number of Chinese studies on Zhang focus mainly on either criticism of her private life or close

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<sup>7</sup> Masters theses and Ph. D. dissertations on Zhang Ailing include: Curtis Peter Adkins, "The short stories of Chang Ai-ling: a literary analysis," master's thesis, University of California; Berkeley, 1972. Carolyn Thompson Brown, "Eileen Chang's 'Red rose and White rose': a translation and afterword," Ph. D. diss., The American University, 1978; Nga Le, "Women in Zhang Ailing's short stories: an insight into her vision of life and place in Chinese literature," master's thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1989; Shu-ning Sciban, "Eileen Chang's 'Love in a fallen city': translation and analysis," master's thesis, The University of Alberta, 1985. Evelyn Teichert, "Zhang Ailing's experimental stories and the reader's participation in her short stories and novellas," master's thesis, The University of British Columbia, 1985; Elizabeth Cheng Stewart, "Awareness of the woman question in the novels of George Eliot and Eileen Chang," Ph. D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana, 1987.

readings of individual works of fiction; my study will look at Zhang's career in all of its aspects: her early works, cultural critiques, film reviews, short stories, informal essays, novels, screenplays, translations and academic research. Zhang looms large in the history of Chinese literature, not only because she created first-rank artistic works, but also because of her diverse contributions to literature. This diversity can be considered another element which marks her off from other modern Chinese writers.

As an overall survey of Zhang's literary life, this study is by no means an overview of previous criticism on Zhang. Instead, I attempt to shed new light on her short stories and novels by reading them from a modernist perspective, claiming that Zhang's work is the first, or at least the first mature, manifestation of Modernist literature in China. My analysis of her cultural critiques, film reviews, screenplays and translations is also new, in that little has been written on these aspects except the introductory articles in Chinese by Lin Yiliang (林以亮 Song Qi 宋淇) and Zheng Shusen (William Tay 鄭樹森). While my detailed analysis of Zhang's informal essays breaks new ground in an area that lacks the attention it deserves, my discovery of Zhang's earliest published translation, "Maltreat through Jokes" (Nüe er nüe 謔而虐), also contributes to further research on Zhang as a translator.

Apart from an analysis of Zhang's literary works, my dissertation also investigates her life. It is my belief that a complete study of this kind can best reveal the worth of a writer as a creative individual. In this sense, my study is a rather "traditional" one in the face of today's ever-changing literary theories, which proclaim the death of the author and

even of literature.<sup>8</sup> I believe that in Zhang's case in particular a study of her life genuinely illuminates her work.

This dissertation will follow the conventional chronological order of her life and examine critically the various genres of her work. The first four chapters outline Zhang's early life and works, with special emphasis placed on their relationship to her subsequent mature writings. The first chapter traces Zhang's development from her childhood to adolescent years, and aims to establish links between her unhappy childhood background and her subsequent anti-romantic stance. The second chapter deals with her impressions of wartime Hong Kong and shows how this factor influenced the formation of Zhang's view of history and of human nature.

The third chapter analyzes the significance and implications of Zhang's early works, which include short stories, book reviews, unfinished novels and essays in both Chinese and English. Written between the ages of seven and nineteen, these immature works represent an experimental period in which Zhang gradually shaped her subsequent writing style. The fourth chapter examines Zhang's cultural critiques and film reviews published in the English magazine *The Twentieth Century*. While showing Zhang's concern for modern China in a changing era, these insightful commentaries on Chinese characteristics also serve to prepare the ground for her later works.

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<sup>8</sup> See Alvin Kernan, *The death of literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

The fifth to seventh chapters constitute a critical analysis of Zhang's creative writings. Chapter five provides a reading of Zhang's short stories in the light of modernism. In this chapter, emphasis is placed on her modernist perspective and her search for a new style through the assimilation of both the traditional Chinese and the Western literary heritages. I also attempt to position Zhang's short stories historically, both in relation to her immediate predecessors -- the May Fourth romantic writers and the New Perceptionists -- and to her contemporaries, the leisurely Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school, and the wartime resistance literature.

Chapter six discusses the rise of Zhang as an essayist against a literary scene which favored a plain, erudite style. It also shows how she forges a unique vernacular prose style, with witty satire and splendid imagery. I shall argue that, while deeply indebted to the Chinese tradition, Zhang can be considered a successor to modern British essayists. I shall also discuss major features of her essays, such as a strong sensuality and sympathetic understanding for human nature, as well as her identification with femininity and everyday life.

Chapter seven traces the development of Zhang's novels, which in turn reflect changes in her life and psychology. By dividing Zhang's nine novels into four groups, this chapter shows how she manages to produce sophisticated works in a unique style after a long period of experimentation with traditional narrative, and under a constant tension between the imposition of political demands and her own artistic conscience. I shall also discuss the way she strives for a more natural style in her later works.

Chapter eight examines Zhang's career as a screenplay writer, translator and academic scholar. Her screenplays continue to express her concern for women and display a feminine but not feminist stance. Her voluminous translation of works, both by others and by herself, from English to Chinese, and vice versa, shows a mastery of language and a zeal for literature. Her research in her later years on traditional Chinese novels serves as a return to her literary roots and makes significant contributions in the academic field. The concluding chapter raises the topic of Zhang's legacy and influence and provides an overall view off her life and works.

## Chapter One: Family Background

### Illustrious family background

Zhang Ailing was born on the 30th September, 1920 in Shanghai, the most modernized city in China at that time. Both her great-grandfather and her grandfather are celebrated figures in Chinese history. Her great grandfather, Li Hongzhang, (李鴻章 1823-1901) was the Qing governor-general who crushed the Taiping Rebellion, while her grandfather, Zhang Peilun (張佩綸 1848-1903), was the pillar of the Qingliu Pai (Clear Stream Faction 清流派) in the Tongzhi and Guangxu (同治光緒) regimes. Zhang Peilun, in his eagerness to protect his country from foreign invasion, appealed to the emperor to lead a war against the French troops. After his defeat in the “War of Ma jiang”(馬江戰役), he was exiled to Heilongjiang. Li, once his political opponent who advocated peace, generously recruited Zhang as an advisor, and later had his daughter, Li Juou (李菊耦), married to him after his first wife died. The marriage became such a popular romance that it was written into one of the four greatest Late Qing Novels of social satire, *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* (Niehai hua 孽海花) by Zeng Pu (曾樸).<sup>1</sup>

The study of *A Flower in a Sinful Sea*, especially the concordance between the fictional characters and the real historical figures, was once a heated topic among literary

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<sup>1</sup> Zeng Pu, *A flower in a sinful sea* (Nie hai hua 孽海花), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979. First published in the magazine *Forest of fiction* (Xiaoshuo lin 小說林) in 1907. Rafe de Crespigny & Liu Ts'un-yab trans., “A flower in a sinful sea,” in *Chinese middlebrow fiction: from the Ch'ing and early republican eras*, ed. Liu Ts'un-yan, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984, 137-192.

circles in Shanghai in the forties,<sup>2</sup> when Zhang enjoyed great fame in her creative career. However, despite her status as a descendant of the legendary figures involved, Zhang remained silent throughout the whole discussion. It was not until the mid-seventies that she talked about her family background in the essay “In the Remembrance of Hu Shizhi” (Yi Hu Shizhi 憶胡適之). She wrote that her family seldom mentioned her grandfather’s name; every time her father spoke of “their old master” she quickly lost track of their conversation as it involved too many unfamiliar names. It was after reading *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* that she became interested in her grand-father’s history and attempted to read his works, which proved to be too difficult for her at that time. With her father’s reluctance to mention the past, and her hesitation to seek help from her private tutor for fear of being misunderstood as boasting of her illustrious background, her brief investigation of family history simply ended there.<sup>3</sup>

In “A Republican Lady,” Hu Lancheng mentions that Zhang once “deconstructed her grand-parents’ romantic tale” by telling him that her grandmother was not good at making poems; those which appeared in *A Flower in a Sinful Sea* were in fact polished by her grand-father. Hu goes on to comment that Zhang’s dislike of such a romantic story is

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<sup>2</sup> Chan An (懺庵) “Zhang Peilun and Li Hongzhang” (Zhang Peilun yu Li Hongzhang 張沛綸與李鴻章), *Past and present* (Gu jin 古今) 50 (July 1944): 18-20. See also Mao Heting (冒鶴亭), “Leisure discussion on *A flower in a sinful sea*” (Nie hai hua xianhua 孽海花閒話) (1-9), *Past and present* 41 (Feb. 1944): 1-5; 42 (Mar 1944): 1-4; 43 (April 1944): 7-10; 45 (April 1944): 15-17; 46 (May 1944): 10-13; 47 (May 1944): 3-6; 48 (Jun. 1944): 16-19; 49 (Jun. 1944): 23-27; 50 (Jul. 1944): 21-24. Zhou Li’an (周黎庵), “The family backgrounds of the characters in *A flower in a sinful sea*” (Nie hai hua renwu shijia 孽海花人物世家), *Past and present* 37 (Dec. 1943): 20-22.

<sup>3</sup> “Remembering Hu Shizhi” (Yi Hu Shizhi 憶胡適之), in *Zhang’s outlook* (Zhang kan 張看), Taipei: Huangguan, 1977, 172-173.

the reason why she can write such great stories.<sup>4</sup> In fact, for Zhang, her celebrated family history left her with nothing but a sense of vicissitude and the realization of the limits of human effort in the face of a changing era.<sup>5</sup> Both her great-grand father and grand-father ended up witnessing the Qing's tragic downfall, despite all their resolution and their efforts to protect and strengthen the government.<sup>6</sup> This sense of desolation subsequently became the underlying tone of most of Zhang's creative writings.<sup>7</sup>

Born one year after the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement, Zhang lived her childhood years in the larger social context of the commencement and rapid development of the New Cultural Movement. Chinese society dramatically changed with the influx of Western concepts such as democracy and science. Traditional Chinese value systems were constantly under attack, while the new social order was not yet established.<sup>8</sup> However, as a trading port with International Settlements under foreign control, Shanghai enjoyed the privilege of staying at a distance from the socio-political flux. The Zhang family, though already in decline, still managed to live on its ancestors' fortune. It remained detached from the outside world, and the traditional system's downfall did not exert an immediate impact on their noble life-style.

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<sup>4</sup> Hu Lancheng (胡蘭成), "A republican lady" (Minguo nüzi 民國女子), in *This life* (Jinsheng jinshi 今生今世), Taipei: San san shufang, 1990, 277. Hu was Zhang's first husband.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>6</sup> Li Hongzhang suffered consecutive failures in the negotiations with the Western powers, whereas Zhang Peilun's "Horse Tail Navy" (Mawei Shuijun 馬尾水軍) was totally defeated by France in the War of Ma Jiang (馬江戰役).

<sup>7</sup> In her last published work, *Albums* (Duizao ji 對照記), Zhang provides a detailed account of her family history. *Albums*, Taipei: Huangguan chubanshe, 1994, 1-88.

<sup>8</sup> See Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May Fourth movement: intellectual revolution in modern China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

In “My Dream of Genius” (Tiancai meng 天才夢), Zhang recalled a childhood scene of her reciting a poem by Du Fu (杜甫) in front of a scion, who wept on hearing the famous verses: “the Shang ladies, not understanding the grief of losing one’s country/ still sing the song of ‘Flower in the backyard’ across the river.”<sup>9</sup> As a child of three, she was just like the Shang ladies in the poem, having no idea what “the grief of losing one’s country” was. Zhang’s early childhood was like the sinking sun in a spring evening, laggard and lazy -- as she reminisced in her auto-biographical essay “Whispered Words” (Siyu 私語).<sup>10</sup>

### Childhood and adolescence

At the age of two, Zhang moved with her family from Shanghai to Tianjin, where she had the early memory of playing on a swing with her little servant “Scar,” and listening to stories in the *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義) from the servant who used to practice calligraphy near the well. She started her early education by reciting Tang Poetry after her mother, who gave her two pieces of green bean cake after learning two Chinese characters everyday.<sup>11</sup> However, this leisurely lifestyle did not last long. Her father took a concubine, and her mother found it

<sup>9</sup> “My dream of genius,” *Zhang’s outlook*, 277. Dufu’s poem in Chinese is “商女不知亡國恨，隔江猶唱後庭花。”

<sup>10</sup> Zhang describes her home in Tianjin as “the sinking sun in a spring evening, laggard and lazy.” (一種春日遲遲的空氣，像我們在天津的家) “Whispered word,” *Gossip* (Liuyan 流言), Taipei: Huangguan, 1982, 142.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

unbearable. Together with her sister-in-law, she left for France to study Fine Art when Zhang was four.<sup>12</sup> Zhang's father soon had his concubine moved in. Though he had arranged a private tutor for his children, the on-going parties in the house distracted them from their studies. Zhang found the classical verses so difficult to remember that she had to change them into funny phrases. Every night, she stayed in a nightclub with her father's concubine, sitting in front of cakes with fresh cream as high as her eyebrows, and dozing in the dim reddish-yellow light until her servant carried her back home.<sup>13</sup>

At the age of eight, Zhang moved with her family from Tianjin to Shanghai, shortly after her father dismissed his unbearably fierce concubine.<sup>14</sup> The cosmopolitan set in Shanghai gave her a kind of bright, "vermillion happiness" (硃紅的快樂),<sup>15</sup> which replaced the "laggard sinking sun" and the dim, reddish-yellow superficial light of her early years. Her mother returned home, and her father gave up smoking opium. The whole family moved into a Western-style house with gardens, flowers, books of fairy tales, dogs, and lots of gaily-dressed relatives and friends. For Zhang, this westernized home was a paradise. By her mother's arrangement, she studied English, and entered primary school at the age of ten, despite her father's opposition.<sup>16</sup> She read Lao She's novels and short stories *The Two Mas*, *Divorce*, and "The Train" in the magazine *Fiction Monthly*, which her mother subscribed to. She also started to learn drawing and playing

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<sup>12</sup> "The guileless words of a child" (Tongyan wuji 童言無忌), *Gossip*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> "Whispered words," 145.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> "Is it necessary to have the right name" (Bi ye zhengming hu" 必也正名乎), *Gossip*, 40.

the piano. These Shanghai years remained as her happiest childhood memory. Her impression of those days was that of the “warm and intimate” orange-red, a color she chose for her bedroom wall, and the background of most of her paintings.<sup>17</sup>

However, her paradise was shattered by her father’s refusal to support the family. The conflict in values and personality between her parents led to frantic quarrels, which ended in a divorce. The emotions associated with the divorce led her to divide her childhood world into two halves of brightness and darkness. She admired everything in her mother’s apartment, and found a special consolation in the modern facilities like the gas stove.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, she despised everything in her father’s home, where all was gray and dusty. As she comments in “Whispered Words,” “father’s room was always in the afternoon, one would sink and sink, after sitting there for a while.” (父親的房間裏永遠是下午，在那裏坐久了便覺得沉下去，沉下去。) <sup>19</sup> Her mother left for France again when Zhang was a boarding student in high school. Her father remarried, and his opium-addicted wife drew him back into his old habit. They returned to the family-owned Republican-style house where Zhang was born.<sup>20</sup> Returned after all the changes that had taken place, the once-familiar home had become cold and haunting:

For me it [the house] retained too many memories of our family, like a photograph that has been developed from a film exposed to many a different scene. The whole atmosphere was blurred: where the sunlight could visit, one felt drowsy and where

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<sup>17</sup> “Whispered words,” 147.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 148-150.

it was dismally dark, one sensed the cold desolation of an ancient grave. But wrapped in its bluish dark colors, the house itself was soberly awake in this strange world. In the intersections of light and darkness, one could see the sunlight, hear the bells of trolleys, and the tune “Su San, Don’t Cry” insistently broadcast from the nearby cotton-goods store promoting sales. One could only doze away in this sunlight.

(房屋裏有我們家太多的回憶，像重重疊疊複印的照片，整個的空氣有點模糊。有太陽的地方使人瞌睡，陰暗的地方有古墓的清涼。房屋的青黑的心子裏是清醒的，有他自己的一個怪異的世界。而在陰陽交界的邊緣，看得見陽光，聽得見電車的鈴與大減價的布店裏一遍又一遍的吹打著『蘇三不要哭』，在那陽光裏只有昏睡。)<sup>21</sup>

Her “orange-red” childhood was then replaced by a “bluish dark” consciousness.

The house that dozed away in the sunlight suddenly woke up. Zhang came to realize that she had to lead a different life from her little brother, Zhang Zijing (張子靜), who had already “dozed off” in her father's home. The scene of her father slapping her brother for some trivial mistake triggered in her a desire for revenge, which was soon replaced by “a chill of sadness” due to her brother’s apathy. He had already degenerated into a rascal who felt neither shame nor desire for progress. He simply forgot what had happened after a short while, and gaily proceeded with his football games.<sup>22</sup> At that time, she planned to continue her studies in Britain after high school graduation, and entertained ideals such as

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 150. Translation based on that by C. T. Hsia, with slight modification. C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 391.

<sup>22</sup> “The guileless word of a child,” 18.

learning to make cartoon films and introducing Chinese paintings to the United States. However, her request to study abroad was bluntly turned down by her father, who took it as an idea instigated by his recently returned ex-wife. Jealous of Zhang's preference for her mother, he brutally beat Zhang after she had a quarrel with her stepmother over her two-week visit with her mother.<sup>23</sup>

Later, confined in the house with the doors closely guarded, Zhang became more vividly aware of the dark forces -- the blindness, the brutality, and the insanity -- deeply rooted in the human heart.

My father claimed that he would kill me with his gun. I was temporarily confined in an empty room. The house in which I was born suddenly turned unfamiliar, like the greenish white walls that appear under the moon, superficial and insane.

In Beverly Nichol's work there is a poem on the twilight world of the insane: 'There is moonlight sleeping in your mind.' When I read it I think of the blue light on the floorboards of our house, shining there with quiet, murderous intent.

( 我父親揚言要用手槍打死我。我暫時被監禁在空房裏，我生在裏面的這座房屋忽然變成生疏的了，像月光底下的，黑影中現出青白的粉牆，片面的，癡狂的。

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<sup>23</sup> "Whispered words," 149-151.

Beverly Nichols有一句詩關於狂人的半明半昧：『在你的心中  
睡著月亮光，』我讀到它就想到我們家樓板上的藍色的月光，那靜  
靜地殺機。)<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the desire for freedom drove her to dreams of escape, like those she had read of in *The Three Musketeers*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and *Nine Tailed Tortoise* (Jiuwei Gui 九尾龜). But unfortunately she fell sick of dysentery, and received no medication from her father.<sup>25</sup> Lying in bed watching the light blue sky for the whole autumn and winter, the sixteen-year-old Zhang started to ponder ontological problems like death and the transience of life. Eventually, she managed to escape to her mother on a chilly night around Chinese New Year, after much psychological aging during the imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

Despite its dramatic quality, her escape differed greatly from Nora's in *A Doll's House*, which enjoyed great popularity among the Chinese youth in her time.<sup>27</sup> She was not asserting her independence in the romantic style of Ibsen's heroine. Zhang says in reminiscence, "there was nothing ardent or heroic in an escape like this. Our era is not a

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 152. Translation of the second paragraph by Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome muse*, 203.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang's younger brother comments that in "Whispered word," Zhang provides a vivid and reliable account of what has happened during her imprisonment. However, not knowing if it is deliberate, she omits the episode of her father giving her an anti-biotic injection himself. Her father did so for fear of getting a notorious name if his daughter died. Zhang Zijing (張子靜), *My elder sister Zhang Ailing* (Wodi Jiejie Zhang Ailing 我的姊姊張愛玲), Taipei: Shibao wenhua chubanshe, 1996, 91.

<sup>26</sup> "Whispered words," 152-153.

<sup>27</sup> In "Go! Go upstairs" (Zou! zoudao loushang qu 走! 走到樓上去), Zhang mentions the play *Ein Puppenheim* (A Doll's house) by the Norwegian playwright Ibsen. This play about the escape of a married women, Nora, from her family, was introduced into China in the twenties. *Gossip*, 92.

romantic one, anyway.”(這樣的出走沒有一點慷慨激昂。我們這時代本來不是羅曼蒂克的。) <sup>28</sup> During her imprisonment, her mother sent her a secret message, warning her of the financial difficulties she might face once she left her father. Though craving freedom, this practical consideration weakened her will to escape. She made the authentic choice only after prudent financial calculation: the family wealth did not belong to her; it might not be hers, even in the future. But after several years of imprisonment, she would not be herself anymore, and the most important years for her education would be wasted. <sup>29</sup> However, the subsequent financial strain on her mother exerted an impact much greater than Zhang had expected. The mother-daughter relationship was gradually ruined by the “trivial embarrassment” Zhang encountered when frequently asking for pocket money. She recalls in “The Guileless Words of a Child”:

At first, asking my mother for money is an intimate act, because I have always loved her with a kind of romantic love. My mother is a beautiful and sensitive lady. I seldom have a chance to get close to her, she went abroad when I was four. Later, she returned and left again several times. In her children’s eyes, she was mysterious and remote. Twice she casually held my hand as we crossed the road, and I felt the special excitement of touching someone unfamiliar. However, in her subsequent financial difficulties, my frequent requests for money irritated her a

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<sup>28</sup> “I see Su Qing” (Wo kan Su Qing 我看蘇青), *Lingering rhymes* (Yuyun 餘韻), Taipei: Huanguan: 1987, 85.

<sup>29</sup> “I see Su Qing,” 85. “Whispered words,” 152.

lot. Suffering from both her temper and my heartlessness, I found the trivial embarrassment ruining my love for her bit by bit.

(問母親要錢，起初是件親切有味的事，因為我一直是用一種羅曼蒂克的愛來愛著我母親的。她是個美麗敏感的女人，而且我很少機會和她接觸，我四歲的時候她就出洋去了，幾次回來了又走了。在孩子的眼裏她是遼遠而神秘的。有兩趟她領我出去，穿過馬路的時候，偶爾拉住我的手，便覺得一種生疏的刺激性。可是後來，在她的窘境中三天兩天伸手問她拿錢，為她的脾氣磨難著，為自己的忘恩負義磨難著，那些瑣屑的難堪，一點點的毀了我的愛。)<sup>30</sup>

If it had only been a matter of pocket money, Zhang's relationship with her mother might not have worsened to such a degree. It was her mother's two-year plan to train her into a "lady" that hurt her pride. Her mother commented after her second return from France, "I do regret taking care of your typhoid when you were small . . . I would rather let you die than see you live and suffer." (『我懊悔從前小心看護你的傷寒症……我寧願看你死，不願看你活著使你自己處處受痛苦。』)<sup>31</sup> What she meant by "live and suffer" referred to her daughter's inability to "adjust to her environment." (學習適應環境)<sup>32</sup> As a result, she spent two years teaching Zhang the basic qualities of a lady, such as how to cook, how to walk gracefully, how to respond quickly to others' subtle signals, and how to look into the mirror and practice different facial expressions.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "The guileless words of a child," 10.

<sup>31</sup> "My dream of genius," 278-279.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

However, this two-year plan proved to be a total failure. Behaving like a lady under economically restrained circumstances was no easy job, not to mention that after having lived in solitude for years, Zhang was frightfully ignorant when it came to social interactions.<sup>34</sup> She wrote in a self-mocking tone in “My Dream of Genius,” an essay written at the age of nineteen: “I do not know how to peel an apple . . . I am afraid of occasions such as visiting the hairdresser or having a fitting in front of the tailor. Lots of people tried to teach me how to knit, but none of them succeeded. After living in the house for two years, I still failed to figure out where the doorbell was . . . In short, I am a piece of garbage in society . . . My mother’s serious warnings exert no influence on me, except to upset my psychological balance.” (我不會削蘋果。經過艱苦的努力我才學會補襪子。我怕上理髮店，怕見客，怕給裁縫試衣裳。許多人嘗試過教我織絨線，可是沒有成功。在一間房裏助了兩年，問我電鈴在那兒揀還茫然。……總而言之，在現實的社會裏，我等於一個廢物。……除了使我的思想失去均衡外，我母親的沉痛警告沒有給我任何的影響。) <sup>35</sup>

At that time, Zhang's childhood admiration for her mother and her desire to imitate her were completely gone. Instead, she found herself like a helpless child standing under the sun, naked, being criticized and judged by the person she once admired most:

I always wandered about alone on the veranda on the top floor of the apartment, watching the blue sky that was bluntly cut into stripes and pieces by the Spanish-styled white walls. Raising my head and looking at the bright sun, I felt I was

<sup>34</sup> “Whispered words,” 154. “My dream of genius,” 279.

<sup>35</sup> “My dream of genius,” 279.

standing under the sky, naked, being judged like all the puzzled children, caught up in an excessive sense of pride and an excessive sense of self-hatred. At this time, my mother's house was no longer cozy.

(常常我一個人在公寓的屋頂洋台上轉來轉去，西班牙式的白牆在藍天上割出斷然的條與塊。仰臉向著當頭的烈日，我覺得我是赤裸裸的站在天底下了，被裁判著像一切的惶惑的未成年的人，困於過度的自誇與自鄙。這時候，母親的家不復是柔和的了。)<sup>36</sup>

### Significance of Zhang's early experiences

Critics writing on Zhang's family background usually dismiss her father as a tyrant who stubbornly adhered to the vices of the gentry, while praising her mother as a modern, emancipated woman, bold enough to go abroad and break away from her arranged marriage. However, a closer examination reveals that, in fact, her mother might have done equal if not greater harm to Zhang than her father. Despite the fact that she was never cruel to her daughter, she was also far from being considerate and attentive. When she first left for France, she wept in self-absorption without responding to her daughter. Instead, she had her pulled away by the servants.<sup>37</sup> Not having seen her daughter for years, the first thing she said when she returned from abroad was that Zhang's overcoat was too small.<sup>38</sup> When she departed the second time, she went to see her daughter in the

<sup>36</sup> "Whispered words," 154-155.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 144 & 146.

boarding school but showed no affection. She was happy that things went smoothly, without any trouble, but at the same time felt hurt by the fact the her daughter let her go without begging her to stay.<sup>39</sup> She did show that she cared for Zhang by trying to train her as a “lady,” but her only concern seemed to be her desire to pass on her own beliefs and values, and she showed little interest in Zhang’s psychological well-being. More important, while Zhang’s father showed great appreciation for her literary talent, and encouraged her in her creative writings,<sup>40</sup> her mother seemed to consider literary talent as merely one of the qualities a lady should possess. It is understandable that she hurt her daughter’s pride as a talented young writer. According to Zhang’s high school teacher, Wang Hongsheng (汪宏聲), the only thing on which Zhang managed to build her self-esteem in her unhappy high school days was her language skill and her creative writings.<sup>41</sup>

It is remarkable that despite her father’s brutal behavior, Zhang’s portrayal of him is far from harsh or unforgiving. In “Whispered Words,” she even shows a kind of sympathetic understanding towards him, an attitude that she later extended to the pitiful characters in *Romance*:

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>40</sup> Zhang mentions that her father was very proud of her essays, and gave her great encouragement in writing classical Chinese poems. “Whispered words,” 150. Her father also made up the chapter title (*huimu* 回目) for Zhang’s chapter-linked novel (*zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說), *A modern version of “Dream of the red chamber”* (Modeng Hongloulou 摩登紅樓夢), see “Old drafts” (Cungao 存稿), *Gossip*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Wang Hongsheng (汪宏聲), “On Zhang Ailing” (記張愛玲), in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, 54. See also “Old drafts,” 114-123.

Sometimes, there was something I did like [about my father's home.] I liked the opium fumes, the fummy sun, and the mosquito newspapers scattered around the house. [mosquito newspapers still give me the feeling of returning home] I used to chat with my father about our friends and relatives while we read the mosquito newspapers -- I knew that he was lonely, and when he was lonely, he liked me.

(有時候我也喜歡。我喜歡鴉片的雲霧，霧一樣的陽光，屋裏亂攤著小報，（直到現在，大疊的小報仍然給我一種回家的感覺）看著小報，和父親談談親戚間的笑話——我知道他是寂寞的，在寂寞的時候他喜歡我。）<sup>42</sup>

However, Zhang's relationship with her mother was a more subtle one. Though disappointed, she could not resent her mother's negligence, because she understood that her mother had sacrificed a lot for her. This complex feeling was further intensified by the awareness that her mother doubted whether the sacrifice was worthwhile. Zhang herself had the very same doubts.<sup>43</sup> While she could not find a reason to hate her mother, she failed to find a reason to love her. On the one hand, she suffered from a guilty conscience due to her ingratitude towards her mother; on the other hand, she disliked her mother's romantic attitude towards money matters, and deliberately took an opposite stand. Zhang wrote: "I insisted that I am a 'money worshiper' once I knew the term." (一學會了『拜金主義』這名詞，我就堅持我是拜金主義者。)<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "Whispered word," 149.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>44</sup> "The guileless word of a child," 8.

Her imprisonment by her father, together with her disenchantment with her mother's image, sowed the seeds of Zhang's subsequent tragic vision and anti-romantic world view. Her childhood experiences not only affected the formation of her personal character, but also shaped her creative writings. By means of a few examples, I shall show the way Zhang's family background influenced her creative writings, and how her creative writings in turn echo her life.

First, Zhang's childhood experiences form much of the substance of her subsequent creative writings. The same incident is often recounted in her essays and employed in her fiction. Nie Chuanqing's (聶傳慶) brutal behavior against Yan Danzhu (言丹朱) in "Jasmine Tea" (Moli xiangpian 茉莉香片), and Gu Manzhen's (顧曼楨) imprisonment by her elder sister in *Romance of Half a Lifetime* (Bansheng yuan 半生緣) remind the reader of Zhang's imprisonment and brutal treatment by her father. Fictional characters like the scions, the vain ladies, and the weak pathetic youngsters in her short stories make one think of her parents and little brother. Moreover, she frequently writes about unhappy marriages, troubled parent-child relationships, and weak family bonds, which reveal her own family background. The weak brother and sister relationship between Jin'gen (金根) and Jinhua (金花) in *The Rice-Sprout Song* (Yangge 秧歌), which fails to stand the challenge of self-interest, reminds one of an episode Zhang describes in "Whispered Words:" Her brother fled to her mother's home the summer after her escape only to be sent back by her mother, who could only afford to support one of her children. Zhang felt sad that kinship became so vulnerable in face of financial

considerations.<sup>45</sup> C. T. Hsia applauds the autobiographical dimension of Zhang's short stories and comments:

What elevates her perception [knowledge of manners and mores of the decadent upper class] and psychological realism into the realm of tragedy is the personal emotion behind the creation, the attitude of mingled fascination and horror with which the author habitually contemplates her own childhood environment.<sup>46</sup>

Second, her lack of security in childhood echoes the motif of orphanage, which recurs throughout her subsequent short stories and informal essays. At the beginning of "Whispered Words," Zhang comments: "People in this chaotic era do not have a home, they just live on day by day." (亂世的人，得過且過，沒有真的家。)<sup>47</sup> The message that nobody has a home resonates on several levels of significance. On the surface, it echoes her unhappy childhood experience of failing to get along with her father and to live up to her mother's standards. She distrusts her father's "traditionalism" and her mother's "modernity," and is left without a "home" in the existential as well as the practical sense. At an underlying level, she extends her childhood insecurity and distrust of romanticism and modernity, which her mother's image represents, to everyone in the world. Besides the disenchantment with protective images of parents and home, her impressions of war during her Hong Kong period also contribute greatly to her skeptical

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<sup>45</sup> "Whispered word," 154.

<sup>46</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 407.

<sup>47</sup> "Whispered word," 140.

attitude and anti-romantic stance, a point I shall return to in the next chapter,

“Impressions of Wartime Hong Kong.”

Third, an interesting finding with regard to Zhang’s literary presentation is that she has a great desire for “discourse.” Her anxiety for communication reveals a tendency that can be interpreted as her urge to make up for a lack of parental attention. At the beginning of “The Guileless Words of a Child,” Zhang expresses her anxiety to communicate through the depiction of a child who goes unheeded while reporting to his parents the trivial events that interest him at school. Her early awareness of this sadness of going unheeded leads to her taboo against talking about herself since her childhood years. She thinks of attracting attention by great deeds and the publication of a widely-read autobiography. After realizing the difficulty of being somebody, she settles for writing about herself, for fear of becoming a garrulous old person due to prolonged suppression of her need for self-expression.<sup>48</sup> As seen from the titles of her collections and essays like “Gossip,” “Whispered Words,” and “The Guileless Words of a Child,” words like “yan” (word 言) and “yu” (speech 語) that imply verbal communication recur. Moreover, her use of the second person “you” as a way of engaging the reader is a common tactic in her works. Her manner of literary presentation, such as the “whispered words style” of a long-winded, witty, little girl talking to the reader in her essays, and the story-teller mode in her short stories, will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>48</sup> “The guileless word of a child,” 7.

Fourth, Zhang's fascination with substantial detail is also related to her childhood experience.<sup>49</sup> As a disillusioned "orphan," Zhang has a tendency to hold to the tangible and the substantial, despite her paradoxical understanding that there is nothing one can grasp onto in an era in which "everything solid melts into the air." In "Whispered Words," she accentuates her situation as an "orphan" by tracing her childhood years through lavish description of the physical aspects of the houses she lived in, none of that gave her the feeling of a home.

Zhang's specific pattern of perception, focusing on the tangible, is also demonstrated in the spatial element in her works. She always focuses on the external environment during critical moments in the narration. The use of pictorial images, and the juxtaposition of selected views stem the flow of time and inform the text with a sense of synchronic presence.<sup>50</sup> In "Whispered Words," she dramatizes the critical moment in which she awaits her infuriated father by focusing on her consciousness of the surroundings:

My step-mother screamed as she ran upstairs, 'She hit me! She hit me!' At that moment, everything became exceptionally clear, the dim dining room with blinds down, the dining table with bowls of rice on it, the gold-fish basin without gold-fish, the orange-red fishery plants carefully painted on the porcelain globe. My

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<sup>49</sup> Rey Chow has commented on Zhang's fascination with vanishing detail in her *Woman and Chinese modernity: the politics of reading between West and East*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 112-114.

<sup>50</sup> Lucien Miller and Hui-chuan Chang, "Fiction and autobiography: spatial form in 'The golden cangue' and *The woman warrior*" in *Modern Chinese women writers: critical appraisals*, ed. Michael S. Duke, NY: M. E. Sharp, 1989, 33-34.

father hurried downstairs in slippers, bluntly grasped me, and started his brutal kicking and beating.

(我後母一路銳叫著奔上樓去：『她打我！她打我！』在這一剎那間，一切都變得非常明晰，下著百葉窗的暗沉沉的餐室，飯已經開上桌了，沒有金魚的金魚缸，自磁缸上細細描出橙紅的魚藻。我父親跛著拖鞋，拍達拍達衝下樓來，揪住我，拳足交加)<sup>51</sup>

Besides her essays, these spatial elements that emphasize the sense of consciousness and immediacy also appear in Zhang's short stories, a point we shall return to in Chapter Five.

In tracing Zhang's development from her childhood to her adolescent years, I have tried to establish links between her unhappy childhood background and her subsequent anti-romantic stance. I have focused here on the impact her family background exerted on her subsequent creative writings and the way in that her childhood experiences were reflected in her works. In the next chapter, I shall turn to her impressions of wartime Hong Kong, a factor which I consider to have an even greater impact than her family background on the molding of her tragic vision of the world.

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<sup>51</sup> "Whispered words," p.151.

## Chapter Two: Impressions of Wartime Hong Kong

Zhang Ailing's unhappy childhood experience fostered in her a revenge mentality against her family, which is manifested in her will to achieve. Brought up in a traditional family that valued boy over girl,<sup>1</sup> Zhang started to ponder the question of equality between male and female since early childhood, and was determined to surpass her little brother. Disenchanted with her mother, Zhang's adoration shifted to one of her contemporary literary figures, Lin Yutang (林語堂). A comparison of Zhang's psychological attitude in her early childhood and adolescence reveals the growth of her ambition. Before the age of eight, she said to herself while watching her mother make up in front of a mirror, "I had to wear the 'miss' hair-style by eight, had to wear high-heels by ten, had to eat dumplings and all the things that are difficult to digest by sixteen." (八歲我要梳愛司頭，十歲我要穿高跟鞋，十六歲可以吃粽子湯丸，吃一切難於消化的東西。)<sup>2</sup> However, after high school graduation, she had greater expectations of herself: "I have to be more famous than Lin Yutang, I have to wear the nicest clothing, go around the world, have my own house in Shanghai, and lead a simple, enjoyable life." (我要比林語堂還出風頭，我要穿最別致的衣服，周遊世界，在上海有自己的房子，過一種乾脆俐落的生活。)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In "Whispered words," she wrote that the amah who took care of her little brother always bullied the one taking care of her. Zhang could not stand this sexist point of view and often got into quarrels with her. "Whispered words," 143.

<sup>2</sup> "The guileless words of a child," 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> "Whispered words," 149.

Despite the fact that Zhang failed to live up to her mother's expectation of her being a lady, she won admission to London University based on her academic achievement. However, because of the Second World War, she settled for the Arts Faculty at Hong Kong University.<sup>4</sup> This was the period in which she was exposed to formal training in both Chinese and Western literature. The courses she took in the first and second year included English, Chinese language and literature, translation and history. Her Chinese professor was the famous writer Xu Dishan (許地山), while her English professors were R. D. M. Simpson and B. C. Birch. In her English course, she received training in writing skills and literary appreciation.<sup>5</sup> In her spare time, she read English novels instead of the Chinese classical novels and the Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly stories, which had been her favorite since childhood. Moreover, in order to practice her English, she wrote in English for most of the time, and stopped her creative writing in Chinese, which she had been passionately engaged in since she was seven.<sup>6</sup> In the second year, Zhang managed to win two scholarships which covered her tuition fee,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 155. *Album*, 54.

<sup>5</sup> Huang Kangxian (黃康顯), "The source of inspiration? the iceland of emotion?: Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University" (Linggan quanyuan? Qinggan bingyuan?: Zhang Ailing de xianggang yinyuan 靈感泉源? 情感冰原? ——張愛玲的香港因緣), *Hong Kong literary monthly* (Xianggang wenxue 香港文學) 136 (April 1996): 5.

<sup>6</sup> "Old drafts," 115, 122-123.

board and living expenses.<sup>7</sup> At that time, she dreamt of winning a scholarship for her doctoral studies at Oxford University, and introducing Chinese culture to the West.<sup>8</sup>

While she was indulging in her great plans, the world outside her ivory tower was undergoing drastic changes. In 1942, when she had half a year before her graduation, Hong Kong fell to the Japanese.<sup>9</sup> Hong Kong University closed down, and Zhang had to stay in the dormitory with her fellow students.<sup>10</sup> Her impressions of wartime Hong Kong during this period had a great influence on the development of her world-view and her subsequent creative writings. This chapter will focus on the impact of Zhang's wartime experiences on the development of her insight into human nature, the formation of her historical and literary view, and her subsequent literary writings.

### **Zhang's view of human nature**

During the war, Zhang had a chance to see instances of extreme behavior, and this led to the formation of her ironic view of human nature. From "Embers" (Jingyu lu 爐餘錄), Zhang's autobiographical essay on her wartime experiences, one notices that she was constantly observing those around her with a detached attitude, and making

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<sup>7</sup> *Album*, 56. The two scholarships won by Zhang were "Nemazee Donor Scholarship" and "Ho Fok Scholarship." The later one was the only scholarship available in the Arts Faculty, which was granted to the best second and the best third year student. The amount was twenty-five pounds, which equaled a year's income for most Hong Kong people at that time. Huang Kangxian, "Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University," 6.

<sup>8</sup> "Whispered words," 149.

<sup>9</sup> *Album*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> The dormitory Zhang stayed in was May Hall (Mei Tang 梅堂). Huang Kangxian, "Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University," 6.

comments in a similarly distanced manner. On the day when the war first broke out in Hong Kong, December, 1942, the students at Hong Kong University were ignorantly happy, because that was the day of their final examination.<sup>11</sup>

There was Surica, a vain Malaysian student who dressed up as if war was an exceptional occasion. When a bomb fell near the dormitory, Surica responded quickly by packing her nice clothes and carrying off her huge suitcase. Zhang presented this incident in an ironic and comical manner: Although Surica felt sorry that her best clothes were ruined when she had to light a fire in the air raid shelter, she considered her sacrifice worthwhile, as her clothes provided her with the confidence to flirt with boys. The war turned out to be a valuable lesson to her, as she became capable of enduring hardship and taking risks after hanging around with the boys and following their examples.<sup>12</sup>

There was also Evelyn, a girl who always boasted about her past experiences in war. However, when bombs started falling, she was the first one to scream hysterically and scare the other girls with frightful tales. Zhang comments sarcastically, “her pessimism was a healthy one, as she ate a lot despite the shortage of food. She did nothing but weep once she filled her stomach. The ironic result was that she suffered from serious constipation.”<sup>13</sup>

Then there was Jonathan, who spontaneously enlisted to fight in the war in Kowloon. After the war was over, he complained bitterly that two university students had

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<sup>11</sup> “Embers” (Jingyu lu 爐餘錄), *Gossip*, 53.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

been ordered to remove a British soldier from a swamp: “Two of our lives are not worth one of theirs. They promised that we would be under our own teachers’ supervision during the recruitment.” Zhang comments in an ironical and anti-heroic way: “He must have thought that war was a hiking trip organized by the youth club of the Christian church.”<sup>14</sup>

During the war, being injured became something of which to be proud. An attention-seeking shop keeper who was injured slightly in the leg was very happy when being carried away, simply because he had the attention of a crowd. However, the ladies in the air raid shelter were selfish enough not to let him in. Instead they carefully kept an eye on their suitcases for fear that thieves would take advantage of the situation. Once the air raid alarm was switched off, everybody was so concerned with their immediate well-being that they rushed back onto the tram from which they had escaped for fear that their transfers would have expired.<sup>15</sup>

While Zhang worked as a nurse in the temporary University hospital, she shrewdly observed the patients’ idleness and self-pity:

The patients’ days were long and unbearable. Once they had stayed long enough in the hospital, they would fall in love with their wounds. In the hospital their wounds represented their whole being. They would tenderly gaze at their new-grown flesh with a kind of creative love. They could not move their legs, and they could not move their brains because they were unaccustomed to thinking.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 45.

(病人的日子是悠長得不耐煩的……時間一長，跟自己的傷口也發生了感情。在醫院裏，各個不同的創傷就代表了他們整個的個性。他們用溫柔的眼光注視新生的鮮肉，對之彷彿有一種創造性的愛……動不了腿，也動不了腦筋，因為沒有思想的習慣。) <sup>16</sup>

However, human greed did not leave them in their sick-beds. There was a “dramatic moment” showing the power of money: a patient in hospital uniform was found running down the street, busily purchasing daily products for his employer -- a wealthy tuberculosis patient in the same hospital. Another patient hid a roll of bandages, a few surgical scissors, and three pairs of uniform trousers under his mattress. <sup>17</sup>

After the war, more than eighty foreign students had to stay in the university dormitory. Having escaped from death, with no worries about food and shelter, and living near the library, these youths should have spent their time reading. However, they just treated the time as a boring transitional period, doing nothing but cooking and flirting. <sup>18</sup> Zhang comments on them ironically,

The past was the bitter weariness of war, the future was sitting on their mothers' laps, crying and telling her about the bitter weariness of war, letting their long pent-up tears flow. At present, all they could do was idly paint the words “home sweet home” on the dirty window panes.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 53.

(過去是戰爭的苦惱，未來是坐在母親膝蓋上哭訴戰爭的苦惱，把  
 瞥了許久的眼淚出清一下。眼前呢，只能夠無聊地在污穢的玻璃窗  
 上塗滿了“家，甜蜜的家”的字樣。)<sup>19</sup>

As a result, Zhang came to the following conclusion: “Stripping off all the  
 superficial civilization, only two things were left: food and sex.”(去掉了一切的浮文  
 ，剩下的彷彿只有飲食男女這兩項。)<sup>20</sup> Environment had little influence on  
 human nature. People’s selfishness, ruthlessness, vanity, stupidity, indifference, and  
 short-sightedness did not leave them during the war, the war only made these weaknesses  
 more obvious or prominent, as human beings were more genuine in war. “Everybody was  
 alike,”<sup>21</sup> Zhang says,

We ignored everything which could be ignored. Living among the most  
 sensational experiences, on the border of death, we were still the same, holding  
 onto our daily habits. Sometimes we seemed a little out of the ordinary, but under  
 careful analysis, we were still the same all the time.

(能夠不理會的，我們一概不理會。出生入死，浮沉於最富色彩的  
 經驗中，我們還是我們，一塵不染，維持著素日的生活典型。有時  
 候彷彿有點反常，然而仔細分析起來，還是一貫作風。)<sup>22</sup>

Zhang’s anti-romantic attitude laid bare the truth of darkness in the human heart  
 and destroyed what the rhetoric of Chinese modernity often naively adopts as an ideal and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 43.

a moral principle.<sup>23</sup> Her indifferent account of the death of a terminally-ill patient serves as a good example:

When he was suffering to the greatest extent, his facial expression resembled ecstasy . . . I was an irresponsible and conscienceless nurse. I hated this man, because when he was there suffering, the whole roomful of patients woke up . . . I had to come out, stand ominously by his bed, and ask, 'What do you want?' He thought for a while and murmured, "Water." He only wanted people to give him something, it didn't matter what.

(痛苦到了極點，面部表情反倒近於狂喜……我是一個不負責任的，沒良心的看護。我恨這個人，因為他在那裏受磨難，終於一房間的人都醒過來了……我不得不走出來，陰沉的站在他床前，問道：“要什麼？”他想了一想，呻吟道：要水。他只要人家給他點東西，不拘什麼都行。) <sup>24</sup>

Indifferent to suffering and death, Zhang left the patient and started boiling some milk for herself:

The yellow bronze basin sat in the middle of the blue gas flame, like a bronze Buddha sitting on a green lotus, tranquil, clear, bright and beautiful. The patient's call -- Miss! Miss! -- followed me all the way to the kitchen, where only a small white candle was lit. I watched the nearly-boiled milk, feeling frightened and infuriated, like a hunted animal.

<sup>23</sup> Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese modernity*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

(銅鍋坐在藍色的煤氣火焰中，像一尊銅佛坐在青蓮花上，澄靜，光麗。但是那個拖長腔的『姑娘啊！姑娘啊！』追蹤到廚房裏來了。小小的廚房只點一隻白蠟燭，我看守著將沸的牛奶，心裏發慌，發怒，像被獵的獸。)<sup>25</sup>

Instead of mournful sadness, a wave of joy swept through the nurses' quarters after this patient's death.<sup>26</sup> To Zhang, life is short but filled with too much suffering.<sup>27</sup> The patient's death was, after all, an emancipation for both himself and those around him. Men's indifference towards others' sufferings is a bare fact, no matter how regrettable a fact it is.

#### Formation of Zhang's historical view

To Zhang, history is recurrent rather than progressive. History is a series of endless follies. Civilization tried hard to eliminate the animal aspects within human beings, but thousands of years of effort were simply in vain.<sup>28</sup> In "Embers," she mentions that Professor France, an orientalized Britisher who taught her history in Hong Kong University, had a great influence on the formation of her historical view.<sup>29</sup> Professor France was a carefree person who drank, smoked, visited little nuns in a notorious

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "The fun of living in an apartment "Gongyu shenghuo jiqu 公寓生活記趣), *Gossip*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang only gave the Chinese translation of his name as "Folangshi" (佛朗士) in "Embers." According to Huang Kangxian, Folangshi's English name is N. H. France. The course he offered in Hong Kong University was on European history and the relationship between China and Europe. "Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University," 5.

nunnery, and distrusted modern materialist civilization. Zhang recorded: “He has a special insight into history . . . We are able to get a warm feeling for history and a precise historical view from him.”(他研究歷史很有獨到的見地 . . . . . 我們從他那那裏得到一點歷史的親切感和扼要的世界觀。)<sup>30</sup> However, Professor France was gunned down by accident in an army training exercise. “The most meaningless death,” Zhang said,

In the first place, it was not dying for one’s country. But what would it matter if he had ‘gloriously sacrificed himself for his country’? He did not have much sympathy for the British colonial policy, but still took it easy, perhaps because that was not the only folly in the world.

(最無名目的死。第一，算不了為國捐軀。即使是『光榮殉國』，又怎樣？他對於英國的殖民地政策沒有多大同情，但也看得很隨便，也許因為世界上的傻事不止那一件。)<sup>31</sup>

The fact that Zhang sees the war from an apolitical point of view is quite significant. By focusing on the catastrophic nature of war instead of its political and racial aspects, Zhang emerges as a disengaged writer. This apolitical attitude, together with her desire for fame, which I am going to discuss later in this chapter, explains the reason why she was willing to write under the Japanese occupation in the subsequent years. To her, reality is something unsystematic, random, fragmented and difficult to understand. The job of an artist, instead of propagating specific political viewpoints or “saving the

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<sup>30</sup> “Embers,” 46.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

country,” is to bring what is random and fragmented into an artistic whole. In “Embers,” she expresses her view as follows:

This thing reality is unsystematic, like seven or eight phonographs playing at the same time, each with its own tune, forming a chaotic whole. In the middle of that incomprehensible noisiness, there are occasionally clear moments that make one sad and light up one’s eyes; the tone of music can be heard, but layers of darkness come forward and drown that little bit of understanding. Painters, writers, and composers bring what they have found as random and fragmented into a harmonious association, creating an artistic whole. If a work of history strives too much for artistic completeness, it becomes fiction . . .

(現實這東西是沒有系統的，像七八個話匣子同時開唱，各唱各的，打成一片混沌。在那不可解的喧囂中偶然也有澄清的，使人心酸眼亮的一剎那，聽得出音樂的調子，但立刻又被重重黑暗上擁來，淹沒了那點了解。畫家、文人、作曲家將零星的、湊巧發現的和諧聯系起來，造成藝術上的完整性。歷史如果過分注重藝術上的完整性，便成爲小說了。) <sup>32</sup>

With no great plans about writing history, Zhang only wanted to focus on the trivial, and reveal the petty passions of the ordinary masses. She says,

What impressed me in wartime Hong Kong were only trivial things. I do not have the will to write history, and I am in no position to judge what kind of attitude

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

historians should hold; however, privately, I do hope that they can talk more about the trivial.

(香港之戰與我的印象，幾乎完全限於一些不相干的事。我沒有寫史的志願，也沒有資格評論史家應持何種態度，可是私下裏總希望他們多說點不相干的話。)<sup>33</sup>

In fact, “Embers” is an essay that consists of ironic depictions of seemingly trivial incidents revealing some startling truths of human nature. Zhang ends the essay with the following striking image:

Time's chariot rumbles forward. What we pass by as we ride along are probably no more than a few familiar streets, yet, while the sky is ablaze, we are racked with fear and horror. It's a pity that we only look hurriedly in the window of a shop as it flashes by, searching for our own image -- we see only our own faces, pale and small: our selfishness and vanity, our shameless blindness and stupidity - everyone is exactly alike, but each of us is alone.

(時代的車轟轟地往前開。我們坐在車上，經過的也許不過是幾條熟悉的街衢，可是在漫天的火光中也自驚心動魄。就可惜我們只顧忙著在一瞥即逝的店舖的櫥窗裏找尋我們自己的影子——我們只看見自己的臉，蒼白，渺小：我們的自私與空虛，我們恬不知恥的愚蠢——誰都像我們一樣，然而我們每個人都是孤獨的。)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

### Later writings and Hong Kong

Besides contributing to the formation of Zhang's views of history and literature, her wartime experience also served as a catalyst for the commencement of her literary career, as the realization of the fragility and uncertainty of life inspired her with a desire to achieve immediate fame. She reminisced about her wartime drawings:

Because of the special atmosphere of the war, I drew many pictures . . . I know that those drawings were good, so good that they did not seem like my own works. I understood I would not be able to draw pictures of such quality in the future . . . While I was drawing, I knew I would soon lose this ability. I learned a lesson from it -- an old lesson: do what you want to do immediately, otherwise there will not be enough time. "Human beings" are the most unpredictable things. (由於戰爭期間特殊空氣的感應，我畫了許多圖 . . . 我確實知道那些畫是好的，完全不像我畫的，以後我再也休想畫出那樣的圖來 . . . 一面在畫，一面我就知道不久我會失去那點能力。從那裏我得到了教訓——老教訓：想作什麼，立刻去做，都許來不及了。『人』是最拿不準的東西。) <sup>35</sup>

Realizing the vicissitude of life, Zhang changed from a lazy, inactive school girl who paid little attention to developing her literary talent into the "blue stocking" of Shanghai who declared in the preface to the second edition of *Romance*:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>36</sup> According to Zhang's high school teacher, Wang Hungsheng, she remained a quiet, lazy, and inactive girl throughout her high school years, despite the fact that her literary writings published on the school magazines were applauded by both her teachers and classmates. Wang Hungsheng, "Remembering Zhang Ailing", *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing, 54.

Oh, better to become famous early! If it comes too late, the happiness will not be so intense . . . Have to be quick: be quick, be quick, there is not enough time, not enough! Even if the individual can wait, time rushes by. Things are already being destroyed, and greater destruction is still to come. Whether it is sublime or superficial, everything will one day be in the past. If the word I most often use is desolation, it's because I feel this melancholy frustrating threat in the background. (呵！出名要趁早呀！來得太晚的話，快樂也不那麼痛快 . . . . . 快，快，遲了來不及了，來不及了！ . . . . . 個人即使等得及，時代是倉促的，已經在破壞中，還有更大的破壞要來。有一天我們的文明，不論是昇華還是浮華，都要成爲過去。如果我最常用的字是“荒涼”，那是因爲思想背景裏有這惘惘的威脅。)<sup>37</sup>

This feeling of “desolation,” together with joy in regaining lost freedom after the war, set the basic tone for her subsequent short stories and essays. On the one hand, there is the “melancholy threat” of destruction; on the other, there is a joyful, passionate love for life. In “Embers,” Zhang carefully recounts how the sleepy city of Hong Kong suddenly awakens to the joy of life after the war. As mentioned in Chapter one, Zhang came from a family that she saw as “dozing off in the sun.” The dozing motif continues in her description of wartime Hong Kong. She shows her fellow students’ attitude towards the war at its beginning in the following simile:

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<sup>37</sup> *Romance*, 5.

For most of us students, our attitude towards the war, to use a simile, was like that of someone dozing on a stool despite feeling uncomfortable and complaining endlessly, he dozed off just the same.

(至於我們大多數的學生，我們對於戰爭所抱的態度，可以打個譬喻，是像一個人坐在硬板凳上打盹，雖然不舒服，而且沒結沒完地抱怨著，到底還是睡著了。)<sup>38</sup>

During the eighteen days when Hong Kong was besieged, life was uncertain and fragile:

Everyone had the difficult feeling at four a.m. . . . Everything was blurred, shaky, and undependable. One could not go home, even if one managed to go back, perhaps his or her home simply did not exist anymore. Buildings could be destroyed, cash could turn into waste paper, people could die, one never knew what was going to happen.

(圍城的十八天裏，誰都有那種清晨四點鐘的難挨的感覺. . . . . 什麼都是模糊，瑟縮，靠不住。回不了家，等回去了，也許家已經不在了。房子可以毀掉，錢轉眼可以成爲廢紙，人可以死，自己更是朝不保暮。)

However, this feeling evaporated once the war was over. The city became a “drunken man,” confused by peace, and frantically joyful.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Embers,” 43.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

Merely knowing that we could lift our heads and watch an airplane without worrying that bombs would fall made the airplane lovely. The winter trees, thin and sad like the light yellow clouds, the clear water from the tap, the electric light, the hustle and bustle on the street -- all these were ours again. The most important thing was, time was ours again -- the day, the night, the four seasons of the year -- we could live on for the moment, how could one not be madly happy? Because of this special psychological stage after the war in Europe, the twenties were called the 'roaring' twenties.

(看見青天上的飛機，知道儘管仰著臉欣賞它而不至於有炸彈落在頭上，單為這一點便覺得它很可愛，冬天的樹，淒迷稀薄像淡黃的雲；自來水管子裏流出來的清水，電燈光，街頭的熱鬧，這些又是我們的了。第一，時間又是我們的了——白天，黑夜，一年四季——我們暫時可以活下去了，怎不叫人歡喜得發瘋呢？就是因為這種特殊得戰後精神狀態，一九二零年在歐洲號稱『發燒的一九二零年』。)<sup>40</sup>

The motif of awakening here echoes at different levels. It is the awakening of a dozing city, and also the awakening of Zhang as a conscious, perceiving self. Seeing how civilization was built on quicksand and how foolish and vain human beings were, she viewed the world with indifference and detachment. Different critics have commented on her irony and restraint, including Edward Gunn, who notes her "skeptical witticism,"<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Gunn, *Unwelcome muse*, 202.

and Chow Rey, who stresses her “nonanthropocentric affective structure that is often expressed through the figures of ruin and desolation.”<sup>42</sup> However, I would like to emphasize that this ironic detachment in fact paradoxically co-exists with a passion for life in Zhang’s creative writings, especially, her essays. I shall return to this point in subsequent chapters.

Zhang’s wartime experiences also influenced her literary writings in several other ways. For one thing, it broadened her horizons. Before the war, she lived in a closed environment, with her experience confined mainly to her family. Her understanding of society was based only on reading. The war added to her understanding of the world, linking her personal experience with the larger backdrop of society, history, and human nature. If Zhang had established a definite, mature world-view before she started her creative career, her experience in wartime Hong Kong added the last, and also the most important dimension to it.<sup>43</sup>

Her wartime experience also provided her subsequent short stories with concrete characters and settings. As Zhang said, “I have written a collection of Hong Kong tales for the Shanghai people.”(我為上海人寫了一本香港傳奇)<sup>44</sup> The Eurasian, British, and Indian characters in her subsequent works are mainly based on her acquaintances in Hong Kong, including her fellow students and professors. Examples include Clementine (Kelimenting 克麗門婷), Professor Roger Empton (Lojie Anbaideng 羅築安白登),

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<sup>42</sup> Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese modernity*, 114.

<sup>43</sup> Yu Bin happened to hold a similar view in his *A biography of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing zhuan 張愛玲傳), Hunan: Hainan chubanshe, 1992, 41.

<sup>44</sup> “After all, I am a Shanghaiese” (Daodishi shanghai ren 到底是上海人), *Gossip*, 57.

Millicent (Meilisheng 靡麗笙) and Susie Mitchell (Suxi Miquier 愴細蜜秋兒) in “Aloeswood: The Second Burning”(Chenxiangxie: dier lu xiang 沉香屑：第二爐香); and Nixi’s (霓喜) husband, Mr. Thomson (Tangmusheng 湯姆生) in *Interlocking Rings* (Lianhuantao 連環套). As well, Hong Kong University and the residential area on the hillside nearby are common settings of Zhang’s early short stories. The Hunan (華南) Univeristy described in “Aloeswood Ashes: The Second Burning” and “Jasmine Tea” (Moli xiangpian 茉莉香片) is very similar to Hong Kong Univerity in its setting. In “Love in a Fallen City” (Qingcheng zhi lian 傾城之戀), Fan Liuyuan(范柳原) and Bai Liusu (白流蘇) rent an apartment on Babington Path, which was very near to Our Lady’s Hall, the dormitory in which Zhang lived.<sup>45</sup>

Besides general characters and settings, Zhang also skillfully employs specific events in her short stories. *The Rice-Sprout Songs* (Yangge 秧歌), “Love in a Fallen City” and “Youthful Years” (Nianqingde shihou 年輕的時候) can serve as examples. In recollecting the gluttony that suddenly caught up with everyone in Hong Kong after the Second World War, Zhang recorded how a crowd of people, herself included, greedily gulped down some delicious turnip pancakes bought from a hawker while a purplish corpse lay next to them on the street.<sup>46</sup> She said: “Hong Kong rediscovered the pleasure of eating. Attracting too much attention, this basic natural instinct suddenly became

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<sup>45</sup> Huang Kangxian, “Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University,” 5.

<sup>46</sup> “Embers,” 48.

abnormal or debased under a strong emotional spotlight.”<sup>47</sup> This description was echoed in her novel *The Rice Sprout Song*, which is a work about starvation.

The thematic influences stemming from her encounter with a wartime marriage are explicit in two of her “matrimonial tales:”<sup>48</sup> “Love in a Fallen City” and “Youthful Years.” When Zhang was working as a Safety Division officer (防空團員), a doctor tried to borrow a car from the director of the Safety Division, so he could go and get a marriage certificate. By the doctor’s appearance, Zhang thought he might not be a kind and easy-going person at ordinary times. But on that day, he kept coming back and smiling at his bride while waiting for the Director. In his eyes there was only a loving look that came near to sadness. The bride was a tiny and beautiful nurse, joyful and festive. She was wearing a light green gown because she could not get a wedding gown in wartime. The two of them waited quietly and kept smiling at each other. Zhang and the other officers could not but smile with them. Zhang said, “we had to thank them for bringing us happiness for no reason at all.”<sup>49</sup> Zhang believed that people were more genuine in wartime, when all the veneer of civilization was destroyed. She said at the end of “Embers”:

Ordinary students seldom had knowledge about real feelings. However, once the superficiality is removed, seeing the cowardly, touchy, pitiful and laughable man or woman underneath, most of them would fall in love with their first discovery.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 415.

<sup>49</sup> “Embers,” 47.

(一般的學生對於人們的真性情素鮮有認識，一旦有機會刮去一點浮皮，看見底下的畏縮，怕癢，可憐又可笑的男人或女人，多半就會愛上他們最初的發現。) <sup>50</sup>

This view was expressed in “Love in a Fallen City.” It is only against the turmoil and destruction of war that Liuyuan and Liusu become able to feel a genuine love for each other. The reckless playboy finally settles for a marriage, and the divorcee who starts by seeking social and financial security comes to care for her lover. In “Youthful Years,” Cynthia, who fails to buy a new wedding gown, is happy to settle for a rented one. Getting married is an occasion that happens only once in her life. What she wants is some self-made romance and some beautiful memories. I shall further discuss these works in Chapter Five. Before examining Zhang’s mature writings, I focus in the next chapter on her early works.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 54.

### Chapter Three: Early Writings

Zhang started writing stories at the age of seven. Her early works, before she started writing cultural critiques and film reviews in English for the magazine *The Twentieth Century* in Shanghai, represent a period in which she experimented with different styles and subject matter. By the term “early works,” I refer to the eight stories (including three incomplete works), seven essays, and four book reviews that she wrote between the ages of seven and nineteen. These works represent Zhang’s early efforts at self-expression. Though still unpolished and immature, they show high creativity, capable mastery of language, and the early precocity of a witty girl. This chapter will analyze the significance and implications of her early works: how they echo her early experience; how they developed from the traditional and butterflies styles into the modern romantic style,<sup>1</sup> and subsequently combine the two; and how Zhang gradually formed her subsequent style based on these immature attempts.

Zhang’s early writings can be divided into two groups, those unpublished and those published in the St. Mary’s Hall yearbook *Glory of the Country* (Guoguang 國光), and the school magazine *The Phoenix* (Fengzao 鳳藻).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By the term “butterflies style,” I refer to the style of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies literature, a school which mainly produced love stories for entertainment. See Perry Link, *Mandarin ducks and butterflies: popular fiction in early twentieth-century Chinese cities*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang’s unpublished works fail to survive, we know of them only from Zhang’s essay “Old drafts,” *Gossip*, 114-123. Zhang’s first published works is “An unlucky girl.” (Buxing de ta 不幸的她) This essay first appeared in *The phoenix*, Shanghai: St. Mary’s Hall, 1932. Republished in *Lianhe bao* (聯合報), 10 Oct. 1995. Reviews of this essay includes Chen Zishan (陳子善),

### Early unpublished works

Zhang's early unpublished works show her family's influence and echo her childhood experience. Both of Zhang's parents had an interest in Chinese and Western literature. Her father found her a private tutor, made her recite Chinese classical prose, and encouraged her in her creation of classical poems and classical Chinese novels. Though basically a traditionalist, he had an English name Stephen Zhang, which Zhang found written on his copy of Shaw's *Heartbreak House*.<sup>3</sup> Her mother, who liked to read Lao She's works in *The Fiction Monthly*, introduced her to modern Chinese literature and Western culture.

Zhang's creative writing in this period is mainly based on the books she enjoyed reading, such as the butterflies-style novels written by Zhang Henshui, as well as classical Chinese novels like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honglouloumeng 紅樓夢).<sup>4</sup> This is understandable. As a little girl from a traditional family, Zhang was always restricted to home and did not have much variety of

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"The starting point of a genius: a brief discussion of Zhang Ailing's first published works 'An unlucky girl'" (Tiancai di qibu: luetan Zhang Ailing di chunüzuò 'buxing di ta' 天才的起步: 略談張愛玲的處女作<不幸的她>) *Lianhe bao*, 10 Oct. 1995. Tao Sihao (陶思浩), "The discovery of Zhang Ailing's early works" (Zhang Ailing di shaonian zhizuo bei faxian 張愛玲少年之作被發現), *Central daily news* (Zhongyang ribao 中央日報), overseas edition, 20 Nov. 1996.

<sup>3</sup> "Whispered words," 142.

<sup>4</sup> Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹), *Dream of the red chamber* (Honglouloumeng 紅樓夢), 4 vols, Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1987. Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in, *The Story of the stone: a novel in five volumes*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973-1986. See also C. T. Hsia, *The classical Chinese novel: a critical introduction*, trans. David Hawks, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1968, 245-297.

experiences. Being lonely, withdrawn and very observant of her surroundings since early childhood, Zhang was very fond of writing, and was especially sensitive to the subtleties of diction. It is amazing that between the age of seven and eight she had already attempted three different types of stories: popular butterflies-style stories, and classical Chinese novels and fables.

Zhang's first creative writing is an untitled family tragedy. This butterflies-style short story, written at the age of seven, involves the female protagonist's murder of her elder sister-in-law. Later, in primary school, Zhang attempted another butterflies-story about a love triangle, which ended with the female protagonist committing suicide. The choice of a family tragedy reveals Zhang's early interest in the complicated human relationships in traditional extended families. As previously discussed, coming from a broken family, Zhang had learned since she was a small child to deal with her father's concubine, and later her step-mother. The fact that a child would write about murder and suicide has great psychological significance. It reveals the dark and pessimistic side of Zhang's character, and hints at two possible ways in which Zhang once considered breaking away from her unhappy childhood: vengeful murder or self-destruction.<sup>5</sup>

The second work Zhang attempted was a historical novel. Imitating the classical Chinese novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Zhang starts her novel with the phrase "At the end of the Sui Dynasty and the beginning of the Tang Dynasty" (Huashuo Suimuo Tangchude shihou 話說隋末唐初的時候), which is a typical opening of the

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<sup>5</sup> Zhang writes about her fantasy of pushing her step-mother off the veranda in "Whispered words," 149-150.

chapter-linked novel (Zhanghui xiaoshuo 章回小說). Despite the fact that she failed to finish the work, it earned her the applause of her first reader, a cousin in his early twenties.<sup>6</sup> At the age of fourteen, with *A Modern Version of "Dream of the Red Chamber"* (Modeng Hongloumeng 摩登紅樓夢), Zhang made her second attempt to "rewrite" a classical Chinese novel. She received great encouragement from her father, who gave classical-style titles to the five chapters of her work.<sup>7</sup> While showing Zhang's familiarity with the classical novel in its depiction of character and its use of diction, this work also represents her first attempt at the creative transformation of classical Chinese literature. By transferring the characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber* into a modern setting, Zhang introduces modern subject matter into the genre of the classical novel: Jia Lian (賈璉) is appointed head of a railway company; You Erjie (尤二姐), instead of committing suicide after an affair with Jia, decides to sue him for compensation; Welcoming Spring (Yingchun 迎春) organizes fashion shows, and Baoyu (寶玉) ends up going abroad.<sup>8</sup>

If we say that her "re-creation" of the traditional novel is influenced by her father, her mother's influence is shown in Zhang's fables like *Happy Village* (Lixiang cun 理想村) and "An ideal Village in an Ideal World" (Lixiang zhong de lixiangcun 理想中的理想村). *Happy Village* was written when Zhang was eight, the year in which her mother returned from France. According to Zhang, it was an unfinished "utopian" novel about a

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<sup>6</sup> "Old drafts," 115-116.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 118.

warrior race living on a high plateau. The Chinese emperor abolishes their tariffs and grants them autonomy, because they helped him defeat the *Miao* race. They form a big family isolated from the world, self-supportive and autonomous, preserving the dynamic culture of the tribal era.<sup>9</sup> The principal characteristics of this work are its notion of isolation, its optimistic view, and its grand vision. The fact that the warrior race gains its autonomy through its victory over the *Miao* race hints at Zhang's longing to earn independence through her own efforts. The creation of a utopia separated from the world also reveals her wish to keep a private space to herself, hiding away from the conflicts in her family.<sup>10</sup> While most children like to build their castles with blocks, Zhang built them with words and drawings. As a child, she already had a vision of city-planning: She drew pictures illustrating various social amenities in her novel, including buildings, libraries, gymnasiums, chocolate stores, roof-top gardens, and a public restaurant inside a pavilion in the middle of a lotus pond.<sup>11</sup>

One can explain the optimistic tone in *Happy Village* by Zhang's joy over her mother's return. The period in her childhood Zhang enjoyed most was between the ages of eight and thirteen. Under her mother's guidance, she learned English, played the piano, and entered a primary school at the age of nine. Her rewriting of *Happy Village* as "An Ideal Village in an Ideal World," when she was between twelve and thirteen, reveals her admiration for Western culture and civilization, represented by her mother. "An Ideal

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<sup>9</sup> "My dream as genius," *Zhang's outlook*, 277-278.

<sup>10</sup> Her wish came true when she moved to the dormitory in primary school. School life gave her a greater space for development. We shall return to this point later.

<sup>11</sup> "My dream of genius," 278.

Village in an Ideal World” is a lyrical essay describing Zhang’s ideal world: a village with a westernized ballroom on top of a hill, with a large swimming pool and many youthful inhabitants. As a school exercise, this work shows Zhang’s acquisition of basic literary techniques, such as personification and metaphor. Sentences like: “The silver-white moon wanders in the hollow sky, as if she is weeping, feeling hatred towards her loneliness,” and “you can hear the lyrical music, like a peach-colored net, thrown from the top of the hill, covering the whole hill,” convey a sense of loneliness, and a desire to communicate to the reader by use of a second person.<sup>12</sup> The first example can also be considered a crude form of the moon imagery that later became Zhang’s hallmark. “An Ideal Village, in an Ideal World” with its romantic and sentimental tone, comes very close in style to the second group of her early works.

### **Early published works**

While Zhang’s early unpublished works shows the influence of her family, her early published works bears the marks of her high school Chinese teacher, Wang Hongsheng, who advocated a modern romantic literary style. In “Old Drafts,” Zhang introduces the concept of “Popular versus Elegant”: “This [*A Modern Version of “Dream of the Red Chamber”*] is a popular novel; in school, I wrote something more elegant.”<sup>13</sup> She also makes it clear that she wrote in the “elegant” style at that time merely because of

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<sup>12</sup> “Old drafts,” 115.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

her teacher's encouragement. She shows her early anti-romantic inclination through her preference for plot and human relationships, which are represented more fully in classical and butterflies literature, instead of the optimistically romantic view and sentimental lamentation of modern Chinese literature.<sup>14</sup> However, she only wrote in the popular style privately, as it was despised as something vulgar in a Catholic girls' school.<sup>15</sup>

Although her "elegant" works, published in the school yearbook and school magazine, gained her wide popularity and applause among teachers and classmates, she openly denied their literary value in "Old Drafts," an essay written after she became famous. However, a discussion of these works is worthwhile, since this "modern stage" provides a transition period between her writing of traditional and popular style stories and her subsequent mature works. While Zhang herself views the concept of "Popular vs Elegant" as a dichotomy, I shall try to show how she in fact gradually formed her subsequent literary style by assimilating and combining the two.

Zhang's published works written between the ages of thirteen and nineteen show great diversity. Her lyrical prose in both Chinese and English, argumentative essays, book reviews, historical and proletarian short stories demonstrate her creativity and fondness for experimentation. Zhang comments in "What to Write" (Xie shenmo 寫甚麼), "when I first learned to write, I thought I could write everything: historical stories, proletarian literature, works of the New Perceptionsit school, even popular family

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>15</sup> However, Zhang's butterflies-style love stories enjoyed great popularity among her classmates in the dormitory, who passed her works around. "Old drafts," 115.

tragedies, socialist stories, stories about love and sex. I once believed that everything was at my own disposal.”<sup>16</sup> For the sake of discussion, I shall further divide the second group of her early works into two genres: essays lyrical and argumentative, and short stories.

### Lyrical essays

Zhang’s early lyrical essays, “Late Dusk” (Chimu 遲暮) and “Autumn Rain” (Qiuyu 秋雨),<sup>17</sup> already show the use of flamboyant diction. Written at the age of thirteen, “Late Dusk” tells about the laments of a lady who has passed her prime. By the use of words like “emptiness” (kongxu 空虛), “forlorn” (changwang 悵惘) and “desolate” (cangliang 蒼涼), which later become her hallmark, Zhang succeeds in evoking a sentimental mood. Her envy for “the butterfly which is born at dawn and dies at dusk” shows her early maturity, and her understanding of the fact that “human beings have to bear the long ‘gray rainy years’ after ‘youth has passed away like running water.’”<sup>18</sup> The main feature of “Autumn Rain,” written three years later, is its use of imaginative similes, which demonstrates her great improvement in description. Examples include “The rain, like damp silvery gray spider lines, knits a soft web and covers the

<sup>16</sup> “What to write,” *Gossip*, 124.

<sup>17</sup> “Late dusk” was first published in *The phoenix*, 1933. Republished in *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays* (Zhang Ailing sanwen quanbian 張愛玲散文全編), Zhejiang: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1992, 491-492. “Autumn rain” was first published in *The phoenix*, 1936. Republished in *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 493-494.

<sup>18</sup> “Late dusk,” 492.

whole autumn world,” and “the sky is also gloomy, like a roof in an old house that is filled with spider webs.”<sup>19</sup>

Zhang’s early English essays are witty and imaginative. “Sketches of Some Shepherds” and “Great Expectations,” published in *The Phoenix* when Zhang was seventeen, are written in the first person.<sup>20</sup> The former is a sketch of three of her teachers, while the latter is an essay glorifying her school. “Sketches,” presented in the form of a mock test paper, opens in a witty way:

Here I am going to give you a matching test. Don’t be frightened, my dear readers, you might have mistaken it to be one of those terribly difficult history or geometry matching tests. Be calm. Read through column one of your test paper, where a list of names are printed: Miss \_\_, Miss \_\_, Miss \_\_. Then go through the following descriptive paragraphs which should be in the second column of your test paper.

Fill in all the blanks.<sup>21</sup>

The following three descriptive paragraphs, one for each teacher, show Zhang’s careful observation and mastery of the skill of character depiction. Besides providing detailed descriptions of human appearances, paying special attention to manners and little gestures, she also demonstrates her ability to convey an impression of a character by an association, or a single color. The first teacher is associated with the sun, while the third

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<sup>19</sup> “Autumn rain,” *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 493.

<sup>20</sup> “Sketches of some shepherds” and “Great expectations,” first published in *The phoenix*, 1937. Republished in *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 502-508 & 509-513, both with a Chinese translation by Chen Zishan.

<sup>21</sup> “Sketches of some shepherds,” 502.

teacher is depicted in tones of brown.<sup>22</sup> It is notable that in this English essay, Zhang endeavors to introduce Chinese allusions in her metaphors. She describes the first teacher's hair as "flowing back like the wavy Yellow River,"<sup>23</sup> and her voice is like "what an ancient Chinese poet has written about the music he heard on a moonlit river, 'like the tinkling of pearls dropping and gliding into a jade bowl.'"<sup>24</sup> This can be related to her wish to introduce Chinese culture to the West. Viewing her apt translation of Bai Juyi's (白居易) poem in the second example, it is not surprising that she became a professional translator in later years.

In "Great Expectations," Zhang describes time as a sharp knife, and her school as a partly carved stone awaiting shaping by its staff and students.<sup>25</sup> She imagines herself as an old lady, returning to her school in a dream: "If I have a chance to live to be a snowy-haired old lady, I shall, in my peaceful dreams beside the fireside, seek for the old paths leading through the green plum trees with which I have been familiar in my early days. Of course, at that time, the youthful plum trees must also have grown into their pleasant old age, stretching their powerful arms to shade the crossing paths."<sup>26</sup> She then visualizes herself watching the girls praying, and hearing the old bell tower echoing in return: although St. Mary's Hall does not possess the largest dormitories, it does possess the most hard-working girls. Whether she will be proud upon hearing these words will

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 502 & 505.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 502.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 503. "Like the tinkling of pearls dropping and gliding into a jade bowl," taken from Bai Juyi's (白居易) "Pipaxing" (琵琶行). The original reads 大珠小珠落玉盤.

<sup>25</sup> "Great expectations," 509.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 510.

depend on whether she has done anything to glorify her school. Although a made-to-order work without high literary value, this essay, as demonstrated in the above quotation, represents Zhang's first attempt to manipulate time and space through vivid imagination, which subsequently develops into the unique treatment of time and space in her short stories.

### Book reviews and argumentative essays

While Zhang's early lyrical essays tend to be clumsy and long-winded, her early book reviews and argumentative essays are precise and to the point, showing her analytical power and demonstrating that she was already an insightful and well-read critic. Her four book reviews published in *Glory of the Country* are especially important, as they provide a glimpse of her early literary views, which subsequently became the guideline for her creative writings.<sup>27</sup> Taking Lin Shu's (林紓) *A Tale of the Misty Water and the Sad City* (Yanshui Chouchenglu 煙水愁城錄) as an adventure story lacking literary value but good for entertainment, Zhang shows her early concern with the issue of "elegant" and "popular" literature.<sup>28</sup> As discussed above, Zhang had been consciously

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<sup>27</sup> The original titles of the four book criticisms are "Book report: *A Tale of the misty water and the sad city*" (Dushu baogao: yanshui chouchenglu 讀書報告：煙水愁城錄), "Book criticism: *Train without a track*" (Shuping: wugui lieche 書評：無軌列車), "Book introduction: *In the Dark*" (Shuji jieshao: zai heian zhong 書籍介紹：在黑暗中), "On *Ruoxing*" (Ruoxing ping <若馨>評). All published in *Glory of the country*, Shanghai: St. Mary's Hall, 1936-37. Republished in *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing's essays*, 495-498.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang has further developed her idea on popular and mass literature in essays on her own works, which are her response to other critics' comments. See "Works of my own," *Gossip*, 19-26.

choosing between the “elegant” modern literary style and the “popular” traditional narrative style since her earliest creative writings. I shall return to this question later in this chapter.

In her review of Lin Yijin's (林疑今) *Railway without a Track* (Wugui Lieche 無軌列車) Zhang applauds its creativity while criticizing its lack of careful observation and its loose structure. She comments that by adding city depiction not directly related to the plot of the love story, Lin succeeds in creating a non-consecutive writing style, which is derived from animated cartoons. However, the novel soon falls into the fixed formulas of contemporary city literature, lacking careful observation in its descriptions of Shanghai and its portrayal of the upper class. Modeled after the works of Mu Shiyong (穆時英),<sup>29</sup> Lin's work proves to be false and pretentious.<sup>30</sup> This criticism can be regarded as a guideline for her own creative writings. Using Shanghai and Hong Kong as backgrounds, Zhang's stories demonstrate not merely careful observation and detailed depiction, but also an understanding of city dwellers, especially the upper class, through her first hand experience. Moreover, Zhang's comment on Lin's creativity in narrative style can also be applied to her own works. When I discuss Zhang's short stories, I shall discuss her innovations in the genre by means of introducing poetic elements, and her use of lyrical, descriptive passages.

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<sup>29</sup> Mu Shiyong (1902-1940), modern Chinese writer, representative of the “New Perceptionist School.”

<sup>30</sup> “Three book reviews,” *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing's essays*, 495-496.

Zhang's "Book Introduction: Ding Ling's (丁玲) *In the Dark* (Zai heian zhong 在黑暗中) is the finest of her early book reviews, showing her female consciousness and her knowledge of modern Chinese literature. By commenting on various aspects of fiction-writing, such as narrative technique, style, theme, psychological description, and character depiction, Zhang demonstrates her familiarity with the short story genre. She considers *In the Dark* Ding Ling's representative early work, which shows the development of Ding's precise and powerful style. While she criticizes "Dreaming of Jade" (Mengke 夢珂) as an immature strictly-narrated autobiographical story without a clear theme, she praises "The Diary of Miss Sophie" (Shafei nüshi Riji 莎菲女士日記) for its detailed psychological depiction, strong sense of individuality, and embodiment of decaying beauty.<sup>31</sup> As a final note, she emphasizes that the female protagonist's contradictory and romantic character represents bored and distressed females in the May Fourth Era, who feel the conflict between old and new thoughts.<sup>32</sup>

This female consciousness and awareness of the conflict between tradition and modernity has a great impact on Zhang's subsequent works. Her early short stories, "The Bull" and "Farewell to the Concubine," which I shall discuss in a moment, represent an embodiment of this female consciousness. In Zhang's subsequent essays, one can also find a unique female perspective in viewing the world. As well, the tension between tradition and modernity is the main thread of her subsequent short stories. The original

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<sup>31</sup> "Dreaming of jade" and "The Diary of miss Sophie" are two of the four short stories collected in *In the Dark*.

<sup>32</sup> "Three book reviews," *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing's essays*, 496.

cover design of her short stories collection, *Romances*, best reveals the central idea of its collection: A late Qing lady in modern fashion sits at a table playing cards, while a baby-sitter holding a baby stands beside her. In the middle of this peaceful scene, a faceless modern man curiously peeps in from a window, creating a disturbing, even ghostly atmosphere, as those inside are unaware of his presence.<sup>33</sup>

In her review of Zhang Rujin's (張如瑾) *Ruoxing* (Ruoxing 若馨),<sup>34</sup> Zhang shows her anti-heroic stance and her concern with simple, ordinary people. Simplicity is what Zhang appreciates most in this work. She comments that as a novel about a simple girl's first love, *Ruoxing* is beautifully written, despite the fact that it does not have twists of plot, heroic figures, or fashionable "class struggles."<sup>35</sup> She also holds that the novel's emotional power comes from the fact that it is written based upon real-life experiences. In "On Writing" (Tan Xiezu 談寫作), written in 1944, she further elaborates on this view: "Ordinary people are more important than geniuses, as they represents the majority."<sup>36</sup> It is Zhang's wish to depict the reality of life, instead of creating optimistic myths about human nature or the future of China.

<sup>33</sup> Zhang has explained the design cover of *Romances* in "A few words to say to my readers" (You jjuhua tong duzhe shuo 有幾句話同讀者說), *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing's essays*, 302. The cover of the revised edition of *Romances* was designed by Zhang's best friend, Yanying (炎櫻). Yanying is a Ceylonese named Fatima Mohideen, "Yanying" is the Chinese translation of her name Zhang gave to her. *Romances*, first published in 1944 by Shanghai zhazhishe, Subsequently republished as *Collected short stories of Zhang Ailing* (張愛玲小說集), Taipei: Huangguan, 1968.

<sup>34</sup> The author of *Ruoxing* is not mentioned in Zhang's book review. However, according to Wang Hongsheng, the author is Zhang Rujin's (張如瑾), one of Zhang's classmates. See Wang Hongsheng, "On Zhang Ailing," 57. Yu Bin mistakes Zhang Rujin as Zhang Huaisu (張懷素). See Yu Bin, *A biography on Zhang Ailing*, 58.

<sup>35</sup> "On *Ruoxing*," 497.

<sup>36</sup> "On writing" *Zhang's outlook*, 268.

In her argumentative essay “On the future of the Cartoon,” written at the age of seventeen, Zhang shows her insights into the animated cartoon movie industry by questioning whether it is satisfactory that the cartoon, an astonishing invention of the twentieth-century, merely serves as a replacement for drawings in children’s story books.<sup>37</sup> Zhang states that the cartoon has its future in reflecting real life, introducing grand adventures, and conveying up-to-date knowledge. Touching again on the function of art and the notion of popular art, Zhang boldly states that cartoon movies have a higher value than the classics in the museums, since “they belong to the passionate masses, and they bring dated great stories alive in front of them.”<sup>38</sup> While history provides the cartoon with numerous beautiful romances, the cartoon can arouse the public’s interest in history. Although written in clumsy, Europeanized Chinese,<sup>39</sup> this essay features Zhang’s optimistic vision and delightful tone. Considering film and the cartoon as two little sisters the Muse gave to twentieth century literature, Zhang invites the reader to look forward to a bright new page in art history through the appearance of a new form of cartoon.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “On the future of the cartoon,” first published in *The phoenix*, 1937. Republished in *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 499-501.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>39</sup> This essay reads like a direct translation from English. There are obvious Europeanized sentences, such as: 我真是高興，當我幻想到未來…… (“I am very happy, when I imagine that in the future . . .”). “On the future of the cartoon,” *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 501.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

## Short stories

Zhang's early short stories are more mature and complex than her early essays. Her first two published short stories, "The Bull" (Niu 牛) and "Farewell to the Concubine" (Bawang bieji 霸王別姬), written at the ages of sixteen and seventeen, already demonstrate a skilful mastery of the technique of fiction writing, showing also her humanistic concern and female perspective.

### "The Bull"

"The Bull" is a story about poverty. Farmer Luxing (祿興) and his wife, having sold their bull due to their poverty, become unable to plough their land in Spring. Luxing then decides to sell their chickens, in order to rent a bull from a neighbor, despite his wife's opposition. However, the bull proves recalcitrant and finally kills him.

After the May Fourth Movement, humanitarianism became the mainstream of thought among the intellectuals. In the thirties, the concept of "class struggle" prevailed, and a writer's sympathy for the lower classes was regarded as a sign of his or her moral conscience.<sup>41</sup> It is understandable that Zhang, who was then studying in a Westernized school with teachers who advocated New Literature, would create a story in this light. Written in the "new literary style" (xin wenyi qiang 新文藝腔), "The Bull," as Zhang comments in "Old Drafts," is an "elegant" work that "represents the proletarian works

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<sup>41</sup> Yu Bin, *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 56-57.

written by the city youths who love literature.” However, “though a good attempt,” she says, “I am impatient reading it now.”<sup>42</sup>

It is remarkable that although Zhang shows no enthusiasm for this work, it represents her personal style in a crude form. With its skillful use of imagery and repetition, “The Bull” proves to be a work that, on close reading, demonstrates a conscious attempt to strive after “an organic unity,” “local texture,” “tension,” and “irony,” to borrow the terms from the New Critics.<sup>43</sup> In this work, a hidden protest against poverty and oppression is brought about through the use of repetition. The main plot of the story consists of consecutive losses: the Lus lose their bull, lose their chickens, Luxing loses his life, and his wife loses her husband. Through the repetition of images, such as the moon hanging over the chimney of the thatched house, and foxtails swaying in the muddy pond, Zhang creates a parallelism between the opening and the closing scene.<sup>44</sup> In the former, Luxing stands in front of his house at dusk, and worries about losing the chickens; in the latter, also at dusk, his wife sadly faces the loss of her husband, as she watches his coffin carried away. While earlier in the story Luxing wonders how lonely his nights will be without the sound of the chickens; at the story’s conclusion, the

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<sup>42</sup> “Old drafts,” 119.

<sup>43</sup> By this sentence, I do not mean that Zhang is writing her story with the New Criticism in mind. It is a coincidence that her works are widely analyzed in the light of New Criticism in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Examples includes *Shuijing* (水晶), *The art of Zhang Ailing's fiction* (Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo de yishu 張愛玲小說的藝術), Taipei: Dadi chubanshe, 1985, 7th ed. and Chen Bingliang (陳炳良), *Collected discussions on Zhang Ailing's short stories* (Zhang Ailing duanpian xiaoshuo lunji 張愛玲短篇小說論集), Taipei: Yuanjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> “The bull,” in *Anthology of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing Wenji 張愛玲文集) ed. Jin Hongda (金宏達) & Yu Qing (于青), Anhui: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1992, vol. 1, 1, 3 & 5.

narrator shows great sympathy for Luxing's wife, whose life ahead would be "a long night," and wonders how lonely her widowhood will be without both the sound of the chickens and the movement of Luxing's shadow in front of the lamp.<sup>45</sup>

The use of irony and foreshadowing techniques in "The Bull" are also worth noting. Luxing's pride and joy in viewing the bull as a dignified prince, and he himself as the prince's guard ironically reveal his vanity and ignorance. In "On *Ruoxing*," Zhang advises her classmate Zhang Rujin to pay more attention to the use of foreshadowing;<sup>46</sup> "The Bull" can be regarded as a demonstration of this. While Luxing is on his way to rent a bull, he passes several tombs, which presage his death:

In the middle of the bushes, there were several round-shaped tombs, the morning-glories entangling the top of the tombs stretched their light purple trumpets into the broken coffins, which appeared above the yellow mud. Farmers with bulls and axes sang and walked past.

(樹叢中露出一個個圓圓的土饅頭，牽牛花纏繞著墳尖，把它那粉紫色的小喇叭直伸進暴露在黃泥外的破爛棺材裏去。一個個牽了牛扛了鋤頭的人唱著歌經過它們。) <sup>47</sup>

These farmers' songs throw into a mocking relief Luxing's anxiety when the bull refuses to obey his order. The story builds to its climax by stressing Luxing's sensations before his death:

<sup>45</sup> The original reads: 展開在祿興娘子前面的生命就是一個漫漫的長夜--缺少了吱吱咯咯的雞聲和祿興的高大的在燈前晃來晃去的影子的晚上，該是多麼寂寞的晚上啊！Ibid., 5.

<sup>46</sup> "On *Ruoxing*," 495.

<sup>47</sup> "The bull," 3.

While he was rolling down the slope, he heard the panting from the bull's flaring nostrils. He felt that a pair of fierce eyes were getting closer and closer, bigger and bigger -- as big as a cart wheel -- then he felt the intense pain of a knife, the salty and smelly blood flowed into his mouth -- he lost consciousness, but seemed to hear the panting of the bull and the noise of the crowd from far away.

(一面滾，他一面聽見那漲大的牛的鼻孔裏的喘息聲，覺得那一雙猙獰的大眼睛越逼越近，越近越大——和車輪一樣大，後來他覺得一陣刀刺似的劇痛，又鹹又腥的血流進口腔裏去——他失去了知覺，耳邊似乎遠遠的聽見牛的咻咻聲和眾人的喧嚷聲。) <sup>48</sup>

“The Bull” also shows Zhang's early female consciousness, and her awareness of the power relations between husband and wife. In the story, Luxing is living on his wife's dowry. She strongly opposes his selling her bull and chickens. However, Luxing “knows that there is no need to take the words of a female seriously, they will soften before the sun sinks.”<sup>49</sup> In terms of subject matter, “The Bull” can be regarded as a prologue to *Genesis* (Chuangshiji 創世記) and *The Rice-Sprout Song*, in which Zhang further elaborates on the topics of village poverty and men living on women's dowries.

### “Farewell to the Concubine”

“Farewell to the Concubine” develops the sense of female consciousness that Zhang shows in “The Bull.” Rewriting the historical tale of Xiangyu (項羽) and his

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 3.

concubine, Yuji (虞姬), Zhang subverts the traditional tale by adding anti-romantic features to the hero's image, and placing special emphasis on Yuji's quest for selfhood, thus providing the story with a new perspective and a modern interpretation. In her description of Xiangyu, Zhang repeatedly associates him with children and babies. "He was born for giving orders." His square chin and thin lips show his resolution and pride. However, on his face, one finds the kind of "frankness and stubbornness belonging to a baby."<sup>50</sup> "Inside his big dark eyes, there is a spark which belongs only to a child."<sup>51</sup> Yuji, instead of being the concubine who commits suicide because of her King's failure, gives up her life due to her realization that she is only "the moon that reflects the sunshine."<sup>52</sup> The night on which Xiangyu is besieged by the Han army, she surveys the army after he falls asleep:

Suddenly she felt cold and empty, just like every time the King left her. If he was the hot and shiny sun that surged out a blinding fire of ambition, she was the moon that reflected his light and power. She was like a shadow, following him through all the dark, stormy nights . . . However, whenever he was asleep, whenever she held a candle and surveyed the army alone, she started to think about herself. She doubted the purpose of her living in the world. He lived for his great plans. He knew how to use his sword, his long spear, and how to win his crown with his army. But what about her? She was only a soft and weak echo

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<sup>50</sup> "Farewell to the concubine," *Anthology of Zhang Ailing*, vol. 1, 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

behind his loud heroic roar, gradually softening, softening, ending up in dead silence.

(她突然覺得冷，又覺得空虛，正像每一次她離開了項王的感覺一樣。如果他是那熾熱的，充滿了燦燦的光彩，噴出耀眼花的 ambition 她便是那承受著，反射著他的光和力的月亮。她像影子一般的跟隨他，經過漆黑的暴風雨之夜……然而，每逢他睡了，她獨自掌了蠟燭出來巡營的時候，她開始想起她個人的事來了。她懷疑她這樣生存在世界上的目標究竟是什麼。他活著，爲了他的壯志而活著。他知道怎樣運用他的配刀，他的長矛，和他的江東弟子去獲得他的皇冕。然而她呢？她僅僅是他的高亢的英雄的呼嘯的一個微弱的回聲，漸漸輕下去，輕下去，終於死寂了。) <sup>53</sup>

Xiangyu's reward is his achievements, but hers will only be a lifelong imprisonment, and the posthumous title of "virtuous concubine":

If he succeeded, what would she get? She would get the name of a "distinguished court lady." She would be imprisoned for her whole life. She would wear the clothes of a court lady, stay in a dark room inside the *Zhaohua* Palace, watching the moon and smelling the flowers outside the window, and tasting the loneliness inside the window. She would grow old, then he would be tired of her, and then countless resplendent falling stars would fly into the sky that once belonged to him and her, depriving her of the sun in which she had been basking for more than ten years. She would not reflect the light he shone on her, she would become a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

waning moon, gloomy, melancholic, dejected, and frantic. At the end of her life, which had been lived for him, he would give her a posthumous title, like “virtuous concubine” or “chaste concubine,” a scented wooden coffin wrapped with embroidered brocade, and three or four slaves to be buried with her. This would be the reward for her life.

(假如他成功了的話，她得到些甚麼呢？她將得到一個“貴人”的封號，她將得到一個終身監禁的處分。她將穿上宮妝，整日關在昭華殿的陰沉古黯的房子裏，領略窗子外面的月色，花香，和窗子裏面的寂寞。她要老了，於是他厭倦了她，於是他的數不清的燦爛的流星飛進他和她享有的天宇，隔絕了她十餘年來沐浴著的陽光。她不再反射他照射在她身上的光輝，她成了一個被蝕的明月，陰暗，憂鬱，發狂。當她結束了她這個爲了他而活著的生命的時候，他們會送給她一個“端淑貴妃”或“賢淑貴妃”的謚號，一只錦繡裝裏的沉香木棺槨，和三四個殉葬的奴隸，這就是她的生命的冠冕。) <sup>54</sup>

Yuji's tragic realization of her status as a woman, and her existential quest for the meaning of life reveal her self-awareness as an individual. Her last words: “I prefer this ending,”<sup>55</sup> are words that the King fails to understand. However, it is notable that the female characters in Zhang's subsequent short stories never take up a feminist warriors' stance. One finds Yuji's image as a “pale and smiling woman” (蒼白，微笑的女人) repeated later in characters like Chang'an (長安) in “The Golden Cangue” and Yu

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 12.

Dunfeng (于敦鳳) in “Lingering Love” (Liuqing 留情).<sup>56</sup> To Zhang, what is important is the tragic awareness of reality, for understanding and sympathy come only after awareness.

It is notable that there are recent studies that attempt to analyze Zhang’s work in the light of feminist literary theory, holding that Zhang is a feminist writer.<sup>57</sup> However, I find this view difficult to agree with, since what concerns Zhang is basically the emancipation of the individual rather than the female sex in particular. Instead of fighting against the social system which adversely affects their lives, and finally gaining victory, as happens in most feminist stories, Zhang’s female protagonists take for granted the status quo and spend their efforts making their way within the given situation. How women manage to survive in a male-dominated society with complicated human relationships remains one of the major concerns in Zhang’s subsequent mature short stories. Zhang’s works, especially her essays and novels, show a delicate feminine sensuality and a strong sympathy for women. However, her feminine, but not feminist, stance certainly disappoints critics who would make of her a modern feminist.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>57</sup> Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese modernity*, 112-120; Lin Xingqian (林幸謙), “A critical review of Zhang’s early works: the sign of oppression and the political implications in the text” (Zhang Ailing shaozuolun: yayi fuhao yu wenbendi zhengzhi hanyi 張愛玲少作論：壓抑符碼與文本的政治含義), *The contemporaries* (Dangdai 當代) 109 (May 1995): 94-105.

### Dream of Genius

Zhang's high school graduation marks the end of her "new literary style." In 1938, she published in the *Evening Post*, an English essay titled "What A Life, What A Girl's Life," which is about her experience of confinement.<sup>58</sup> After that she only published one Chinese essay, "My Dream of Genius," before she began her creative career with her contributing to *The Twentieth Century* in 1943.<sup>59</sup> This essay, written in 1939, is regarded by critics as the earliest work showing the characteristics of Zhang's unique "Gossip" essay style (流言體), which is marked by the tone of a witty girl chatting to the reader, whispering her secrets or gossiping about what is going on in her ordinary life. While featuring the use of creative metaphor and flamboyant diction, Zhang's "Gossip" style essays are also marked by a subtle mingling of witty humor and restrained sadness, which contribute to the complexity of the work.

"My Dream of Genius," is an autobiographical essay tracing Zhang's personal development, and her fading dream of becoming an artist. The opening raises her difficulty of being a strange and talented girl at the same time:

I am a strange girl, who was viewed as a genius since I was little. Besides developing my genius, I have no purpose in living. However, when this childhood fantasy gradually faded, I found that I had nothing but my dream of genius -- what

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<sup>58</sup> The original essay has not survived. According to Zhang Ailing, the title of the essay is given by the editor. Zhang Zijing, *My elder sister Zhang Ailing*, 93.

<sup>59</sup> "My dream of Genius," first published in *The west wind monthly* (Xifeng 西風), 48 (Aug. 1940): 542-543. Republished in *Zhang's outlook*, 277-279.

I have are only the eccentricities and flaws of a genius. People forgive the eccentricity of Wagner, but not mine.

(我是一個古怪的女孩，從小被目為天才，除了發展我的天才外別無生存的目標。然而，當童年的狂想逐漸褪色的時候，我發現我除了天才的夢之外一無所有——所有的只是天才的乖僻缺點。世人原諒瓦格涅的疏狂，可是他們不會原諒我。)<sup>60</sup>

The earlier part of the essay develops in a humorous and self-mocking tone along the dichotomy of “strangeness” in contrast to “genius.” While Zhang manages to recite poetry and create short stories as early as the age of three and seven, she is “astonishingly stupid” in socializing. The later part brings a shift in mood, and ends with a striking metaphor:

There is a part in the art of life that I do not fail to appreciate. I know how to appreciate the drama “July Cloud,” the Scottish soldiers’ bagpipe, and the neon lights on rainy days. I enjoy sitting in a bamboo chair in the breeze, eating salty peanuts. Riding on a double-decker bus, I like to stretch out my hand and reach for the green leaves on the treetops. I am filled with the joy of life in circumstances without human interaction. However, as long as I fail to overcome these gnawing problems, life is a resplendent robe covered with bugs.

(生活的藝術，有一部份我不是不能領略。我懂得怎麼看《七月巧雲》，聽蘇格蘭兵吹 bagpipe，享受微風中的藤椅，吃水鹽花生，欣賞雨夜的霓紅燈，從雙層公共汽車上伸出手摘樹頭的綠葉。在沒有人

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 277.

與人交接的場合，我充滿了生命的歡悅。可是我一天不能克服這種要嘴性的小煩惱，生命是一襲華美的袍，爬滿了蚤子。) <sup>61</sup>

Epigrammatic endings and sudden shifts in tone are two of the major features in Zhang's essays. To Zhang, life is enjoyable and lovable despite all its disappointments and compromises. The use of the imagery of a resplendent robe covered with bugs conveys a kind of decadent beauty and restrained sorrow that show the sensitivity and unique perspective of a precocious nineteen-year-old woman. Free of the superficial sentimentalism of her previous essays, "My Dream of Genius" shows its complexity with a sadness hidden under the light-hearted tone. While its restrained sadness comes from her inborn sensitivity and personal experiences, its witty humor shows the influence of Lin Yutang's "familiar essays" (xiao pinwen 小品文), and that of the "Western magazine essay" (西洋雜誌文) advocated by *The West Wind Monthly*.

It is notable that "My Dream of Genius" was written for the sake of an essay competition with the topic "My --", organized by *The West Wind Monthly* for the celebration of its third anniversary. As indicated by its motto, "Translate the essence of Western magazines, and introduce European and American life and society" (譯述西洋雜誌精華，介紹歐美人生社會), <sup>62</sup> *The West Wind Monthly* aimed to introduce Western culture and scientific knowledge through the translation of essays from

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> This slogan is printed beside the journal title in every issue. The editors and publishers of *The west wind monthly* are Huang Jiade (黃嘉德) and Huang Jiayin (黃嘉音).

magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *New York Times*, *Scientific American*, *Forum*, etc.<sup>63</sup>. Advocating the "Western magazine essay," which approximates Lin's familiar essays in style,<sup>64</sup> *The West Wind Monthly* organized periodic essay competitions, in order to encourage humorous and leisurely creative writings.

The fact that "My Dream of Genius" came thirteenth in this competition did not bring Zhang great excitement, despite her wish to become a famous writer. When republishing "My Dream of Genius" in *Zhang's Outlook* (Zhangkan 張看) in 1976, Zhang added an epilogue explaining that this "early work" was densely abridged so as to meet the word limit of the essay competition. However, the winning essay turned out to be twice the length of her own.<sup>65</sup> Although she notes that she mentioned this episode only because it "affected her essay's content and credibility,"<sup>66</sup> she had every reason to be discontented with this result, as the winning essay was no match for hers with regard to artistry.<sup>67</sup>

By the time "My Dream of Genius" was first published in *The West Wind Monthly* in September, 1940, Zhang had already been studying at Hong Kong University. Hoping to further her studies abroad, she gave up writing and concentrated on her school work.

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<sup>63</sup> *The west wind monthly*, 35 (Jan 1941): 501-506, 507-509, 518-520. Ibid., 61 (Sept. 1941): 33-36. Important writers contributing to *The west wind monthly* include Xuxu (徐許), and Lin Yutang.

<sup>64</sup> The fact that Lin was the advisory editor for *The west wind monthly* explains this affinity. *The west wind monthly* can be regarded as a subsidiary publication of Lin's publishing ventures devoted to the familiar essay.

<sup>65</sup> Epilogue to "My dream of genius" (fuji 附記), *Zhang's outlook*, 280.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Zhang Ailing, "Remembering *West wind*" (Yi Xifeng 憶西風), *Zhongguo shibao* (中國時報), 3 Dec. 1994.

With Hong Kong's fall to the Japanese, she returned to Shanghai and entered St. John University. Due to financial difficulties, she discontinued her studies and started to contribute cultural and film reviews to the English magazine *The Twentieth Century*. This began a new phase in her creative career.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Albums*, 56.

## Chapter Four: Cultural Critiques and Film Reviews

Zhang Ailing's contribution to the English language magazine *The Twentieth Century* marked the beginning of her literary career. Founded in October, 1941, *The Twentieth Century* was a magazine directed at the Westerners living in the Shanghai International Settlements, and featured detailed analysis of the war situation. Its editor, Dr. Klaus Mehnert, a German born in Moscow, was a history professor at the University of California (Berkeley) and at the University of Hawaii before founding this magazine.<sup>1</sup> Besides political analysis, *The Twentieth Century* also featured cultural and art criticism, translations of short stories from around the world, modern scientific research, and book and film reviews.

From January to December 1943, Zhang published three cultural critiques and six film reviews in *The Twentieth Century*. The three cultural critiques, "Chinese Life and Fashions," "Still Alive," and "Demons and Fairies,"<sup>2</sup> were later rewritten in Chinese as "The Change of Fashion" (Gengyi ji 更衣記),<sup>3</sup> "Westerners Watching Peking Operas and Other Issues" (Yangren kan jingxi ji qita 洋人看京戲及其他),<sup>4</sup> and "The Religion of the Chinese" (Zhongguoren de zongjiao 中國人的宗教) respectively.<sup>5</sup> The six film

<sup>1</sup> Zheng Shusen (鄭樹森 William Tay) ed., *The world of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing di Shijie 張愛玲的世界), Taipei: Yuncheng chubanshe, 1989, 3rd edition, 42.

<sup>2</sup> "Chinese life and fashions," *The twentieth century* 4, no. 1 (Jan 1943): 54-61. "Still alive," *The twentieth century* 4, no. 6 (Jun. 1943): 432-438. "Demons and fairies," *The twentieth century* 5, no. 6 (Dec. 1943): 421-429.

<sup>3</sup> *Gossip*, 65-74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-109.

<sup>5</sup> *Lingering rhymes*, 19-44.

reviews she wrote for the “On the Screen” column are “Wife, Vamp, Child,”<sup>6</sup> “The Opium War,”<sup>7</sup> “‘Song of Autumn’ and ‘Clouds over the Moon,’”<sup>8</sup> “Mothers and Daughters-in-law,”<sup>9</sup> “‘On with the Show’ and ‘The Call of Spring,’”<sup>10</sup> and “Educating the Family.”<sup>11</sup> Only the first and the last of these were rewritten in Chinese as “Borrowing the Silver Spot-light” (Jie yindeng 借銀燈) and “Attending a Film School” (Yingong jiuxueji 銀宮就學記).<sup>12</sup>

These cultural critiques and film reviews published in *The Twentieth Century* can be described as “Zhang’s Outlook on the Chinese,” since China, especially the characteristics of the Chinese, is the common concern of all these works.<sup>13</sup> As noted by Mehnert, the main feature of Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews is the curiosity they show: the curiosity to look at China and the Chinese from the perspective of an outsider -- “It is her deep curiosity about her own people that enables her to interpret the Chinese to the foreigners.”<sup>14</sup> It is because of this curiosity that her works bear a lively and

<sup>6</sup> *The twentieth century*, 4, no. 5 (May 1943): 392.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, no. 6 (Jun. 1943): 464.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, no. 1 (July. 1943): 75-76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, no. 2/3 (Aug./Sept. 1943): 202.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1943): 278.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, no. 5 (Nov. 1943): 358.

<sup>12</sup> *Gossip*, 88-91, 95-99. “Mothers and daughters-in-law” and “The opium war” are translated by Chen Binliang (陳炳良) into Chinese as “Poxi zhijian” (婆媳之間) and “Yapian zhanzheng” (鴉片戰爭), “‘Song of autumn’ and ‘Cloud over the moon’” and “‘On with the show’ and ‘The call of spring’” by Lin Shuyi (林淑懿) into “Qiuge he wuyun gai yue” (秋歌和烏雲蓋月) and “Wanzi qianhong he yanyingchun” (萬紫千紅和燕迎春). *Unitas* (Lianhe wenxue 聯合文學) 29 (March 1988): 46-47, 48-49, 50-51 & 52-53.

<sup>13</sup> Zheng Shusen ed., *The world of Zhang Ailing*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Klaus Mehnert, Introduction to “Still alive”, *The twentieth century* 4, no. 6 (Jun. 1943): 432.

humorous style, which emphasizes understanding instead of criticism.<sup>15</sup> Stylistically, her cultural critiques and film reviews are greatly influenced by the “Western magazine style” advocated by *The West Wind Monthly*; however, instead of introducing Western society and lifestyles to the Chinese, she was trying to introduce Chinese culture to Westerners. This Chapter will analyze Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews in terms of their content and style, with a special emphasis placed on their significance in relation to Zhang’s subsequent creative writings.

## **The Concern for modern China**

### **China in an changing era**

One of the major concerns in Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews is China in a changing era. In “Chinese Life and Fashion,” Zhang presents an insightful socio-political comment on modern China by considering fashion as a sign of the times.<sup>16</sup> This article traces the development of fashion from Late Qing to the early Republic (1850-1940s), taking fashion as a reflection of the psychology of the Chinese in responding to various social and political changes. In an introduction to this article, which marks Zhang’s first appearance in *The Twentieth Century*, Mehnert acclaims Zhang as a

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<sup>15</sup> Yu Bin holds the same view in his *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 71-72.

<sup>16</sup> “Chinese life and fashions,” 57.

“promising talent,” who offers “more than just an essay on fashions,” but rather “an amusing psychoanalysis of modern China.”<sup>17</sup>

Considering the late Qing as “an age of extremes” subjected to both the sweeping condemnation of traditional Chinese culture by a youthful intelligentsia, and the increased repression from the old and sedate, Zhang makes an interesting comment on the tall, stiff “Sycee collar” which reaches up to the nose: “The atmosphere of emotional excess, unprecedented in the history of a land of moderation and good sense, produced such a thing as the ‘Sycee collar’ . . . the top-heavy, unbalanced effect was one of the signs of the times.”<sup>18</sup> On late Qing coiffures for women, which were marked by a thick fringe cut in the shape of a pointed arch, Zhang says: “the encased feeling typified the suppressed, unhappy atmosphere of the age,” giving the features underneath a melancholy downward slant.”<sup>19</sup>

The early twentieth century was a critical moment for China. With the Qing dynasty overthrown, there followed a period of unrest. Intellectuals of the early Republic thought to save the country through the introduction of Western culture and science, leading to an iconoclastic rejection of traditional Chinese values. Early May Fourth

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<sup>17</sup> “[T]he following pages contain more than just an essay on fashions. Indeed, they offer an amusing psychoanalysis of modern China. This is the author’s first appearance in our magazine. It is a pleasure to present to our readers such promising young talent as represented by Miss Chang, who wields the pen so well that she has produced not only this charming article but also its expressive illustrations.” Klaus Mehnert, Introduction to “Chinese life and fashions,” 54.

<sup>18</sup> “Chinese life and fashion,” 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

literature saw the emancipation of the individual, and subsequently, his or her romantic self-aggrandizement as patriotic “heroes.” Observing this phenomenon, Zhang comments:

In pre-Revolution costumes, the individual was wholly submerged in the form -- the form being a subjective representation of the human figure, conventionalized as always in Oriental art, dictated by a sense of line, rather than faithfulness to the original. Post-Revolution clothes slowly worked towards the opposite direction -- the subjugation of form by the figure.<sup>20</sup>

To Zhang, the early Republic was “a period of superficial enlightenment” and “affected naïveté,” “a time when Rousseauistic sentiments were taken very seriously.”<sup>21</sup> In Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews, one finds her expressing not for the only time her worries about the indiscriminate importation of foreign fashion and culture. While ladies considered spectacles as a sign of modernity and wore them solely for ornament, the young intelligentsia accepted foreign romances in an uncritical manner.<sup>22</sup> In her film reviews of “‘Song of Autumn’ and ‘Cloud over the Moon,’” Zhang makes the following comment:

With the renunciation of all traditions at the turn of the century, the Chinese were . . . [i]ntoxicated with the new realism . . . The average Chinese denies a story depth and significance unless it is a tragedy or a satire.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. “‘On with the show’ and ‘The call of spring,’” 278.

<sup>23</sup> “‘Song of autumn’ and ‘Cloud over the moon,’” 75.

The problem is aggravated by the average Chinese's failure to appreciate the essence of Western culture. On the one hand, there is the uncritical adoption of things foreign; on the other, there is the failure to understand their underlying spirit. In the review of "On with the Show," Zhang says: "In Chinese eyes, the Tadarauzka dances are expressive only of the splendor of youth, health and intelligent discipline . . . the fascination of ballet lies chiefly in its difficulty." Despite its "promises of sophisticated sensuality," "On with the Show" proves to be a "curiously naive" film. Instead of introducing American culture to the audience, the whole production does little but "feed the eyes with ice cream and seat the heart in a sofa."<sup>24</sup> The audience merely delights in the film's infantile jokes, and complains about the showing of the actress's famous leg only once.<sup>25</sup> Zhang points out this problem of superficiality, not without anxiety:

It is appalling to reflect that, in the imagination of young Chinese intellectuals nurtured on a quarter of a century of foreign films and fiction, there is so little room for anything really Chinese. The transformation has already gone past the stage of "fundamentally Chinese, functionally Western," the slogan invented at the beginning of this process of Westernization.<sup>26</sup>

Commenting on the influence of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Zhang says, "[A]s in everything else learned from the West, the Chinese are more impressed by the bleak beauty of Nora's gesture than by the underlying thought."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "'On with the show' and 'The call of spring,'" 278.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

In "Chinese Life and Fashion," she goes on to question whether the indiscriminate importation of foreign fashion and swift changes in style signify mental flexibility and readiness to adopt new ideas. She puts forth her view that, quite to the contrary, this phenomenon shows "frustration in other fields, so that all the intellectual and artistic energy is forced to flow into the channel of clothes." She says:

In an age of political disorder, people were powerless to modify existing conditions closer to their ideal. All they could do was to create their own atmosphere, with clothes, which constitute for most men and women their immediate environments.<sup>28</sup>

"Disillusioned" and "cynical" are the two adjectives Zhang uses to describe the twenties and the thirties. With the failure of early Republican idealism and escapism in the face of repeated national disasters, the curt, long gown prevailed in the "disillusioned late '20s."<sup>29</sup> To Zhang, the thirties are "a period of intellectual vigor despite its bigotry, its touchiness, and its tiresome grandiloquence."<sup>30</sup> She considers the revived tall, tubular collar as an "expression of the intellectual sensuality of the '30s -- an upright, remote little head, the head of a goddess, perched on top of a voluptuous, free-flowing figure. What sensuality there was, was reasoned and deliberate."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Chinese life and fashion," 60.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> "China: educating the family," 358.

<sup>31</sup> "Chinese life and fashion," 59.

Although it is not difficult to detect Zhang's anti-romantic attitude and her hidden worries about the "affected naïveté" of "the infancy of the Republic,"<sup>32</sup> she is by no means without hope for the future of China. Considering the return of sleeves as marking the turn of the tide towards a new formalization, i.e., the submergence of the individual in clothes; Zhang comments in a calm and forward-looking manner: "China is standing at the threshold of life, more grim and practical this time, surer of her own mind because of the lessons she has learnt."<sup>33</sup> In her review of "The Opium War," Zhang praises the film for its sincerity in approaching the painful subject of opium smoking, and expresses her gladness about the fact that China in the forties, "with her more mature self-consciousness, is no longer anxious to keep her shame in the dark."<sup>34</sup>

### **Chinese characteristics**

Zhang's cultural critiques and film reviews provide an insightful analysis of Chinese characteristics, especially in regard to the Chinese people's ties to the past, and their belief in the importance of the crowd instead of the individual.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>34</sup> "The opium war" 464.

### Tradition and modernity

In "Still Alive," an essay concerning Peking Opera, she reveals Chinese deep-rooted ties to the past. Focusing on the question: "Why is the Peking Opera so deep-rooted and universally favored in the Chinese entertainment world, although its artistic supremacy is far from undisputed?"<sup>35</sup> Zhang provides an insightful analysis of the "romantic escape" of the Chinese into an "imaginary past" and touches upon the problem of tradition versus modernity in China.

Zhang considers the relation of the Peking Opera to the present world to be one "in the nature of a quotation," quotation in the sense of "the tissues of a living past."<sup>36</sup> She says, "Perhaps nowhere else in the world does the past play so active a role in common everyday life -- the past in the sense of elucidated experience, communal memories analyzed by the historical viewpoint."<sup>37</sup> Despite the fact that the world of the Peking Opera bears scant resemblance to the actual Chinese world at any given historical stage, it manages to provide the public with a "romantic escape" into the past, since "the public has at the back of its mind the impression that the Peking Opera world, with its tidy ethics, its beauty and finish, is a faithful representation of the old order."<sup>38</sup>

Zhang shows great concern about the problem of tradition and modernity: how the Chinese are tied to their tradition, and how they react in the face of the influx of Western concepts and culture. In "Chinese Life and Fashion," Zhang makes fun of the Chinese

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<sup>35</sup> "Still alive," 432.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

dilemma: being caught between zeal for total Westernization and ties to the past. She does this through an account of the simultaneous disappearance of the “hat equilibrium,”<sup>39</sup> and the traditional emphasis on balance:

Republican zealots found the hallowed principle of the golden mean to have a retarding influence on the great amount of destructive and constructive work to be done in the new state. It is noticeable that in China even a passionate renunciation was delivered with tact. The jewels on women’s hats dropped off one at a time, so as to avoid an abrupt break with the past.<sup>40</sup>

Among the problems arising from preserving ties to the past and wishing to accept Western concepts, those concerning the changes in the relationship between the sexes are given an especially humorous treatment in Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews. In “Wife, Vamp, Child,” she raises the question of “whether the wife of a philanderer has the right to be unfaithful,” and touches on the subject of wifely virtues, “particularly that of being able to remain cheerfully monogamous with a polygamous husband.”<sup>41</sup> In “Educating the Family,” she calls attention to the fact that although modern Chinese men accept that women should be educated, they nonetheless prefer to educate them themselves, and for themselves.<sup>42</sup> In “Chinese Life and Fashion,” she makes fun of the way Chinese women wore the imported military-looking belted coat in the thirties:

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<sup>39</sup> The “hat equilibrium” is the jewel ornament on a lady’s hat. The jewels, numbering as many as five, were originally placed in the very center of the brow. “Chinese life and fashion,” 59.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Wife, vamp, child,” 392.

<sup>42</sup> “China: educating the family,” 358.

Was it the Oriental sense of moderation which softened it by wearing underneath a floor-length gown of sleek velveteen . . . A strange combination it was, symbolic of the educated women of the day, aggressive feminists in theory but rapaciously materialistic when it came to the point.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Individual and the crowd**

Besides ties to tradition, Zhang also calls attention to the power of the crowd in Chinese life, which leads to a lack of privacy: "There is no getting away from on-lookers in China . . . the most imitate feelings have to be defensively, satisfactorily explained for the benefit of the ever-present crowd."<sup>44</sup> There is also little "genuine eccentricity," because "in segregating from one crowd, one merely joins another."<sup>45</sup> With the Chinese "habit of quoting," "the psychological mechanism is trained to work in such a way as to make it impossible for one who is drawn by one idea to extricate himself from the entire devouring system which dictates the life of a certain crowd."<sup>46</sup> It is this "method of conventionalization" that enables the Peking Opera to call up associations to a "more lucid, comprehensible reality," by systematized physical and vocal expressions.<sup>47</sup>

Ties to tradition, together with the power of the crowd, result in a lack of respect for originality, and the interest in "Man" in the abstract instead of the individual. In "Still

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<sup>43</sup> "Chinese life and fashions," 61.

<sup>44</sup> "Still alive," 434.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 433-434.

Alive,” Zhang points out that “Peking Operas are curiously free of the slightest mark of individual creative genius.” Because, in China, “[p]ersonal success is judged by the degree in which the individual is submerged in the traditional form . . . , the artist spends his originality on the effort to overcome those qualities in him which may be excellent but which hinder a perfect fit into the form.”<sup>48</sup> In Peking Opera, the only subject matter is Man: Man instead of the individual, Man in his different moods and capacities. Zhang says, “The Chinese are more interested in the ordinary man than in his aspirations.”<sup>49</sup> Preferring modest and unassuming descendants to extravagantly moral ones, the Chinese view the morals in Peking Opera, which are supposed to be out-dated, merely as “the Sunday clothes in their psychological wardrobe,” and hence not discouraging to their devotion to Chinese operas, their favorite pastime.<sup>50</sup>

### **The Style of Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews**

Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews are presented in a lively, and easily understandable way. Her cultural critiques show a witty and humorous style. Commenting on the cultural critiques, Mehnert acclaims her wielding of the pen in “whimsical meanderings.”<sup>51</sup> In “Chinese Life and Fashion,” it is not difficult to find the following amusing expressions:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>51</sup> Klaus Mehnert, Introduction to “Chinese life and fashion,” 54. Introduction to “Demons and fairies,” 421.

New China was in a state of unrest. Warlords came and went, each trailing his own cloud of employees, civil government bodies, measures of reform; and Fashion tripped behind on its light, fantastic toes, trying to catch up.<sup>52</sup>

The protective instinct, always strong in men, was perhaps stimulated by the hard times, which saw the death of the old order and the birth of the new. Women, formerly staid and self-possessed in their wide garments, now found it to their advantage to act the “damsel in distress.”<sup>53</sup>

Zhang also shows her witty humor in the subtitles of her articles, such as “Rules for Fur,” “Damsels in Distress,” and “Profusion and Confusion,” just to name three examples that show skillful use of alliteration and rhyme.

A comparison of the style of her cultural critiques and film reviews shows that the former tend to be humorous, while the latter tend towards sarcasm. In her review of “The Fisher-Girl,” she satirically comments that “the creator of the fanciful fisher-girl has presumably never seen a fish swimming except in a goldfish bowl.”<sup>54</sup> The sarcastic and biting style of her film reviews is closely related to her serious attitude as a critic. In her film reviews, Zhang is knowledgeable and skeptical. She shows appreciation for the sincerity of “The Opium War” in attempting to deal with the sensitive topic of opium smoking,<sup>55</sup> and for the “rare sweetness of style and remarkable incidental touches which

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<sup>52</sup> “Chinese life and fashion,” 59-60

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>54</sup> “China: educating the family,” 358.

<sup>55</sup> “The Opium war,” 464.

throw light on the Chinese nature” in “The Fisher-Girl.”<sup>56</sup> However, she is also quick to spot ideological and cultural problems in other films, such as the young intelligentsia’s “unanalytical acceptance of foreign romances” in “The Call of Spring,” and their going to extremes in rebellion against the family system in “Mother.”<sup>57</sup>

Zhang is exceptionally harsh concerning films that aim high but reach low, and those that advertise themselves as pointing the way for the audience, but in fact do nothing but please them with vulgar gimmicks for box-office results. Her tone in “‘On with the Show’ and ‘The Call of Spring’” is acrimonious and stinging: “‘On with the Show’ is a success with the public in spite of its banal situation, its structural weakness, and its apparent clash of adult and infantile interests.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Significance of Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews**

Zhang’s cultural critiques and film reviews can be considered as a footnote to her subsequent works, including her short stories, essays, and screenplays. From her cultural critiques and film reviews, one can easily discern Zhang’s anti-romantic attitude towards the idealism of the Early Republic and the romantic tradition of the May Fourth Era. Her short stories can be considered as a concrete elaboration of these viewpoints. In “Still Alive,” she feels sorry for the lack of privacy among the Chinese. Under the surveillance

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<sup>56</sup> “China: educating the family,” 358.

<sup>57</sup> “The call of spring,” 278. “Daughters and mothers-in-law,” 202.

<sup>58</sup> “‘On with the show’ and ‘The call of spring,’” 278.

of the “everlasting crowd,” there are no “lonely places in the heart.”<sup>59</sup> Her efforts to delve deep into the psychology of her fictional character reveal her concern with the individual, which is ignored or disproportionately expanded, in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary China. However, to Zhang “individual” does not necessarily mean “hero” or “superman.” Instead, she shows her anti-romantic viewpoint through writing about the petty passions of the ordinary person.

The elimination of scenery in Peking Opera also finds an echo in her short stories, which strive after universality by emphasizing basic human nature instead of a concrete social background. In “Still Alive,” Zhang comments:

This thoroughgoing generalization eliminates scenery, because the historical background is unimportant. In whatever time or clime, the lover would be a lover, the fighter a fighter.<sup>60</sup>

As previously discussed, Zhang holds that environment has little influence on human nature.<sup>61</sup> People’s stupidity, vanity, and escapist psychology always follow them, whatever the social circumstances.

Although there are moments when Zhang gently mocks the helpless characters in her short stories, her attitude is always an understanding and sympathetic one. Similarly, in “Still Alive,” despite her sadness and disappointment over the Chinese romantic escape

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<sup>59</sup> “Still alive,” 434.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>61</sup> Refer to Chapter Two “Wartime Impressions.”

into the “tidy ethics,” “beauty,” and “finish” of the world of the Peking Opera,<sup>62</sup> she nevertheless comments: Peking Opera, with its crude thoroughness, its simplification of complicated feelings into well-established formulas, comes near to the dramas of many infantile civilizations. The secret of eternal youth lies exactly in this love for childlike vigor and primitiveness. Conventionalization and simplification are gratifying, as they leave the feelings stronger, with the weight of centuries of experience behind. It is always pleasant to fall in with an old tradition, to be harmonious with the communal habit that makes up a great part of one’s surroundings.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to prefiguring her short stories, the views expressed in her cultural critiques and film reviews hint at the direction taken by her subsequent screenplays. In “‘Song of Autumn’ and ‘Cloud over the Moon,’” Zhang mentions that the Chinese audience, intoxicated with Western realism, denies a story depth and significance unless it is a tragedy. Moreover, Chinese films are “generally preoccupied with the melodramatic stations of riches and rags,” whereas the life of the middle-class is hardly explored.<sup>64</sup> It is not therefore surprising that in subsequent years, Zhang wrote a number of comedy scripts, most of them dealing with middle-class life. This shows both her desire to fill in the missing blanks in film history, as well as her courage in going against

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<sup>62</sup> “Still alive,” 433. In “Embers,” she also says: “Neatly formulated worldviews, whether political or philosophical, cannot but arouse dislike.” (清堅決絕的宇宙觀，不論是政治上還是哲學上的，總未免使人嫌煩。) “Embers,” 42.

<sup>63</sup> Paraphased from “Still alive,” 434-435, 438.

<sup>64</sup> “‘Song of autumn’ and ‘Cloud over the moon,’” 76.

popular trends. As I shall discuss later, this is a feature also found in other genres of her creative writings.

Furthermore, there is a clear linkage in style between her cultural critiques and her subsequent essays. The erudite style of her essays, such as “On Painting” (Tan hua 談畫) and “On music” (Tan yinyue 談音樂), which are able to draw on numerous examples from both East and West, can be considered as a development from her cultural critiques, which always take a perspective of cultural comparison. Zhang’s cultural critiques can be considered as a prologue to her Chinese essays in the sense that the latter derive their style mainly from the former.

There is a clear development in Zhang’s three cultural critiques. While the first one, “Chinese Life and Fashion,” is written in an ornate and amusing style, the second one, “Still Alive,” presents the reader with a solid, sophisticated, and in-depth cultural analysis. The third one, “Demons and Fairies,” tends to be even more direct and informative. These changes can be explained by the fact that Zhang had already started writing Chinese essays and had translated her first two cultural critiques into Chinese before she wrote the third one in English. As Zhang consciously “transferred” the lively, witty style in her cultural critiques to her later Chinese essays, her cultural critiques gradually took up a more informative style. To Zhang, it is the Chinese, especially Shanghai people, whom she views as her ideal readers. If she was interested in introducing China and the Chinese to foreigners, she was keen to write for her fellow

countrymen. In November, 1943, a month before she stopped contributing to *The Twentieth Century*, she started publishing essays in Chinese.

It is also interesting to point out that the views Zhang expressed in her cultural critiques and film reviews can also be related to her personal life. Right after Zhang started her publication of Chinese essays and short stories, she enjoyed immediate fame and wide popularity. At that time, Zhang was famous not only for her works, but also for the way she dressed, which shows once again her courage in defying social pressures. In “Chinese Life and Fashion,” she states that in China, it is commonly accepted that “women should not attract too much attention . . . no mention need to be made of those who attract attention through a disturbing deviation from the accepted mode of attire.”<sup>65</sup> However, Zhang was famous for dressing in a dazzling way in the forties. Pan Liudai (潘柳黛), a friend who later broke with Zhang, describes this in “On Zhang Ailing” (Ji Zhang Ailing 記張愛玲): Sometimes, she would dress herself as an eighteenth-century Western lady, and sometimes, in a gown of the Qing dynasty, looking just like a grandmother.<sup>66</sup> In *Albums*, Zhang explained in reminiscence her craziness for clothes as her desire to make up for the days in which she had been forced to dress in her step-mother’s old clothes.<sup>67</sup> For Zhang, “we live in our clothes,” and clothes are one’s closest environment.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps in a period of social unrest, as in China under the Japanese

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<sup>65</sup> “Chinese life and fashions,” 54-55.

<sup>66</sup> Pan Liuda, “On Zhang Ailing” (Ji Zhang Ailing 記張愛玲), *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing, 65-66.

<sup>67</sup> *Albums*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> “Chinese life and fashions,” 60.

occupation, what one can control is merely one's style of dressing and writing. I shall discuss the prominently personal style of Zhang's mature short stories and essays in the following chapters.

## Chapter Five: Short Stories

In May 1943, Zhang published her “Aloeswood Ashes: the First Burning” and “Aloeswood Ashes: the Second Burning” in the monthly magazine *Violet* (Zi Luolan 紫羅蘭), and immediately gained wide popularity in Shanghai literary circles. Zhou Shoujuan (周瘦鷗), the editor of *Violet*, once commented that her two “Aloeswood” stories were reminiscent of Somerset Maugham’s stories and of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. This comment pinpoints an important feature in Zhang’s works: her appropriation of both the Chinese and Western literary heritage.

The achievement of Zhang’s short stories lies in her subtle combination of traditional Chinese and Western elements. C. T. Hsia, in his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, comments that, while “deeply indebted to Freud and Western novelists for the psychological sophistication and metaphorical enrichment of her stories,” Zhang is “even more of a dedicated student of traditional Chinese fiction” in her observation of manners.<sup>1</sup> In his study of wartime literature, *Unwelcome Muse*, Edward Gunn notes that the major feature of Zhang’s short stories is their distrust of modern civilization, and their anti-romantic stance, as opposed to the May Fourth optimistic romanticism.<sup>2</sup> A link

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<sup>1</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 396-397.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Lee compares the May Fourth Literary Revolution in Twentieth-century China with the Romantic Movement in Nineteenth-century Europe. He holds that both movements “represented a reaction against the classic tradition of order, reason, schematization, ritualization, and structuring of life. Both ushered in a new emphasis on sincerity, spontaneity, passion, imagination, and the release of individual energies -- in short, the primacy of subjective human

between Zhang and the disillusioned British literature after the First World War can be established through a comparison of Maugham's works on British expatriates in the Far East and Zhang's two "Aloeswood Ashes" tales.<sup>3</sup>

Based on Hsia's and Gunn's findings, I shall argue that Zhang's short stories are the first, or at least the first mature manifestation of Modernist literature in China. Re-reading Zhang's short stories from this point of view, this chapter concentrates on her modernistic vision and subtle combination of traditional and Western elements. I shall also attempt to position Zhang's short stories historically, both in opposition to her immediate predecessors -- the May Fourth romantic writers and the New Perceptionists (Xin ganjue pai 新感覺派) -- and in relation to her contemporaries, the leisurely Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school, and the wartime resistance literature.

### **A modernist interpretation**

Although it is widely agreed that Zhang's short stories can be regarded as the pioneer Modernist works in China, there has not been scholarly consensus on this point, and an in-depth discussion of the topic still remains to be done.<sup>4</sup> Such a claim encounters

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sentiments and energies." Leo Lee, *The romantic generation of modern Chinese writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, 292.

<sup>3</sup> Gunn, *Unwelcome muse*, 200.

<sup>4</sup> Gunn establishes a link between Zhang and the modern British literature after the Second World War. However, there is no identification of Zhang as a modernist writer. As well, Zhang is not mentioned in Yvonne Chang's study on Taiwan Modernism, *Modernism and the nativist resistance: contemporary Chinese fiction from Taiwan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. However, Zhang is considered a modernist writer in several Chinese articles, such as Leo Lee,

the difficulty of defining the term “Modernism.” Since “Modernism” is a Western concept used to identify “what are considered to be distinctive features in the concepts, sensibility, form, and style of literature and art since World War One,” implying “a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases both of Western culture and of Western art,”<sup>5</sup> one may question the pertinence of applying it to the discussion of modern Chinese literature. However, taking Modernism as a worldwide movement in literature and art, which spread from the West to the East, I consider a re-reading of this kind capable of shedding light on the development of modern Chinese literature.

Before turning to the discussion of Zhang’s short stories, I shall outline the main features of “Modernism” as follows: First, Modernism is marked by a conscious revolt against traditional literary forms and subjects, implying a sense of alienation, loss and despair.<sup>6</sup> As the modernists’ faith in civilization and culture was crushed by the First World War, they were driven by an existential compulsion to create new art forms, both to combat mundane society, and to define their own sense of self and their existence. Turning their attention inward towards subjective experience rather than the objective world, modernists elevated the individual and the unconscious over the social and the

“Time rushes by, greater destruction is still to come: Zhang Ailing, decadence and fin-de-siècle” (Shidai shi cangsudi, gengdadi pohuai zhang daolai: Zhang Ailing, tuifei yu mou shiji 時代是倉促的，更大的破壞將到來 -- 張愛玲、頹廢與世紀末), *Ming pao monthly* 29, no. 1 (Jan 1994): 22-24; & Jiang Xianghua (蔣翔華), “Modernistic techniques in Zhang Ailing’s short stories: an attempted analysis on space” (Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo zhong de xiandai shoufa: shixi kongjian 張愛玲小說中的現代手法 -- 試析空間) *Unitas* 10, no. 7 (May 1994): 149-155.

<sup>5</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A glossary of literary terms*, Orlando: Holt Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1985, 5th edition, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Abrams, *A glossary of literary terms*, 109. C., Hugh Holman & William Harmon, *A handbook to literature*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992, 6th edition, 198.

self-conscious. Although by no means all modern writers should be termed philosophical existentialists, existentialism has created a schema within which much of the modernist temper can see a reflection of its attitudes and assumptions.<sup>7</sup>

Second, Modernism can be considered as a reaction against Romanticism. One of the qualities that distinguishes Modernism from Romanticism is a generally more pessimistic, even tragic, view of the modern world, a world seen as fragmented and decayed, in which human communication is difficult. In general, modernists are more suspicious of contemporary science and technology.<sup>8</sup> However, as opposed to post-modernists, modernists believe that there exists a unified, though complex, underlying reality, and they take on multiple perspectivism as their epistemology for revealing its true nature.<sup>9</sup>

Third, Modernism is marked by its relation to the concept of the avant-garde. By violating accepted artistic conventions, modernist writers create ever-new forms and styles, and introduce neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subjects. Innovative modes of narration include subversion of the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up narrative continuity, departure from the standard ways of representing character, and

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<sup>7</sup> Holman & Harmon, *A handbook to literature*, 298.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *A concise glossary of contemporary literary theory*, London: Edward Arnold, 1994, 2nd edition, 120-122.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

violation of traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

Zhang's short stories, with their anti-romantic themes and their search for new narrative forms through the assimilation of Western and traditional Chinese literary heritages, can be considered as pioneering works of Modernism in China. Her experience of the Second World War, as discussed in Chapter Two, provides the background for her illusionary vision towards civilization, just as their experience of the First World War did for the British Modernists. In the following, I shall analyze her short stories from the perspective of their modernistic vision, and their search for a new style in short story writing.

### **Modernist vision**

#### **The reaction against romanticism**

Zhang's short stories are always related to the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school through one theme which they have in common -- love. Zhang's short stories are mainly about courtship, flirtation, or love-affairs. A devotee of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies stories, Zhang nevertheless manages to develop her own style by breaking away from their sentimentality and stereotyped formulas. While the Butterflies stories

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<sup>10</sup> Abrams, *A glossary of literary terms*, 109. For the backgrounds of modern Western literature, see also Richard Ellmann & Charles Feidelson, ed., *The modern tradition: backgrounds of modern literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

simply follow what Perry Link terms the “romantic route,” one which portrays young lovers continually trapped in hopeless predicaments by social custom, fate or treachery, a situation leading to worry, pain, remorse, sickness and death,<sup>11</sup> Zhang’s works provide a strikingly anti-romantic vision of human nature.

It is Zhang’s belief that people are more genuine when they are in love, as their souls are unprotected by their usual vanity and desire. In her view, passion is transient. Most people are incapable of true love, as the sheer weight of selfishness, stupidity and vanity lying within the human heart simply precludes the possibility of prolonged flights of sublimity. Her characters are by no means heroes or heroines. Instead, they are “the great mass of burden-carriers of the age,” weak, fallible, and in Zhang’s own words, “incomplete.”<sup>12</sup>

It should be noted that by the 1930s, realist fiction centered around character-portrayal had already become the orthodox style in the Chinese literary scene. Engel’s notion of “typical circumstances and typical characters,” in particular, was the most influential theory of fiction at the time.<sup>13</sup> With the outbreak of the War of Resistance (1937-1945), depicting “the most typical incidents in heroic events” became the mainstream in fiction writing, since the majority of Chinese writers, with their idealism and historical optimism, strongly believed in literature as a weapon to arouse and inspire

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<sup>11</sup> Perry Link, *Mandarin ducks and butterflies: popular fiction in early twentieth-century Chinese cities*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> “Works of my own,” *Gossip*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Qian Liqun, “An overview of Chinese theories of fiction from the 1940s,” *Modern Chinese literature* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 59.

the spirit of the nation. Fearing that melancholy works might weaken the nation's will to resist, critics advocated the heroic style, which focused on manufacturing myths of victory through the dramatization of conflict.<sup>14</sup>

It is against this wartime romanticism influenced by the Marxist ideas of "socialist realism" that Zhang stands out as a unique figure. Focusing on ordinary incidents, and elevating subjective experiences above the objective "realist" world, Zhang's vision was certainly ahead of her time. Facing criticism that her works lacked scope, Zhang candidly stated her preference for desolation over heroism and tragedy:

I have noticed that those involved in literature often emphasize that which is active and exciting in human life and ignore that which is stable and calm.

Actually the latter is the foundation of the former . . . Even though this calm stability is often incomplete and must be broken every now and then, it is still eternal . . . I do not like heroism. I like tragedy, but I like desolation more.

Heroism has only strength but no beauty, as it lacks human nature. Tragedy is like the combination of true red and true green, a powerful contrast. Yet it is better at stimulating than inspiring. Desolation leaves an even longer aftertaste because like the green of scallions and the red of peaches it is an uneven contrast . . . I know people are anxious to find completion; otherwise, they seek stimulation, even if it is just to satisfy themselves. It seems they are impatient with mere revelation. Yet this is the only way I can write. I believe writing in this way is more genuine . . .

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

[T]he main theme of my work's sometimes isn't clear . . . It may be that the difference between modern literature and past literature lies right here: we no longer emphasize a main theme but allow the story to give what it can and the reader to take whatever is available.

(我發現弄文學的人向來是注重人生飛揚的一面，而忽視人生安穩的一面。其實，後者正是前者的底子……雖然這種安穩常是不安全的，而且每隔多少時候就要破壞一次，但仍然是永恆的……我不喜歡壯烈。我是喜歡悲壯，更喜歡蒼涼。壯烈只有力，沒有美，似乎缺少人性。悲壯則如大紅大綠的配色，是一種強烈的對照。但它的刺激性還是大於啓發性。蒼涼之所以有更深長的回味，就因為它像蔥綠配桃紅，是一種參差的對照……我知道人們急於完成，不然就要求刺激來滿足自己都好。他們對於僅僅是啓示，似乎不耐煩。但我還是只能這樣寫。我以為這樣寫是更真實的……我的作品有時候主題欠分明……現代文學作品和過去不同的地方，似乎也就在這一點上，不再那麼強調主題，卻是讓故事自身給它所能給的，而讓讀者取得他所能取得的。) <sup>15</sup>

Zhang's short stories exemplify these attitudes. Her "Youthful Years" (Nianqing de shihou 年輕的時候) is a story about the imaginary romance of an ordinary young man, Pan Ruliang (潘汝良). It is not difficult to discern in this work Zhang's skeptical attitude towards modern science, religion and romance. The character of Ruliang also

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<sup>15</sup> "Works of my own," 19-24. Translation by Wendy Larson, in *Modern Chinese literary thought: writings on literature 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, 436-440. I have made a few changes in Larson's translation.

suggests that of the romantic May Fourth literati (such as Yu Dafu 郁達夫), towards whom Zhang shows an ironical attitude.<sup>16</sup> Ruliang is a medical student who possesses the self-image of an aloof “loner” and a romantic, “literary” youth (caizi 才子). Vain and proud, he blindly worships foreign culture, and shows a great contempt for his family:

Ruliang was a good patriotic boy, but he did not have a good impression of the Chinese. The foreigners he knew were movie stars and handsome models who appeared in soap and cigarettes advertisements. The Chinese he knew were his parents, his brothers and sisters.

(汝良是個愛國的好孩子，可是他對於中國人沒有多少好感。他所認識的外國人是電影明星與香煙廣告俊俏大方的模特兒，他所認識的中國人是他父母兄弟姊妹。)<sup>17</sup>

Ruliang is discontented with his present reality because, contrary to his ideal, his father is an ordinary business man instead of somebody important, and his mother is a secular woman instead of conforming to the classical Chinese image of a loving mother. As a medical student, Ruliang shows great admiration for modern science and technology:

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<sup>16</sup> “Stale mates: a short story set in the time when love came to China,” written originally in English, is another example which shows Zhang’s satirical attitude towards the so-called romantic lovers of the May Fourth generation. First published in *The reporter* 15, no. 4 (Sept. 1956): 34-38. Zhang subsequently translated it into Chinese as “Incidents in the May Fourth era: the reunion of Luo Wentao and his three beauties” (Wusi yishi: Luo Wentao sanmei tuanyuan 五四遺事：羅文濤三美團圓). *Sequel* (Xuji 續集), Taipei: Huangguan, 1988, 255-273.

<sup>17</sup> “Youthful years,” *Collected short stories of Zhang Ailing* [Romances] (張愛玲小說集[傳奇]), referred to as *Romances* in subsequent references), Taipei: Huangguan, 1985, 444.

He studied medicine partly because the tools used by doctors are new and shiny. Taken out one by one from a leather bag, those cool metal tools are tiny and omnipotent. The electrotherapy machine is the greatest invention. The neat turning wheels sparkle out jazz music, light-hearted, bright, and healthy. Modern science is the only perfect, lovely thing in this good-for-nothing world. Once he put on that holy, dustless white gown, his father who drinks Chinese wine with deep-fried peanuts, his mother who listens to Shaoxing opera, his elder sisters who wear thick make-up, would no longer be able to go near him.

(他獻身於醫學，一半也是因為醫生的器械一概都是嶄新燦亮，一件一件從皮包裹拿出來，冰涼的金屬品，小巧的，全能的。最偉大的是那架電療機，飛出火星亂迸的爵士樂，輕快、明朗、健康。現代科學是這十不全的世界上唯一無可訾議的好東西。做醫生的穿上了那件潔無纖塵的白外套，油炸花生下酒的父親，聽紹興戲的母親，庸脂俗粉的姊姊，全都無法近身了。) <sup>18</sup>

However, Ruliang does not oppose the idea of drinking, it excites his admiration if it is done in the Western manner -- A man with a shock of long hair falling into his eyes stumbles into a bar, climbs onto the high stool, and says in a loud, coarse voice, "Whisky, no Soda." He then holds his head in one hand and gazes into nothingness. This kind of situation, instead of his father's drinking Chinese wine, would be normal and deserves sympathy, no matter whether a man does this due to failure in love or career. It would be

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 451.

a kind of noble vulgarity, even if he happens to drink too much.<sup>19</sup> Living in the illusion of himself as a literary youth, Ruliang believes he could have written some masterpiece, if he had not been so busy or if he had drunk more coffee. “His belief in coffee is not due to its smell, but to the complexly structured, scientific silver pot and its sparkling glass lid.” (他對咖啡的信仰，倒不因為咖啡的香味，而因為那構造複雜的，科學的銀色的壺，那晶亮的玻璃蓋。)<sup>20</sup>

In order to escape from his family, Ruliang spends his leisure time learning German. He fantasizes himself as being in love with Cynthia (沁西亞), the Russian secretary of the language school. Despite his realization that Cynthia is just another ordinary girl, no different from his sisters, he constantly banishes the reality that intrudes unpleasantly into his courtship. He understands that “he loves merely for the sake of love” (他是為戀愛而戀愛).<sup>21</sup> He does not want to know her, since if he gets to know her, his dream cannot continue. He starts to communicate with Cynthia in his elementary German, the simplicity and clumsiness of which reflects his childishness. He looks up words like “love” and “marry” in a dictionary, and fantasizes a marriage proposal. The realization that a reckless marriage would ruin his life merely adds to his excitement.

Ruliang’s imaginary romance comes to an end with Cythia’s consenting to marry a good-for-nothing Russian. She marries merely for the sake of getting married. This marriage is treated with an ironical and anti-romantic attitude, revealing Zhang’s

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 454.

skepticism towards religion and towards the illusion of romance.<sup>22</sup> The church is described as “a light-green garlic soaked in a glass bowl filled with vinegar;” and it smells like “the odor of leather shoes on rainy days.”<sup>23</sup> Besides describing the church as a profane, ghostly place, Zhang also deprecates the officiating priest who carries out the ceremony as a drinker corrupted by women. Cynthia, whom Ruliang once compared to the Virgin Mary, is dressed in an old wedding gown, borrowed or rented somewhere.

Watching Cynthia's dim, pale smile in the flickering candle light, Ruliang suddenly comes to a moment of sympathetic understanding. He realizes that “she has created for herself the sense of mystery and atmosphere of dignity that a bride should have, despite the fact that the priest is tired, the candles unexpectedly dirty, the groom impatient, and her gown a rented one. She has only this one special day in her life, and she should have good memories to recall it when she is old.” (她自己爲自己製造了新嫁娘應有的神秘感與尊嚴的空氣，雖然神甫無精打采，雖然香火出奇地骯髒，雖然新郎不耐煩，雖然她的禮服是租來的。她一輩子就只這麼一天，總得有點值得一記的，留到老年時去追想。) <sup>24</sup> Overwhelmed by sadness, Ruliang quietly leaves once the ceremony is over, for fear that he will cry. With the realization of the delusion of romance, Ruliang frees himself from his unrealistic dreams. He no longer draws sketches of women in his books.

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<sup>22</sup> Another example of Zhang's ironical treatment of marriage is “Happy matrimony” (Hong luanxi 鴻鸞禧), *Romances*, 39-56.

<sup>23</sup> “Youthful years,” 459.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

### The focus on subjective experience

The age Zhang writes about is one in which “all of everyday life is not going the right way” (日常的一切都有點兒不對).<sup>25</sup> People are living under the threat of war, and things can fall apart at any moment. “In this age, the old things are falling apart, while the new are yet to be born” (這時代，舊的東西在崩壞，新的在滋長中),<sup>26</sup> comments Zhang. “Time rushes by. Things are already being destroyed, and greater destruction is still to come” (時代是倉促的，已經在破壞中，還有更大的破壞要來).<sup>27</sup> “Men live in a certain age, but our age is sinking like a shadow; we feel we have been deserted” (人是生活於一個時代裏的，可是這時代卻在影子似地沉沒下去，人覺得自己是被拋棄了).<sup>28</sup>

While most of Zhang's contemporaries focused on the creation of a wartime myth, emphasizing the socio-political situation and their protagonists' heroic actions, Zhang focused on the experience of the subjective individual during this time of change. One aspect of what is modern about Zhang's short stories is her treatment of current political events as a remote backdrop, and in her replacing of wartime myth and resistance propaganda with a subjective account of history.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Works of my own,” 21.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Preface to the second edition of *Romances*, 5. Translation by Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese modernity*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> “Works of my own,” 21. A comparison can be made between Zhang's quotations and W. B. Yeats's “Second coming,” especially the lines “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” A. Norman Jeffares ed. & annot., *Yeats's poems*, London: Macmillan, 1989, 294-295.

<sup>29</sup> Leo Lee holds a similar view in “Time rushes by, greater destruction is still to come,” 22-23.

“Blockade” tells of a brief encounter between a University tutor, Wu Cuiyuan (吳翠遠), and a married accountant, Lü Zongzhen (呂宗楨), on a train halted during a blockade by the Japanese. Instead of focusing on the larger socio-political background, the story concentrates on the caprice and vanity of the human heart. During this psychological blockade from everyday life, Zongzhen temporally escapes his ordinary self and acts out his fantasies by starting a flirtation with Cuiyuan. Cuiyuan, tired of her demureness and her uneventful life, becomes especially excited by an adventure that goes beyond the bounds of convention.

Though a “good” daughter from a “good” family, Cuiyuan is unhappy, as she believes that “there are more good people in the world than genuine people.” (世界上的好人比真人多)<sup>30</sup> This is the reason she is attracted to Zhongzhen. Although he is not especially honest or intelligent, he is, to her, a “genuine man” with spontaneous emotions.<sup>31</sup> “He was a man here. Usually, he was an accountant, the father of his child, the head of a household, a passenger on a bus, a customer in a shop, and a citizen. But to this woman who knew nothing about him he was simply a man.” (在這裏，他是一個男子。平時，他是會計師，他是孩子的父親，他是家長，他是車上的搭客，他是店裏的主顧，他是市民。可是對於這個不知道底細的女人，他只是一個單純的男子。)<sup>32</sup> In everyday life, people are busy acting according to their

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<sup>30</sup> “Blockade,” 490.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 493.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 496.

social roles. It is only during the temporal moment of blockade that they dare to unmask their feelings and act out their forbidden fantasies.

However, Cuiyuan is bitterly disappointed to find out that, once the blockade is lifted, Zhongzhen leaves her promptly and returns to his original seat, as if nothing has happened:

She knew what he meant by this act: all that took place during the period of blockade should be consigned to oblivion. The whole city of Shanghai had dozed away, had had a preposterous dream.

(她明白他的意思了：封鎖期間的一切，等於沒有發生。整個的上海打了個盹，做了個不近情理的夢。)<sup>33</sup>

From Cuiyuan's subjective perspective, once Zhongzhen disappears he is dead. The train moves forward, and the pedestrians on the pavement quickly pass by. "They were alive only when Cuiyuan saw them, alive for just a short moment. As the train clanked on, they died one by one." (翠遠的眼睛看到了他們，他們就活了，只活那麼一剎那。車往前嚙嚙的跑，他們一個個的死去了。)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 499. Translation by C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 414. There are other two translations of the same paragraph by Stephen Cheng and Edward Gunn. Cheng's translation is "She realized his intention: whatever took place during the blockade never really happened. The whole city of Shanghai had gone into a trance and had had a preposterous dream." "Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang's stories," 175. Gunn's translation is "She knew what he intended by this. It was to be as though during the whole span of the blockade nothing had happened. The whole city of Shanghai had dozed away into an irrational dream." *Unwelcome muse*, 214.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

In "Love in a Fallen City," a story set on the eve of the Second World War, Zhang explains the fall of Hong Kong, absurdly, by the fulfillment of Bai Liusu's private wish of getting married to Fan Liuyuan. Liusu, a divorcée of twenty-eight, is determined to seek economic and social security through marriage. Her family is a place in which she can no longer stay; her brothers and sisters-in-law, after squandering her money, complain about having to support her in the penury of wartime. Liuyuan, however, starts courting her merely in the hope of making her his mistress. It is only against the chaos and destruction of the war that they come to realize the fragility of their existence, and become capable of feeling a genuine love for each other:

In this world of turmoil and tumult, wealth, property and all other things that used to last forever were now unreliable. All she could count on was the breath within her throat and this man sleeping beside her. She suddenly moved to Liuyuan's side in bed and embraced him through the quilt. He pulled out his hand to take hers, and they saw through each other. It was a mere instant of complete understanding, but that flash could enable them to live in harmony for the next eight to ten years. He was just a selfish man, and she just a selfish woman. In this age of military turmoil, there was no room for individualists, but there was always a place for an ordinary couple.

(在這動蕩的世界裏，錢財、地產、天長地久的一切，全不可靠了。靠得住的只有她腔子裏的這口氣，還有睡在她身邊的這個人。她突然爬到柳原身邊，隔著他的棉被，擁抱著他。他從被窩裏伸出手來

握住她的手。他們把彼此看得透明透亮。僅僅是一剎那的澈底的諒解，然而這一剎那夠他們在一起和諧地活個十年八年。他不過是一個自私的男子，她不過是一個自私的女人。在這兵荒馬亂的時代，個人主義者是無處容身的，可是總有地方容得下一對平凡的夫妻。) <sup>35</sup>

As noted by Gunn, the story's title, "Love in a Fallen City," may also be read "Love that Topples Cities."<sup>36</sup> Viewed from Liusu's perspective, the war that levels the city and brings death to thousands turns out to "fulfill" (chenquan 成全) her life.<sup>37</sup> Zhang subverts ordinary ideas of history by posing the following question: "In this irrational world, who knows what is cause and what is effect? Who knows? Perhaps it was for her fulfillment that a great metropolis was leveled." (在這不可理喻的世界裏，誰知道什麼是因，什麼是果？誰知道呢？也許就因為要成全她，一個大都市傾覆了。) <sup>38</sup> For the revival of the human capability for love, and for the realization of

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<sup>35</sup> "Love in a fallen city," *Romances*, 249. I have based my translation on that of Stephen Cheng and made several changes. "Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang's stories," 174. Sciban's translation is "In this turbulent world, money, property, and everything else that would last as long as heaven and earth were all unreliable: The only thing that was reliable was the breath of life held in her and the man sleeping beside her. She suddenly climbed over to Liuyuan, and embraced him through his quilt. He took his hand out from under the quilt and held her hand. Now they finally understood each other through and through, but it was only an instant of searching. An instant though that would be enough for them to live harmoniously together for eight or ten years. He was just a selfish man, and she just a selfish woman. In this age of military turmoil, there was no place for individualism, but there was always a place for an ordinary couple." Shu-ning Sciban, "Eileen Chang's 'Love in the fallen city': translation and analysis," Master's thesis, The University of Alberta, 1985, 151.

<sup>36</sup> Gunn, *Unwelcome muse*, 215.

<sup>37</sup> "Love in a fallen city," 251. Zhang has commented that this story is written from Liusu's point of view. "Frank words on 'Love in a fallen city'" (Guanyu qingcheng zhilian di laoshihua 關於傾城之戀的老實話), *Album*, 103.

<sup>38</sup> "Love in a fallen city," 251. Translation by Gunn, with slight modifications, *Unwelcome muse*, 215.

their selfhood, modern civilization, with all its pretense and treachery, has to be destroyed. Liuyuan's words to Liusu, as they stand by a broken wall in Repulse Bay, serve best to show Zhang's disillusionment with civilization:

One day when our civilization is completely ruined and everything destroyed . . .  
maybe then you will be sincere towards me, and I towards you.

(有一天，我們的文明整個的毀掉了，什麼都完了 . . . . . 也許你會對我有一點真心，也許我會對你有一點真心。)<sup>39</sup>

I would like to argue that, contrary to the commonly accepted view of Liuyuan as a playboy, he is, in fact, an insightful character who understands the limitations and fragility of human nature. Moreover, despite all his treacheries in order to make Liusu his mistress (such as ruining her reputation by creating the false impression that she is already his mistress, and by a public display of intimacy), he is sincerely seeking genuine affection. During their walk by Repulse Bay, he desperately pleads for Liusu's understanding, knowing deep down inside that she is only after the financial and social security that marriage can provide.<sup>40</sup> Liusu, however, thinks that he is after spiritual love. She is happy about it, since she thinks such love usually ends in marriage. The only problem with spiritual love is that women in love never understand men's words. But that is not important to her. She believes that when it comes to finding a house and settling down, women are always more capable than men.<sup>41</sup> In a late night phone conversation

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<sup>39</sup> "Love in a fallen city," 226.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 228.

with Liusu, Liuyuan comments that the poem from the *Book of Songs* (Shijing 詩經) “Till death do us part/ To you I pledge my word/ I hold your hands/ Wanting to grow old together” is the saddest of all poems.<sup>42</sup> Death and departure are things beyond human control, but people are so determined in promising life-long love, as if they “can be their own master.” (好像我們自己做得了主似的).<sup>43</sup> However, Linyuan’s realization of human insignificance is understood by Liusu as an excuse for not marrying her. As Liuyuan comments, she only takes marriage as “long-term prostitution.”<sup>44</sup>

### **The struggle with the self**

Zhang’s focus on subjective experience is closely related to her existential concern with a human being’s struggle with him- or herself. Characters in Zhang’s short stories are struggling with their selves in the sense that due to their blindness or flawed vision, they fail to come to terms with what they really are. As a result, they constantly try to escape from themselves through deluded methods, such as self-aggrandizement and indulgence in imaginary identities or imaginary romances. Despite the fact that Zhang’s characters are often criticized as unreflective, sick and pathetic,<sup>45</sup> I would like to point out that most of them are in fact men and women who deserve compassion for the great

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<sup>42</sup> The original poem in Chinese is “生死契闊，與子相悅，執子之手，與子偕老。” Ibid., 234.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>45</sup> Tang Wenbiao, *Chop Suey on Zhang Ailing*, 55-56.

effort they make in search of their selves. As Zhang remarks in "Works of My Own," most of her characters are serious about life, despite the fact that they are not heroes.<sup>46</sup> However, unlike Liuyuan, one of the exceptional few who comes to a tragic realization of human limitations, most of Zhang's characters possess a distorted self-image. As a result, in their belief in their ability to control or master themselves, they underestimate the dark forces lurking deep inside the human heart, or else they simply live in a world of self-delusion. The impact of their subsequent failures, which arise from their lack of self-knowledge, cannot but result in disappointment.

Ge Weilong (葛薇龍) in "Aloeswood Ashes: The First Burning" (Chen xiangxie: diyi luxiang 沉香屑第一爐香) and Tong Zhenbao (佟振保) in "Red Rose and White Rose" (Hong meiguai yu bai meiguai 紅玫瑰與白玫瑰) serve as the best examples of characters who overestimate themselves. "Aloeswood Ashes: The first Burning" is a story about the degradation of a young lady who fails to recognize the dark forces of blind passion and irrational desire. Refusing to return to Shanghai with her parents after the war, Weilong seeks refuge with her well-off aunt in Hong Kong, so as to continue her studies. Despite her realization that her aunt is a notorious widow who seeks pleasure with gigolos and playboys, Weilong believes that she can stay out of her aunt's affairs. However, she soon finds that "she can no longer control herself" in the face of the overwhelming luxury her aunt provides for her, and the irresistible charm of George Qiao (喬琪喬), a gigolo of mixed blood. Weilong abandons her studies and marries George.

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<sup>46</sup> "Works of my own," 21.

Henceforth, she is either busy scheming to get money for George, or serving as bait for her aunt to entice young men. During a visit to the Wanchai market on New Year's Eve, she comes to realize the ruin of her marriage and the void in her future:

Beyond these lamps, people and goods there were the sadly limpid sea and sky -- boundless desolation and boundless fear. Her future was just like that -- she could not bear to think of it, for these thoughts could only give rise to endless fears. She had no long-range plans. Only in these tiny knick-knacks could her fearful and agitated heart find some momentary rest.

(在這燈與人與貨之外，還有那淒清的天與海——無邊的蒼涼，無邊的恐怖。她的未來，也是如此——不能想，想起來只有無邊的恐怖。她沒有天長地久的計劃。只有在這眼前的瑣碎的小東西裏，她的畏縮不安的心，能夠得到暫時的休息。)<sup>47</sup>

As Weilong's lack of self-awareness leads to her fall, Zhenbao, too, is a victim of his complacency. Zhenbao "is determined to create a "correct world" that he can carry everywhere. In that pocket world, he will be the absolute master."(下定了決心要創造一個『對』的世界，隨身帶著。在那袖珍世界裏，他是絕對的主人。)<sup>48</sup> Despite his determination to repress his spontaneous, desiring self, he finds himself unable to resist the charms of his friend's wife, Wang Jiaorui (王嬌蕊), and has an affair with her. However, as an upright man, a filial son and a promising engineer, he is

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<sup>47</sup> "Aloeswood ashes -- the first burning," 337. Translation by Stephen Cheng, with slight modifications, "Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang's stories," 178.

<sup>48</sup> "Red rose and white rose," *Romances*, 61.

unwilling to compromise his future for his love, despite Jiaorui's divorce for his sake. During their encounter on a bus after both of them have married others, Zhenbao, the ideal man, simply cannot stop weeping in front of Jiaorui:

Zhenbao wanted to wrap up his fulsome, successful life into a couple of simple sentences. Just as he was framing these words, he raised his head and saw his face in the small mirror that protruded to the right of the operator's seat. It was quite calm. But as the bus jolted, the face in the mirror trembled unsteadily with it. It was a very odd sort of calm tremor . . . Suddenly his face actually began to tremble. In the mirror he saw his tears streaming down. Why, he didn't know himself. In such an encounter as this, if someone had to cry, she should be the one. This was all wrong, and yet astonishingly he could not restrain himself.

(振保想把他的完滿幸福的生活歸納在兩句簡單的話裏，正在斟酌字句，抬起頭，在公共汽車司機人座右突出的小鏡子裏看見他自己的臉，很平靜，但是因為車身的搖動，鏡子裏的臉也跟著顫抖不定，非常奇異的一種心平氣和的顫抖，……忽然他的臉真的抖了起來，在鏡子裏，他看見他的眼淚滔滔流下來，爲什麼，他也不知道。在這一類的會晤裏，如果必須有人哭泣，那應當是她。這完全不對，然而他竟不能止住自己。)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 96-97. Translation by Edward Gunn, with slight modifications, *Unwelcome muse*, 211.

In the story "Jasmine Tea," (Moli xiangpian 茉莉香片) Zhang tackles the existential theme of the quest for a better self-identity.<sup>50</sup> Nie Chuanqing (聶傳慶), an adolescent suggestive of Zhang's weakling younger brother, finds an alternative in his life through the accidental discovery that his Professor, Yan Ziye (言子夜), once gave a book to his mother, Feng Biluo (馮碧落). He then makes up a story by piecing together items of hearsay and conjecture. Through the fantasy of his deceased mother marrying Professor Yan instead of his opium-smoking father, Chuanqing entertains the possibility of his being a professor's son. He believes that he would be a brave and sympathetic person if he had been born into a better family. Instead of making an effort to improve himself, he simply puts all the blame on destiny.

Chuanqing's distorted vision results in his frantic jealousy of Professor Yan's daughter, Yan Danzhu (言丹朱). Danzhu, out of female vanity, tries to win Chuanqing's love as proof of her charms. Chuanqing does fantasize about Danzhu loving him. He tells her, "To me, you are not only a sweetheart, but also a creator, a father and mother, a new environment, a new heaven and earth." (對於我，你不單是愛一個人，你是一個創造者，一個父親、母親，一個新的環境，新的天地。)<sup>51</sup> However, torn between jealousy and self-hate, Chuanqing is incapable of loving anybody, or even

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<sup>50</sup> C.T. Hsia holds that "Jasmine tea" is a story tackling the theme of "a young man in search of his real father." *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 407. My interpretation tends to emphasize the existential quest for self-identity. From my point of view, Chuanqing is a self-centered character, who cares less about the question of who his father is, than about who *he* is as a result of who his father is.

<sup>51</sup> "Jasmine tea," *Romances*, 275.

understanding love. The only thing he needs is an idea of love to enforce his imagined importance and to abolish his shameful past. Hence, what underlies the seeming love story is a kind of totally unreasonable desire for revenge. Chuanqing longs for revenge and believes that, if Danzhu loves him, he should have the power to manipulate her and torture her mentally.<sup>52</sup> As a result, after being dismissed by Professor Yan for failing to answer a question, Chuanqing unleashes all his pent-up fury in a brutal attack on Danzhu that almost kills her:

Chuanqing forced these words out of his clenched teeth: "I'll tell you. I want you to die. If there were you there shouldn't be me. If you exist, I can't. If I exist, you can't. Understand?" He clasped tightly both of her shoulders with one arm, and with the other hand he pushed her head down so hard that it seemed as though he wanted to shove it back into her neck. She should have never been born into this world . . . He couldn't help kicking her savagely a few times more for fear that she might be still alive . . . He ran as if he were in a nightmare . . . he only saw before him flight after flight of stone steps gleaming and dancing under the moonlight.

(傳慶從牙齒縫裏拼出幾句話來道：『告訴你，我要你死！有了你，就沒有我。有了我，就沒有你，懂不懂？』他用一隻手臂緊緊的挾著她的雙肩，另一隻手就將她的頭拼命的向下按，似乎要她的頭縮回到腔子裏去。她根本不該生到這世上來……他不能再狠狠的踢

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 274.

兩腳，怕她還活著……他終於丟下了她，往山下跑。身子就像在夢魘中似的……只看見月光裏一層層的石階，在眼前兔起鶻落。)<sup>53</sup>

It should be noted that the notion of having “no escape” appears repeatedly in the story. Chaunqing’s obsession with his existential quest for self-identity arises from his realization that he would have had a chance to escape from his present identity some twenty years ago if his mother had gone against the will of her family and married Professor Yan. Chuanqing believes that his mother was aware of the sacrifice she made when she consented to marry into the wealthier Nie family. But he was born into the family without a choice. For him, everything is doomed: “No escape! No escape!” (跑不了！跑不了！)<sup>54</sup> “Twenty years with his father had made him a mental cripple. Even if given his freedom, he could not fly away.” (他跟著他父親二十年，已經給製造成一個精神上的殘廢。即使給了他自由，他也跑不了。)<sup>55</sup> The notion of having “no escape” is repeated towards the end of the story. “Danzhu didn’t die. When school opened two days later, he would still have to face her. He couldn’t escape.” (丹朱沒有死。隔兩天開學了，他還得在學校裏見到她，他跑不了。)<sup>56</sup> As pointed out by C. T. Hsia, Chuanqing’s violent abuse of Danzhu “only lays bare the ruin of his life” and “reveals the abject stance of his soul as it desperately attempts to recover

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 277-278. Translation by Hsia, with slight modifications, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 411.

<sup>54</sup> “Jasmine tea,” 264.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 278. Translation by Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 412.

self-importance.”<sup>57</sup> Trapped by his own flawed vision and failure to accept who he really is, Chuanqing, like other characters discussed above, is left with no way out.<sup>58</sup>

In “Heart Sutra” (Xinjing 心經), Xu Xiaohan (許小寒) has developed an attachment to her father, Xu Fengyi (許峰儀), that has become a passionate and incestuous relationship. However, instead of facing reality and tackling their problem, both characters live in self-deception and hypocrisy. Xiaohan, in her self-deceiving image of herself as a superior goddess, believes that she can manipulate everyone around her. By displaying contempt whenever her mother shows the slightest sign of intimacy with her father, Xiaohan succeeds bit by bit in killing the love between her parents. She is equally manipulative with her suitor, Gong Haili (龔海立), and with her friend, Duan Lingqing (段凌卿). Besides using Haili to arouse the jealousy of her father, she plans to match Haili with Lingqing, who greatly resembles her in appearance, so that Lingqing can be her substitute. Xiaohan shows her confidence as a manipulative goddess who can put something over on the world in saying to Lingqing that “I can make him (Haili) like you, and I can also make you like him.”(我可以使他喜歡你，也可以使你喜歡他。)<sup>59</sup>

However, to her fury and surprise, Xiaohan realizes that her father has taken Lingqing as his mistress. Her world simply falls apart when she finds out that she is the only one left in the dark:

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<sup>57</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 413.

<sup>58</sup> A cross-reference can be made between the notion of having “no escape” in “Jasmine tea” and Jean-Paul Satre’s *No exit* (Huis Clos), written in 1944, a year after “Jasmine tea.” In this play, Satre holds that the world, in which no one can escape the survey of others, is already a hell.

<sup>59</sup> “Heart sutra,” *Romances*, 413.

Between the two of them are the floor, the lemon-yellow and pearl-gray checker carpet, the sleeping cat, the spittoon, the ashes from the cigarettes, the scattered morning newspaper . . . her broken family . . . Such a short distance, but there seem to be pieces of broken glass all over the floor, sharp broken glass, she could not run across it. She could not go near him.

(在他們之間，隔著地板，隔著檸檬黃與珠灰方格子的地氈，隔著熟睡的狸花貓、痰盂、小撮的煙灰。零亂的早上的報紙……她粉了的家！……短短的距離，然而滿地似乎都是玻璃屑，尖力的玻璃片，她不能夠奔過去。她不能夠近他的身。)<sup>60</sup>

Losing self-control, she hits and scratches her father in a hysterical manner, but instead hurts herself by accident. Standing in front of a full-length mirror, she finds tears and blood all over her red, swollen face. “She suddenly has a strong feeling of disgust and horror, who is she afraid of? Who does she hate? Her mother? Herself? . . . She starts to cry. She has sinned. She has killed the love between her parents bit by bit.” (她突然感到一陣強烈的厭惡與恐怖。怕誰？恨誰？她母親？她自己？……小寒哭了起來。她犯了罪。她將她父母之間的愛慢慢吞吞的殺死了，一塊一塊割碎了。)<sup>61</sup> Eventually, the self-confident goddess only finds herself weeping in her mother’s arms.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 439-440.

When Xiaohan first appears in the story, she is introduced in the image of goddess, aloof and superior.<sup>62</sup> She is described as “a child in a myth,” sitting on the railing that surround the rooftop garden of her apartment, with her friends arrayed below her. Her peacock-blue blouse vanishes into the peacock-blue evening sky. There is nothing, it seems, but “the sky, Xiaohan, and Shanghai.”<sup>63</sup> Her name “Xiaohan,” in its literal translation, is “Little Coldness.” Zhang takes special care to associate her with coldness. For example, Xiaohan once immerses her hands in the shade of cool leaves, smiles and says to her father: “You should have understand long ago, Dad . . . as long as I do not give you up, you will not give me up.” (『你早該明白了，爸爸……我不放棄你，你是不會放棄我的！』)<sup>64</sup> However, after Haili tells her about her father’s affair with Lingqing, she feels the whole world swell up under the autumn sun in an absurd manner. The residences swell like dumplings in a steam-cooker, everything expands and the street becomes very congested. She is reduced to nothing, feeling dizzy and desperate. She thinks she is the one in control, the one who manipulates, only to find out that she is the one who has been kept in the dark.

The characters in “Heart Sutra” are not ruthless people with no sense of shame. While Xiaohan and her father are sitting together on a sofa, both of them subconsciously move a little apart on realizing the inappropriateness of the situation. However, due to their flawed vision and their self deception, they can only fall into the trap of degradation.

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<sup>62</sup> Gunn, *Unwelcome muse*, 225.

<sup>63</sup> “Heart sutra,” 400-401.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 424-425.

Just as Xiaohan remarks, "I . . . will not be able to control myself anymore!" (我這就要 . . . 管不住我自己了!)<sup>65</sup> Fenyi, instead of facing the fact of incest, blames himself for being confused, and tries to explain the whole thing as arising from Xiaohan's desire to preserve the total security and unquestioning love of her childhood years. In the end, he even takes Lingqing as a replacement for his daughter. Lingqing, who is eager to move out of her unhappy family, has wished that she could find an unmarried man around her own age. However, she ends up being Fengyi's mistress out of financial considerations. When Xiaohan talks about Haili with her father, she comments that she is not the kind of selfish person who would hold onto a man whom she would not marry. However, she treats her parents in just such a possessive way. If "Heart Sutra" is too pathetic a story, it is because all of its characters end up being losers in their struggle with their self.<sup>66</sup>

### Sympathetic understanding

In Zhang's short stories, most of her characters have a chance to undergo, in Joyce's term, a moment of epiphany at which they come to an illumination and realize the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>66</sup> The title of the story, "Heart sutra," means the Buddhist scripture, Hridaya or "Heart" Sutra, 般若心經 or 般若波羅蜜多心經, which holds that all is illusory. Titled as "Heart," this scripture is considered the most important one. When publicly recited, it helps to get rid of evil spirits. *A dictionary of Chinese Buddhist terms* (最新漢英佛學大詞典), reprint, Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1982, 151. Ding Fubao (丁福保) ed., *A dictionary of Buddhism* (Foxue da cidian 佛學大詞典) vo. 1, Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1974, 708. Wan changchun (萬長春) ed., *A dictionary of Buddhist literature* (Fojiao wenxue cidian 佛教文學詞典), Taipei, Changcunshu shufang, 1986, 167. Zhang's use of the title hints at the evil side of human nature and the major protagonists' failure to realize their self-deception and illusionary perception.

truth they are facing. As noted by C. T. Hsia, "For her [Zhang] as for most story-writers since Chekhov, tragic revelation comes only at the moment when the protagonist, temporarily outside the shell of his ego, surveys the desolation of his triumph or failure."<sup>67</sup> The moment at which Liusu feels a spark of genuine love for Liuyuan; Zhenbao's encounter with Jiaorui, during which he cries over his inability to love; and Xiaohan's sudden feeling of horror and regret for killing her parents' love -- can all be considered as examples of Joycean epiphanies in Zhang's short stories.

However, the momentary spark of understanding can die down easily. Despite his moment of illumination, Zhenbao remains a "good man" when he wakes up the next day.<sup>68</sup> Although the spark of genuine love enables Liuyuan and Liusu to live together in harmony, they do not change into two good persons overnight. Zhang is only too keenly aware of the limitations and fallibility of human beings. As she remarks in "Works of My Own," Liusu has not been converted by war into a revolutionary female. While Liuyuan is changed by the war and settles for a simple married life, his marriage neither turns him into a saint nor makes him abandon his old life-style. Although the ending for these characters' story is wholesome, it is nonetheless petty and conventional. Under the circumstances, they can do no better.<sup>69</sup>

For Zhang, life is so heavy that it does not permit easy attainment of enlightenment. Humans are always trapped in the existential question of "to be or not to

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<sup>67</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 398.

<sup>68</sup> "Red rose and white rose," 108.

<sup>69</sup> "Works of my own," 20.

be.” All that matters is the spontaneous choice one makes at any moment. Sick, lying in her bed, Weilong in “Aloeswood Ashes: The First Burning” is struggling to decide between returning to her parents in Shanghai or staying in Hong Kong for George:

She was perfectly aware that George was a very ordinary philanderer, and was nothing to be afraid of. What she feared was her own irrationally violent passion that he had roused . . . From this instant on, she changed her mind every few minutes: leave! Stay! Leave! Stay! In between these two extremes, she turned over and over feverishly in her bed, as though her mind was on fire

(她明明知道喬琪不過是一個極普通的浪子，沒有什麼可怕，可怕是他引起的她那不可理喻的蠻暴的熱情……從這一剎那起，她五分鐘換一個主意——走！不走！走！不走！在這兩個極端之間，她躺在床上滾來滾去，心裏像油煎似的。)<sup>70</sup>

What is tragic about Weilong’s story is that despite her epiphanic realization that the only difference between herself and the streetwalkers is that they are forced into it but she is willing,<sup>71</sup> she fails to extricate herself after all. Instead of didactic moralizing, Zhang aims at laying bare the terrifying truth of life and the inherent tragedy of human existence. Zhang says in “I See Suqing,”

As a story writer, I believe that my job is to understand the complexity of life.

Even if I hate them [those about whom I wrote] at the beginning, I am only left

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<sup>70</sup> “Aloeswood ashes -- the first burning,” 333. Translation based on Stephen Cheng, “Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang’s stories,” 177 and Nga Le, “Women in Zhang Ailing’s short stories,” master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989, 18.

<sup>71</sup> “Aloeswood ashes -- the first burning,” 339.

with a kind of sad compassion, after I come to understand them . . . I can forgive their failings and sometimes even love them, because they exist and they are real.

(因為是寫小說的人，我想這是我的本份，把人生的來龍去脈看得很清楚。如果原先有憎惡的心，看明白之後，也只有哀矜……我寫到的那些人，他們有什麼不好我都能夠原諒，有時候還有喜愛，就因為他們存在，他們是真的。) <sup>72</sup>

She also quotes from the *Analects* in the preface to the second edition of *Romances*: “If you succeed in extracting the truth from them, do not contragulate yourself on this but have compassion on them” (如得其情，哀矜勿喜). <sup>73</sup> Viewing her pitiful characters with detachment, and carefully tracing the convoluted paths of their psychology, Zhang shows her tolerance and sympathy for human suffering.

It should be noted that, while Zhang's short stories can be considered as a reaction to May Fourth romanticism, they are in fact closely related to Lu Xun's (魯迅) tragic perspective and detached depiction of human weakness. In works like “Glazed Tiles” (Liuli ya 琉璃瓦), “Happy Matrimony,” and “Stale Mates,” which are written in a more light-hearted tone, it is not difficult to notice Zhang's satirical attitude towards human vanity and blindness. However, I shall claim that despite her awareness of human

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<sup>72</sup> “I see Suqing,” 83-84.

<sup>73</sup> Yang Bojun (楊伯峻) annot., *Analects* (論語), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958, 210. Translation by D. C. Lau, *Confucius: the Analects (Lun yü)*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1979, 195.

weakness, Zhang still believes in the human capacity for sympathetic understanding, and sees it as a way out.<sup>74</sup> It is exactly this belief which makes her a modernist.<sup>75</sup>

I would like to conclude this section with an analysis of “Indian Summer: A Xiao’s Autumnal Lament” (Guihuazheng: A Xiao beiqiu 桂花蒸 阿小悲秋), a rich and complex story which, in my opinion, best illustrates Zhang’s compassionate vision as a modernist.<sup>76</sup> “Indian Summer” tells of two typical working days of a maid named A Xiao. A Xiao’s master, Mr. Schacht (Ge’r Da 哥兒達), is a foreign resident in war-time Shanghai who indulges himself in sexual pleasures.

As noted by Shui Jing, A Xiao differs greatly from other images of the maid in modern Chinese fiction. In the thirties, it was trendy to write about the oppressed working class; examples of such works includes Lu Xun’s “Sacrifice” (Zhufu 祝福) and Wu Zuxiang’s (吳組緝) “Fan Village” (Fan jia pu 樊家鋪). However, Zhang’s characterization of A Xiao is totally unaffected by leftist literary theories. Instead of being

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<sup>74</sup> For example, Ruliang in “Youthful years” first believes that he is a loner who watches others with cold eyes. However, his contempt and indifference melt away with his sympathy for Cynthia. “Youthful years,” 460.

<sup>75</sup> According to *The new Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*, “the most acclaimed instances of high modernist art are not content with ironic gestures. Rather, they use ironic strategies to undo the expectations elicited by representational art and then focus attention on the capacity of the work’s own syntactic intensity to demonstrate the significance of certain powers for engaging and interpreting experience.” Alex Preminger & T. V. Brogan, *The New Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 793.

<sup>76</sup> Zhang Ailing has translated “Indian summer: A Xiao’s autumnal lament” into an abridged English version, “Shame, amah!” in Nieh Hua-ling selected & translated, *Eight stories by Chinese women*, Taipei: The Heritage Press, 1962, 91-114. The English translation quoted in the text follows “Shame, amah!.” However, if the quoted passage does not appear in “Shame, amah!” the translation is my own.

weak and oppressed, she is optimistic and dynamic.<sup>77</sup> She is far from being a perfect person, but she shows a great concern for those around her, and protects them with a kind of motherly love. Despite its setting in war-time Shanghai, the story does not carry political overtones. Instead of the larger socio-political background, Zhang focuses on the spark of kindness and sympathetic understanding in ordinary people like A Xiao. It is this neglect of immediate social concern that enables the story to rise to a universal level.

Not formally married to her husband, A Xiao is jealous of her friend Xiuqin (秀琴), who shows her pride as a bride-to-be. However, once A Xiao hears the newly wedded couple quarreling upstairs, she starts to worry if Xiuqin will be happy in her married life. A Xiao steals tea from her master when her man visits her; however, when she finds out that her master's flour is used up, she is willing to use hers instead. Despite the fact that her master's abandoned mistress, Miss Li, hurts her professional pride by checking to see if she remembers to tell her master about her call, A Xiao shows great sympathy in protecting Miss Li's feelings by lying to her that Mr. Schacht is busy with his work (not without consideration, however, for the tips Miss Li has paid her in the past). She blames her man for not being able to support her; however, when he comes to visit her and begs to stay over, she suddenly feels his loneliness. She even imaginatively projects his passion onto the refrigerator, which then seems to her to have a pumping heart:

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<sup>77</sup> Shui Jing, *The art of Zhang Ailing's fiction*, 51-52.

He seldom pleads--at least he has not begged her before . . . she is facing the refrigerator's frozen silver ribs, she does not understand the refrigerator's structure, just as she does not understand the x-ray of a human body. But this refrigerator's heart is pumping. The cold waves surging out from the refrigerator irritate her nose, and she is about to cry.

(他是不慣求人的——至少對她他從來沒有求告過。……她面對著冰箱銀灰色的脅骨，冰箱的構造她不懂，等於人體內臟的一張愛克斯照片，可是這冰箱的心是突突跳著；而裏面噴出的一陣陣寒浪薰得她鼻子裏發酸，要出眼淚了。) <sup>78</sup>

A Xiao dislikes her master's heartless philandering, but she shows a detached tolerance for it. When she and other amahs talk about the love-affairs of their masters and mistresses,

They wear a special innocent smile on their faces, as if they are not talking about human events. Their masters are like the wind, making everywhere dusty, their mistresses are like the embossed surfaces of the red wood, gathering all the dust, keeping them busy wiping the dust all day.

(她們說到這些事情，臉上特別帶著一種天真的微笑，好像不在說人的事情。她們那些男東家是風，到處亂跑，造成許多灰塵，女東家則是紅木上的雕花，專門收集灰塵，使她們一天到晚揩拭個不了。) <sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Indian summer," 142.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 132. "Shame, amah!" 98.

To A Xiao, Mr. Schacht's flirting tactics are already *déjà vu*. He talks to different women on the phone with the same passionate voice, invites them home and treats every one of them to the same kind of meal. A Xiao has heard his enchanting "Hello" thousands of times. She understands that to his different mistresses, however, everything must seem new and romantic.

This detached understanding and tolerance is also Zhang's attitude towards her pitiful characters. Mr. Schacht has a whisky advertisement posted on his wall. In Zhang's detached description, the naked model on the poster, who "gazes at her audience with big, brown eyes, looks neither happy nor flirtatious. She is just like a child having her picture taken in her new clothes. She is not even proud; she has neatly arranged her lovely breasts, legs, and uncombed hair just like a model showing off fashions for her audience." (一雙棕色大眼睛楞楞的望著畫外的人，不樂也不淫，好像小孩穿了新衣拍照，甚至於也沒有自傲的意思；她把精緻的乳房大腿蓬頭髮全副披掛整齊，如同時裝模特兒把時裝店裏的衣服穿給顧客看。) <sup>80</sup>

Criticisms of "Indian Summer" usually focus on the contrast between the innocence of A Xiao, who represents the unspoiled country folk, and the carnal aspect of her master, who represents the morally degraded city-dwellers.<sup>81</sup> However, I would like to draw attention to the notion of sin and sympathetic forgiveness in the story. At the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>81</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 415. Stephen Cheng, "Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang's stories," 175.

opening of the story, the city of pretense and flirtation is described as an absurd wilderness. Even Heaven turns its face away from it:

From the back of the tall apartment building the city spread out like a wilderness, a rubble of gray and rust-red roofs, all-back-yards, rear windows, back alleys. Even Heaven had turned its face away, the sky blank and sunless. Nobody knew what it was thinking of. The Moon festival had passed and it was still so hot. Many sounds floated up from below: cars and buses, carpets being beaten, school bells ringing, carpenters sawing and hammering, motors humming, but all very vague, Heaven paying no attention to any of it, as if all were just wind past its ears.

(高樓的後陽台上望出去，城市成了曠野，蒼蒼的無數的紅的灰的屋脊，都是些後院子、後窗、後衙堂，連天也背過臉去了，無面目的陰陰的一片，過了八月節還這麼熱，也不知道它是什麼心思。下面浮起許多聲音，各樣的車，拍拍打地毯，學校xx搖鈴，工匠槌著鋸著，馬達嗡嗡響，但都恍惚得很，似乎都不在上帝心上，只是耳旁風。)<sup>82</sup>

However, it is not the case that Heaven is totally indifferent to the sins of the human world. It shows its wrath at night and rains heavily, washing away all the dirt and sin:

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<sup>82</sup> "Indian summer," 125. "Shame, amah!" 92.

Heaven suddenly turned around and showed its huge black face. Everything in the world fled terrified, bumping and clattering in the dark, thunder and lightning chasing each other. The shiny, painful green, white and purple light kept striking the small kitchen, forcing the glass to bend inward.

(天忽然回過臉來，漆黑的大臉，塵世上的一切都驚惶遁逃，黑暗裏拚鈴碰隆，雷電急走。痛楚的青、白、紫、一亮一亮，照進小廚裏。玻璃窗被迫得往裏凹進去。)<sup>83</sup>

A Xiao, the center of consciousness in this scene, is overwhelmed by a kind of frantic fear. She suddenly becomes aware of her own existence and finds it closely linked to the external world. As she walks on the paved floor with bare feet, she feels like “placing a hand on her heart, her heart is as icy as the floor.” (她覺得是她把手按在心上，而她的心冰冷的像石板。)<sup>84</sup> After the rain stops, she hears a food peddler slowly crying his wares, and feels in his lingering tone a subdued sadness:

No one knows what he is selling, only a long, lingering sadness can be heard in his cry. A gang of boys and girls is stumbling along the street, laughing and singing foreign songs. Under the weight of the huge sky, their song is dissident, frivolous, and weak. It disappears after just a moment, whereas the peddler’s song resounds throughout the street, the sadness and worries of the whole world are loaded on his shoulder.

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<sup>83</sup> “Indian summer,” 146. “Shame, amah!” 112. The last two sentences do not appear in “Shame, amah!” the translation is my own.

<sup>84</sup> “Indian summer,” 146.

(不知道賣點什麼，只聽得出極長的憂傷。一群酒醉的男女唱著外國歌，一路滑跌，嘻嘻哈哈走過去了；沉沉的夜重壓下，他們的歌是一種頂撞，輕薄，薄弱的，一下子就沒有了。小販的歌，卻唱徹了一條街，依世界的煩憂都挑在他擔子上。)<sup>85</sup>

As noted by C. T. Hsia, in this story there is “a sense of loneliness and frustration,” evoked by “the blending of delicate satire and subdued pathos.”<sup>86</sup> Despite Zhang’s humorous or even ironical treatment of Mr. Schacht and A Xiao, it is not difficult to note her restrained sorrow and compassionate understanding towards the inescapable pettiness and sadness of human endeavors. Refraining from overt gestures of indignation or protest, her stories leave the readers with a sympathetic understanding of human folly and a long, lingering rhyme of sadness.

### Technique of modernity

While thematically Zhang’s works show a conscious break with the romantic May Fourth tradition, a link can be established between the two in terms of their experiments with form and with new expressions. But while most of the May Fourth writers hastily turn to Western literature for their models, Zhang can be considered as one of the few writers who consciously return to the Chinese literary heritage, in search of a new

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<sup>85</sup> “Indian summer,” 148-149.

<sup>86</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 415.

narrative form and a uniquely classical style.<sup>87</sup> Besides traditional Chinese literature, the Western literary heritage also has a great impact on Zhang. Her characterization shows the influence of the “intimate boudoir realism” of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and a parallel to Freudian psychology.<sup>88</sup>

## Narrative

### Modernization of the *huaban* story-telling mode

A major aspect of Zhang’s narrative style is its modernization of the *huaban* story-telling mode.<sup>89</sup> Zhang’s short stories always take the form of a framed narration, with a story-teller introducing the story to the readers. The opening of “Aloeswood Ashes

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<sup>87</sup> Early May Fourth writers like Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo (郭沫若) and He Qifang (何其芳) in general look to Western models such as Shelley, Pushkin, Goethe and T. S. Eliot. It has been generally accepted that after the early 1930s the trend toward the left and the obsession with mass and proletarian literature turned most writers away from the West, except for Soviet and Marxist literature. Yet Bonnie McDougall argues that interest in Western literature did not disappear in the 1930s. See Bonnie S. McDougall, “The Impact of Western literary trends,” in *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era*, ed. Merle Goldman, Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1977, 37-62. Besides Zhang, Lu Xun is another modern Chinese writer who consciously turns to traditional Chinese literature for a narrative form. His *Old tales retold* (Guhi xinbian 故事新編) serves as a good example. For a discussion of Lu Xun’s assimilation of the Chinese literary heritage, see Leo Lee, *Voices from the iron house: a study of Lu Xun*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, 25-48.

<sup>88</sup> Zhang mentions Freud and Jung in her later works, such as “On reading”(1976) and *Album* (1994). “On reading,” *Zhang’s outlook*, 264. *Album*, 81. However, there is no evidence that she had read Freud before she wrote *Romances*.

<sup>89</sup> “The earliest *huaben* texts were originally scripts for storytellers to speak from; when printed, they became popular reading matter; writers then imitated them and produced a vernacular fiction.” They appeared in the Song dynasty. Its main features are brief prologues and didactic comments from the narrator. Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese vernacular story*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1981, 28-33.

-- the First Burning” evokes a nostalgic mood, by asking the reader to take out his or her family’s antique incense burner and burn incense:

Please take out your family heirloom, the mottled bronze incense burner, light the incense and listen to my story of pre-war Hong Kong. When the incense finishes burning, my story will be finished.

(請您尋出家傳的霉綠斑斕的銅香爐，點上一爐沉香屑，聽我說一支戰前的故事，您這一爐沉香屑點完了，我的故事也該完了。)<sup>90</sup>

“Jasmine Tea” starts in a similar manner by the narrator talking to the reader -- this time, serving jasmine tea. By cautioning the reader that the tea is hot, and asking him or her to blow on it a bit, the narrator skillfully guides the reader into a fictional world:

This pot of jasmine tea that I made for you may be too bitter. I am afraid the Hong Kong romance which I am going to tell you is as bitter -- Hong Kong is a gorgeous city, but heart-breaking.

First, you pour one cup, be careful, it’s hot! You blow on it a bit. Looking through the mist, you can see a Hong Kong bus driving down the hill slowly . . . In the back sits Nie Chuanqing, a young man in his twenties.

(我給您沏的這一壺茉莉香片，也許是太苦了一點。我將要說給您聽的一段香港傳奇，恐怕也是一樣的苦——香港是一個華美的但悲哀的城。

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<sup>90</sup> “Aloeswood ashes -- the First Burning,” 279.

您先倒上一杯茶——當心燙！你尖著嘴輕輕吹著它。在茶煙繚繞中，您可以看見香港的公共汽車順著柏油山道徐徐的駛下山來……後面那一個座位上坐著聶傳慶，一個二十上下的男孩子。）<sup>91</sup>

The significance of such narrative frameworks lie in the fact that they help to increase the sense of distance between the reader and the events of the story, and hence enable the reader to view the story with detachment. As well, placing the story within a narrative frame serves as a reminder of the story's fictitious nature, which can be considered as another sign of Zhang's modernism.<sup>92</sup> By this device, Zhang hints at the endless repetition of tragedy caused by human ignorance. Her framed story "The Golden Cangue" serves as the best example. The story opens as follows:

Shanghai thirty years ago on a moonlight night . . . maybe we did not get to see the moon of thirty years ago. To young people the moon of thirty years ago should be a reddish-yellow wet stain the size of a copper coin, like a teardrop on letter paper by Duo Yun Xuan [a famous shop], worn and blurred. In old people's memory the moon of thirty years ago was gay, larger, rounder, and whiter than the moon now. But looked back on after thirty years on a rough road, the best of moons is apt to be tinged with sadness.

(三十年前的上海，一個有月亮的晚上……我們也許沒趕上看見三十年前的月亮。年輕的人想著三十年前的月亮應該是銅錢大的一個

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<sup>91</sup> "Jasmine tea," 252.

<sup>92</sup> "The modernist art-work is possessed, typically, of a *self-reflexive* element . . . when reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* we are made conscious that we are reading a novel." Jeremy Hawthorn, *A concise glossary of contemporary literary theory*, 120.

紅黃的濕暈，像朵雲軒信箋上落了一滴珠淚，陳舊而迷糊。老年人回憶中的三十年前的月亮是歡愉的，比眼前的月亮大、圓、白；然而隔著三十年的辛苦路望回看，再好的月色也不免帶點淒涼。) <sup>93</sup>

The story's ending returns to the same moon imagery, creating a sense of tragic continuity, which expresses Zhang's pessimism regarding the human condition:

The moon of thirty years ago has gone down long since and the people of thirty years ago are dead but the story of thirty years ago is not yet ended -- can have no ending.

(三十年前的月亮早已沉下去，三十年前的人也死了，然而三十年前的故事還沒有完——完不了。) <sup>94</sup>

### Experimental treatment of time and space

Zhang's short stories demonstrate their modernist spirit by consciously breaking with the traditional treatment of time and space. Besides using story-teller narrative frames, Zhang's short stories also show a great variety of narrative experiments. Examples include "slice of life" narration within a limited time frame in "Blockade," "Waiting" (Deng 等) and "Happy Reunion" (Xiangjianhuan 相見歡); the use of anachronisms and flashbacks in "Youthful Years" and "Withering Flower"; the distorted

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<sup>93</sup> "The golden cangue," *Romances*, 150. Translation by Zhang in C. T. Hsia ed., *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1971, 138, with slight modification made.

<sup>94</sup> "The golden cangue," 202. *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 191.

chronology in “Lust and Abstinence,” (Se Jie 色，戒); and stream of consciousness narration in “Flower and Pistils in the Floating Waves” (Fuhua Langrui 浮花浪蕊).<sup>95</sup>

In “The Golden Canguie,” time is skillfully contracted and extended. Ten years pass by while Qiqiao looks in a mirror. This contraction of time highlights human insignificance in the face of passing time:

A gust of wind came in the window and blew against the long mirror in the scrollwork lacquered frame until it rattled against the wall. Qiqiao pressed the mirror down with both hands. The green bamboo curtain and a green and gold landscape scroll reflected in the mirror went on swinging back and forth in the wind -- one could get dizzy watching it for long. When she looked again the green bamboo curtain had faded, the green and gold landscape was replaced by a photograph of her deceased husband, and the woman in the mirror was also ten years older.

(風從窗子裏進來，對面掛著的回文雕漆長鏡被吹得搖搖晃晃，磕托磕托敲著牆。七巧雙手按住了鏡子。鏡子裏反映的翠竹簾子和一副金綠山水憑條依舊在風中來回盪漾著，望久了，便有一種暈船的感覺。再定睛看時，翠竹簾子已經褪了色，金綠山水換為一張她丈夫的遺像，鏡子裏的人也老了十年。)<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Evelyn Teichert has done an in-depth study of the experimental narrative mold of three of Zhang's later stories: “Lust and restrictions,” “Flowers and pistils floating on the waves” and “Happy reunion.” Evelyn Teichert, “Zhang Ailing's experimental stories and the reader's participation in her short stories and novellas,” master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1985.

<sup>96</sup> “The golden canguie,” 168. *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 157.

However, the silent moment after Qiqiao and Jizhe break up is disproportionately extended, so as to intensify the protagonists' painful feelings:

Jizhe was gone . . . Drop by drop, the sour plum juice trickled down the table, keeping time like a water clock at night -- one drip, another drip -- the first watch of the night, the second watch -- one year, a hundred years. So long, this silent moment.

(季澤走了 . . . . . 酸梅湯沿著桌子一滴一滴朝下滴，像遲遲的夜漏——一滴，一滴 . . . . . 一更，二更 . . . . . 一年，一百年。真長，這寂寂的一剎那。)<sup>97</sup>

The treatment of time in “The Golden Cangue” is, in my opinion, comparable to the contrasting narrative pace in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, in which the first section, “The Window,” focuses on the events of a single afternoon, the second section, “Time Passes,” spans over the war period of ten years, and the last one, “To the Lighthouse,” narrates the events of a single morning, as if it is a continuation of the first section.<sup>98</sup>

Spatial form is another modernist element in Zhang’s short stories.<sup>99</sup> Long descriptive paragraphs are added to slow down plot development. The conscious

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<sup>97</sup> “The golden cangue,” 177. *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 166.

<sup>98</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the lighthouse*, Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.

<sup>99</sup> “Spatial form” denotes a development in modern fiction and poetry whereby techniques are used to subvert sequence, chronology and the linear flow of words. It is regarded as an element of modernistic works, as literary High Modernism (Eliot, Proust, Joyce, Pound) has a tendency to prefer simultaneity over sequentiality. Irena R. Makaryk ed., *Encyclopedia of contemporary literary theory*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, 629. See also Lucien Miller & Hui-

manipulation of narrative pace and the de-familiarizing effects result in an overall aesthetic impression of timeless unity and a feeling of illumination and tranquillity. In “The Golden Cangu,” Qiqiao looks out a window after Jize’s departure and wonders whether there is any difference between reality and illusion:

The tiny shrunken image of a policeman reflected faintly in the top corner of the window glass ambled by swinging his arms. A ricksha quietly ran over the policeman. A little boy with his long gown tucked up into his trouser waist ran kicking a ball out of the edge of the glass. The postman in green riding a bicycle superimposed his image on the policeman as he streaked by. All ghosts, ghosts of many years ago or the unborn of many years hence . . . What is real and what is false?

(玻璃窗的上角隱隱約約反映出弄堂裏一個小巡警的縮小的影子，晃著膀子踱過去。一輛黃包車靜靜在巡警身上輾過。小孩子把袍子掖在褲腰裏，一路踢著球，奔出玻璃的邊緣。綠色的郵差騎著自行車，複印在心經尚，一溜煙掠過。都是些鬼，多年前的鬼，多年後的沒投胎的鬼……什麼是真的，什麼是假的?)<sup>100</sup>

The ricksha running over the policeman’s shadow, and the superimposing of a bicycling postman over the policeman, all help to create the impression that they are unreal and interchangeable, caught inside an everlasting cycle with no escape.<sup>101</sup>

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chuan Chang, “Fiction and autobiography: spatial form in ‘The golden cangu’ and *The woman warrior*,” in *Modern Chinese women writers*, ed. Michael S. Duke, 25-43.

<sup>100</sup> “The golden cangu,” 177--178. *Twentieth-century Chinese stories* 166-167.

<sup>101</sup> Lucien Miller & Hui-chuan Chang, “Fiction and autobiography,” 34.

In "Indian Summer," long descriptive paragraphs and pictorial images are used to shatter temporality and create an illusory extension of time:

A white mist had risen in the city at twilight. A ricksha came from afar, a purplish shadow seemed especially slow, and slowly passed. The car's dimmed headlights glowed faintly. Even bicycle bells sounded muffled.

The protruding veranda downstairs looks like the front of a ship. A young man downstairs is sitting enjoying the cool wind, he has one leg up on the iron railing, his chair tilts back. With the legs of the chair as a support, he continues to rock without falling down. He has a mosquito newspaper in his hand, but he is not reading it anymore. The sky darkens. There are many fruit peels on the floor. A Xiao would like to sweep them away for him -- the night is so clear and deep, like the earth under the ocean. The dark veranda is a sunken ship with glittering jewelry boxes. A Xiao feels quiet and happy.

( 傍晚的城中起了一層白霧，霧裏的黃包車紫陰陰地遠遠來了，特別地慢，慢慢過去一輛；車燈，腳踏車的鈴聲，都收斂著，異常輕微，仿佛上海也是個紫禁城。

樓下的陽台伸出一角來像輪船頭上。樓下的一個少爺坐在外面乘涼，一隻腳蹬著欄干，椅子向後斜，一晃一晃，而不跌倒，手裏捏一份小報，雖然早已看不見了。天黑了下來，地下吃了一地的柿子菱角。阿小恨不得替他掃掃掉——上上下下都是清森的夜晚，

如同深海底。黑暗的陽台便是載著微明的百寶箱的沉船。阿小心裏很靜也很快樂。)<sup>102</sup>

The next day after the rainstorm, A Xiao finds that the chair on which the young man sat is still outside on the downstairs veranda. The scene of him enjoying the wind seems to have happened a year ago.

The brown lacquered chair, still unfolded, sways and creaks in the wind, as if a typical Chinese is sitting on it. Peanut shells, plum seeds and plum skins are scattered all over the floor. A mosquito newspaper had blown near the drain, and was tightly sucked in between the railings. A Xiao throws a quick glance downstairs and indifferently thinks: there are such messy people in this world! Lucky that they are not in her world.

(那把棕漆椅子，沒放平，吱格吱格在風中搖，就象有個標準中國人坐在上頭。地下一地的菱角花生殼，柿子核與皮。一張小報，風捲到陰溝邊，在水門汀欄干上吸的牢牢地。阿小向樓下只一瞥，漠然想道：天下就有這麼些人會作躑！好在不是在她的範圍內。)<sup>103</sup>

The repetition of two lengthy descriptions of the veranda retards the pace of narration and focuses the story on its psychological dimension. It creates a sense of epiphanic tranquillity and illumination, as the momentum of the work moves sideways rather than forward.<sup>104</sup> This tranquillity accords well with A Xiao's sympathetic

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<sup>102</sup> "Indian summer," 144-145. "Shame, amah!" 110. I have made slight modifications to Zhang's translation. The second paragraph does not appear in "Shame, amah!".

<sup>103</sup> "Indian summer," 149.

<sup>104</sup> See Joseph Frank, *The idea of spatial form*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

understanding and compassionate tolerance of human folly. The world is dirty and corrupt, but she still cares for it, to the extent of wanting to sweep the floor for a stranger downstairs. She believes that she does not care for anything that does not directly concern her. However, her behavior is exactly the opposite to what she believes.

### Language

Zhang's language is an elegant and embellished style, with much flamboyant poetic diction and exquisite imagery. While it is undeniable that Zhang's descriptive language renews the stylistic beauty of traditional literary Chinese, the real dynamism of her language springs from the strong historical awareness conveyed by her use of detailed description, classical diction and imagery. As noted by C. T. Hsia, Zhang's diction and imagery "suggest the persistence of the past in the present, the continuity of Chinese modes of behavior in apparently changing material circumstances."<sup>105</sup>

Zhang's use of diction and imagery shows the great influence which *Dream of the Red Chamber* had on her. C. T. Hsia notes her use of "intimate boudoir realism" in her description of physical details. He comments:

Nothing like this has appeared in Chinese fiction since the great novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* . . . But in contrast to the world of stable moral standards and feminine fashions of the latter novel, Zhang deals with a society in transition,

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<sup>105</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 396

where the only constants are the egoism in every bosom and the complementary flicker of love and compassion.<sup>106</sup>

### Detailed Description

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Zhang is greatly concerned with the strong persistence of traditional sensibilities among the Chinese in a changing society. Set in modern cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, the world of Zhang's short stories is nevertheless one of traditional furniture and clothing. Detailed description is used to create a disturbing atmosphere of the new intruding on the old, and to show the failure of the characters to adjust to their changing realities.

For example, at the beginning of "Love in a Fallen City," Zhang carefully describes the resounding *huqin* (胡琴) played by Fourth Master Bai,

A *huqin* was squeakily playing in a night full of a myriad of twinkling lights. Its melody busily ran up and down the scales, telling endless sorrowful stories that were better not to ask about!

(胡琴啾啾啞啞拉著，在萬盞燈的夜晚，拉過來又拉過去，說不盡的蒼涼的故事——不問也罷！)<sup>107</sup>

The *huqin* is a classical Chinese instrument, like a one-stringed violin, with a desolate sound. The choice of such an old instrument as background music in this story reflects the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> "Love in a fallen city," 203.

fact that, just like the *huqin*, which “fails to follow the pace of life” (跟不上生命),<sup>108</sup> the Bai family fails to keep up with the changing times. They even insist on using the old time, while the rest of Shanghai has turned their clocks ahead one hour so as to save daylight.

In “Aloeswood: The First Burning” as well, Mrs. Liang’s house is decorated with Chinese antiques such as jade snuffboxes, ivory *Guanyin* statues and bamboo screens. She is keen to show her British friends the China of their expectations. Even her maids are dressed in costumes that resemble those worn by maids in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Her lofty white house, covered with a layer of green ceramic tile in imitation of the traditional style, is compared to an ancient imperial tomb. Refusing to keep up with the times, she is trying to “shut herself up in her own little world to be a small-scale Empress Dowager” (關起門來做小型慈禧太后).<sup>109</sup>

### Imagery

Zhang’s extensive use of nature and animal imagery in symbolically describing scenes and characters has been discussed in detail by several critics.<sup>110</sup> What I would like

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> “Aloeswood ashes: the first burning,” 293. Translation by Curtis Peter Adkins, “The short stories of Chang Ai-ling: a literary analysis,” Master’s thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1968, 26.

<sup>110</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 396. Stephen Cheng, “Themes and techniques in Eileen Chang’s stories,” *Tamkang review* 8, no. 2 (Oct. 1977): 182-185. Cao Shujuan (曹淑娟), “The sun and moon imagery in Zhang Ailing’s fiction” (Zhang Ailing xiaoshuo zhong de ri yue yixiang 張愛玲小說中的日月意象), in *Zhang Ailing’s fictional world* (Zhang Ailing di

to discuss are her typically Chinese images, which again hint at the persistence of the old in the new. I shall concentrate on two pairs of images, which have the common point of suggesting the destiny of an individual or a group.

In "Red Rose and White Rose," with two typically Chinese similes, Zhang contrasts the life of an average man and that of Zhenbao, an engineer returned from overseas:

At best, the average man's life is like the 'peach blossom fan,' he bangs his head and blood flows onto the fan. But painting some little something on it turns it into a branch of peach blossoms. Zhenbao's fan was still empty, his brush was poised and the ink in readiness . . . He had only to lower his brush.

In fact, there were also faint imprints of human figures on his empty fan. Like a kind of fine, ancient writing paper, there were slightly protruding light purple figures in traditional costumes printed on the white background -- before his wife and his mistress, there had been two insignificant women in his life.

( 普通人的一生，再好些也是『桃花扇』，撞破了頭，血濺到扇子上。就這上面略加點染成爲一枝桃花。振保的扇子卻還是空白，而且筆酣墨飽，窗明几淨，只等他落筆。

那空白上也有淡淡的人影打了底子的，像有一種精緻的仿古信箋，白紙上印出微凸的粉紫古裝人像——在妻子與情婦之前還有兩個不要緊的女人。）<sup>111</sup>

The “peach blossom fan” is an allusion to the Qing play *The Peach Blossom Fan* (Taohua shan 桃花扇) by Kong Shangren (孔尚任). In the drama, the protagonist, Li Xiangjun (李香君), is determined to wait for her lover, Hou Fangyu (侯方域). She refuses another proposal of marriage by banging her head against the ground, and her blood drips onto the fan her lover gave her as a love token. By adding some brushstrokes to the blood stains, she turns the stains into peach blossoms. She then asks a friend to send this “peach blossom fan” to her lover, to show how faithful her love is.<sup>112</sup>

In Zhang’s story, the allusion is used with a subtle, ironic touch. The protagonist’s romantic, faithful love in the play is contrasted with the rash, futile attempts of average men in the short story. The act of adding brushstrokes to the blood stains, instead of showing resolution, denotes much resignation and a willingness to settle for less. The second image in the passage under discussion shows Zhenbao’s confidence in his ability to control his destiny, a faith that turns into tragedy. In contrast to the average man’s blood-stained fan, his fan is an empty one. However, despite the fact that he always views himself as “a good person,” he does not have a clear history -- his empty fan is just like an ancient writing paper, with imprints of female figures in the background.

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<sup>111</sup> “Red rose and white rose,” 58.

<sup>112</sup> Kong Shangren (孔尚任), *The peach Blossom Fan* (Taohua shan 桃花扇), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980. K’ung Shang-jen (=Kong Shangren), *The peach blossom fan*, trans. Chen Shih-hsiang and Harold Acton, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

In "The Golden Cangue" and "Jasmine Tea," Zhang uses two images: that of a pinned butterfly, and that of an embroidered bird, in order to describe the destiny of two women who married for financial security. Married to a cripple out of her family's greed, Qiqiao in "The Golden Cangue" is compared to a butterfly pinned as a specimen by her golden earrings:

She stared straight ahead, the small, solid gold pendants of her earrings like two brass nails nailing her to the door, a butterfly specimen in a glass box, bright-colored and desolate.

(她睜著眼睛直勾勾朝前望著，耳朵上的實心小金墜子像兩隻銅釘把她釘在門上——玻璃匣子裏蝴蝶的標本，鮮艷而悽愴。)<sup>113</sup>

While Qiqiao is a lively butterfly pinned to death by gold pendants, Feng Biluo in "Jasmine Tea," who reluctantly submits to her parents' will and marries into the wealthy Nie family, is compared to an embroidered bird, mildewing and moth-eaten on a door-screen:

She had not been a bird in a cage. The caged bird, once the cage was open, could still fly away. She has been a bird sewn on a door-screen -- a white bird encircled by embroidered golden clouds on a melancholy door-screen of purple brocade. As the months and years went by, her feathers became darkened, then mildewed, then moth-eaten. When it was time for her to die, she died on the door-screen. (她是繡

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<sup>113</sup> *Romances*, 162. *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 151.

在屏風上的鳥——悵鬱的紫色緞子屏風上，織金雲朵裏的一只白鳥。年深月久了，羽毛暗了，霉了，給蟲蛀了，死了還死在屏風上。) <sup>114</sup>

### Characterization

Zhang's characterization shows a modernist spirit in its psychological sophistication and its attempt to deal with sensitive and forbidden themes, such as the Oedipus Complex in "The Golden Cangue," the Electra Complex in "Heart Sutra" and the search for a father-figure and the depiction of brutal jealousy that leads to a violent denouement in "Jasmine Tea." As works about love between men and women, one of the distinguishing features of Zhang's characterization is her skillful description of sexual psychology, especially male sexual psychology. A scene in "Heart Sutra" may serve as a good example:

The two of them [Xiaohan, the daughter, and Fengyi, the father], one was inside the house and the other was outside . . . Separated by the glass, he placed one hand on Xiaohan's shoulder -- Her round arm was ivory-yellow, her nightgown was an enchanting floral organza, with a background of lacquered vermilion; it had little children with black hair and white faces printed on it, numberless children moved slowly beneath his fingertips. Xiaohan -- that lovely grown-up child, a child with a voluptuous, ivory-yellow body . . . Fengyi abruptly removed his hand, as if he

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<sup>114</sup> "Jasmine tea," 263. Translation by C. T. Hsia, with slight modifications. *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 408-409.

had been burnt, the color of his face changed. He turned around and did not look at her.

(兩個人一個在屋子裏面，一個在屋子外面……隔著玻璃，峰儀的手按在小寒的胳膊上——象牙黃的圓圓的手臂，袍子是幻麗的花洋紗，珠漆似的紅底子，上面印著青頭白臉的孩子，無數的孩子在他的指頭縫裏蠕動。小寒——那可愛的大孩子，有著豐澤的，象牙黃的肉體的大孩子……峰儀猛力掣回他的手，仿佛給火燙了以下，臉色都變了，掉過身去，不看她。) <sup>115</sup>

This paragraph provides the strongest support to the interpretation that, not only does Xiaohan suffer from an Electra Complex, but Fenyi is also physically attracted to his daughter. Freudian overtones are obvious: the children printed on Xiaohan's nightgown, which "move slowly beneath his fingertips," are plainly representations of Xiaohan.

In "Red Rose and White Rose," Zhang's characterization of Zhenbao is reinforced by a network of imagery, which in turn elucidates his character. Many metaphors repeat and form clusters through mutual association. For instance, when Zhenbao and Jiaorui first meet, Jiaorui spatters some soap suds onto Zhenbao's hand, since she has just come out from a bath. Zhang then describes Zhenbao's psychological reactions:

Unwilling to wipe them off, he let them dry by themselves. He felt a puckering sensation on that patch of skin, as if a mouth were sucking lightly . . . Her striped bathrobe, which was untied, loosely hugged her body. From those light ink-

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<sup>115</sup> "Heart sutra," 422-423.

colored stripes, one could almost guess her silhouette. Each stripe, each inch was vibrant.

(他不肯擦掉它，由它自己乾了，那一塊皮膚上便有一種緊縮的感覺，像有張嘴輕輕吸著它似的……一件紋布浴衣，不曾繫帶，鬆鬆合在身上，從那淡墨條子上可以約略猜出身體的輪廓，一條一條，一寸一寸都是活的。) <sup>116</sup>

When Zhenbao goes into the bathroom and turns on the tap, the vibrancy of Jiaorui's body is transferred symbolically to the tap water.

There seemed to be a warm wick inside the lukewarm water. A thread of water hung from the tap, coiling its way down, each inch was vibrant.

(微溫的水裏就像有一根熱的芯子。龍頭裏掛下一股水一扭一扭流下來，一寸一寸都是活的。) <sup>117</sup>

The repetition of the phrase "each inch was vibrant" shows that Zhenbao is sexually attracted to Jiaorui. Zhang then describes Zhenbao's discovery of Jiaorui's hair left in the bathroom:

The piles of hair on the floor swirled lightly, like the shadows of ghosts . . . She was everywhere, tangling and snarling.

(地下的頭髮成團飄逐如同鬼影子……到處都是她，牽牽絆絆的。) <sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> "Red rose and white rose," 64-65.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 66.

Jiaorui's ghost-like image haunts him to the extent that, in her shiny green gown, she spontaneously dyes everything around her green:

She was wearing a long gown which dragged on the floor, a gown made of the shiniest moist green, which dyed everything it touched green. She moved a small step, leaving, it seemed, a green trace in the space where she had been.

(她穿著的一件曳地的長袍，是最鮮辣的潮濕綠色，沾著什麼就染綠了。她略略移動一步，仿佛她剛才所佔有的空氣便留著個綠跡子。)<sup>119</sup>

This network of images contrasts Jiaorui's spontaneity with Zhenbao's desire for self-control, and also elucidates Jiaorui's sexual attraction for Zhenbao, through the repetition of associations such as sucking and entangling. As well, through the careful description of how Zhenbao subtly transfers Jiaorui's vibrancy to the running tap water, Zhang is able to show his subconscious thoughts by means of metaphor.<sup>120</sup>

Evocation of male sexual psychology are by no means unusual in modern Chinese literature. What distinguishes Zhang from her predecessors is the metaphorical dimension of her descriptions. In comparison to Yu Dafu's sentimental outcries and the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 71. Translation by Carolyn Thompson Brown, "Eileen Chang's 'Red rose and white rose': a translation and afterward," Ph. D. diss. The America University, 1978, 22.

<sup>120</sup> Another example which shows Zhang's subtlety in her description of male sexual psychology can be found in "Youthful years." Zhang describes Cynthia's sweater from Ruliang's eyes: "the rosy purple sweater on her body is a sweater with a heart beat--he sees her heart beating, he feels his heart beat." (她身上的玫瑰紫絨線衫是心跳的絨線衫——他看見她的心跳，他覺得他的心跳。)" "Youthful years," 452.

New Perceptionists' explicit, exaggerated descriptions of city sexual mores, Zhang shows a subtle sensuality which is her own.<sup>121</sup>

### **The position of Zhang's short stories in modern Chinese literature**

As mentioned in the chapter on Zhang's early works, Zhang was influenced by both the classical Chinese novel and the popular Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction, as well as the elegant romantic style of the New literature. From her early historical novels and family tragedies to "The Bull" and "Farewell to the Concubine," Zhang oscillated between these two literary poles in an experimental manner. It is not until "Aloeswood Ashes-- the First Burning" and "Aloeswood Ashes -- the Second Burning" that she finds her own individual style -- a style marked by her use of narrative framing devices, derived from the traditional Chinese novels and short stories, combined with a strikingly modern anti-romantic vision, influenced by her reading of post-War Western literature.

In "Works of My Own," Zhang makes the following comments on her short stories:

When someone from the old school reads my works, they feel at ease but still not quite comfortable. Those from the new school think it interesting but still not

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<sup>121</sup> Shui Jing contrasts Yu's sentimentalism and technical crudities with Zhang's sophistication in a comparison of their descriptions of male sexual psychology. "A Male under the periscope -- I read 'Red rose and white rose'" (Qianwangjing xia yi nanxing --wo du hong bai meiguai 潛望鏡下一男性——我讀紅白玫瑰), *The art of Zhang Ailing's fiction*, 101-127.

serious enough. But I can write no other way, and I am sure that I am not taking the easy way out by traveling the middle path and avoiding the two extremes. The only demand I place on myself is to try to write things that are more real.

(我的作品，舊派的人看了覺得還輕鬆，可是嫌它不夠舒服。新派的人看了還覺得有些意思，可是嫌它不夠嚴肅。但我只能做到這樣，而且自信也並非折衷派。我只求自己能夠寫得真實些。)<sup>122</sup>

A comparison between Zhang and the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school, which Zhang calls the “old school,” shows that, despite their common interest in the theme of love, the Butterflies school is no match for Zhang in terms of vision and artistry. While Zhang explains her characters’ failures as a result of the desire and irrationality deep within the human heart, the Butterflies stories simply explain these failures through chance events or the appearance of villains. Influenced by *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Butterflies stories simply borrow its formal outline as a story of star-crossed love and take from it descriptions of hypersensitive, crazily-infatuated young lovers.<sup>123</sup> Zhang appreciates the immense sophistication and the metaphorical dimension of the great novel, and derives from it her use of boudoir realism in detailed descriptions and her use of symbolic imagery.

The greatest difference between Zhang and the “new school” -- that is, May Fourth literature -- is her anti-romantic vision and her distrust for modern civilization,

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<sup>122</sup> “Works of my own,” 23. Translation by Wendy Larson, with slight modifications. “My writing,” 439.

<sup>123</sup> Perry Link, *Mandarin ducks and butterflies*, 64.

which mark a conscious break with the May Fourth optimistic romanticism, and show an affinity with the disillusioned post-World War I British literature. However, in contrast to the Resistance literature of the thirties and forties, which views literature as propaganda, Zhang inherits from May Fourth literature its humanitarian viewpoint and its constant search for new artistic forms. As well, Zhang's focus on the experience of the subjective individual also differs from Resistance literature's creation of myths of victory, describing typical incidents through heroic scenes.

The last issue I would like to raise in this chapter is the relation between Zhang and the New Perceptionists. There are scholars who consider the members of the New Perceptionist School in Shanghai in the late-twenties and early-thirties, such as Shi Zhicun (施蛰存), Mu Shiying (穆時英) and Liu Naou (劉訥鷗), as the pioneers of Modernism in modern China.<sup>124</sup> However, their experimental works are far from being mature or sophisticated. I would claim that, while Zhang read Perceptionist fiction in her adolescence,<sup>125</sup> and was influenced by its careful observation of modern urban lifestyles, her work develops far beyond the Perceptionist school in creating her unique style: a combination of an urban sensuality with a concern for the conflict between the traditional

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<sup>124</sup> Lee Oufen (Leo Lee 李歐梵), *An anthology of new perceptionist fiction* (Xin ganjue pai xiaoshuo xuan 新感覺派小說選), Taipei: Yunchen chubanshe, 1988, 2. Zhang Yingjin, "The texture of the metropolis: modernist inscriptions of Shanghai in the 1930s," *Modern Chinese literature* 9, no.1 (Spring 1995): 11-30. For the New Perceptionists' descriptions of modern Shanghai lifestyle, see Yomi Braester, "Shanghai's economy of the spectacle: The Shanghai race club in Liu Na'ou's and Mu Shiying's stories," *Modern Chinese literature*. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 39-56.

<sup>125</sup> "The guileless words of a child," 17. "Book review: *Train without a track*," 496.

and the modern. The greatest difference between the Perceptionists and Zhang is that Perceptionist fiction is usually built on a fixed formula -- a psychologically abnormal male protagonist coming across a *femme fatale*. Narrated from the mentally-ill protagonist's viewpoint and over-emphasizing the subconscious, such stories are broken up into absurd, fragmentary episodes that fail to point to any concrete themes. In contrast, Zhang shows a special concern for ordinary people in changing times, through her descriptions of quotidian events in their lives. None of her characters, not even Qiqiao in "The Golden Cangue," can be considered totally insane. Instead of emphasizing life's absurdity and the impossibility of human communication, as the New Perceptionist School does, Zhang's work shows great sympathy for and compassionate understanding of human folly. With her modernist vision and artistic excellence, I consider Zhang's fiction the first mature manifestation of Modernism in China.

## Chapter Six: Informal Essays

In January 1945, four months after the publication of *Romances*, Zhang published her first essay collection, *Gossip*, which shows a wide variety of styles and a feminine sensuality. While her short stories demonstrate her links with the traditional Chinese novel and her assimilation of Western fictional techniques, her essays show the influence of modern Western informal essays. In a forum on *Romances* that Zhang attended in August 1944, Tan Weihan (譚惟翰) commented that Zhang's essays were better than her short stories, in which he thought individual sentences fared better than the overall structure.<sup>1</sup> Ban Gong (班公) also comments that while her short stories are experimental, her essays, with their flamboyant style and extensive use of metaphor, already have an established position in the development of modern Chinese literature.<sup>2</sup> These comments, though tentative and preliminary, are significant in pointing out a direction for the critical discussion of Zhang's essays, in which Zhang creates a prose style that is sophisticated and rich in imagery.

However, despite occasional favorable comments, *Gossip* was not received with the kind of wide popularity that *Romances* enjoyed among readers and critics. No in-depth analysis of her essays appears on the Mainland until the eighties, not to speak of

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Musong (朱慕松), "Notes on the tea forum on *Romances*" (Chuanqi jipian caihui ji 「傳奇」集評茶會記), in *Complete collection of materials on Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing ziliao dachuanji 張愛玲資料大全集), ed. Tang Wenbiao, Taipei: Shibao wenhua chubanshe, 1984, 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

criticism in English.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will focus on Zhang's innovations in the essay genre as a modern writer, and her contribution to the development of the modern Chinese essay.

### The modern Chinese essay

Before turning to the discussion of Zhang's essays, I shall briefly sketch the background of the development of modern Chinese vernacular prose and poetry. During the May Fourth Movement, intellectuals called for a radical replacement of the standard classical language, viewed as inadequate for expressing feelings in a modern time, by a vernacular language. Hu Shi (胡適) (1891-1962) summarizes his opinion on literary reform in the following eight points:

1. Writing should have a substance
2. Do not imitate the ancients
3. Emphasize the technique of writing
4. Do not mourn without an illness
5. Eliminate hackneyed and formal language
6. Do not use allusions
7. Do not use parallelism
8. Do not avoid vulgar diction<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Even Edward Gunn's detailed study of wartime essays in his *Unwelcome muse* does not include Zhang's essays.

<sup>4</sup> Hu Shi, "Some modest proposals for the reform of literature" (Wenxue hailiang chuyi 文學改良芻議), *New youth* (Xinqingnian 新青年) 2, no. 5 (Jan. 1917). Translation by Kirk A. Denton, *Modern Chinese literary thought*, 123-124.

Theodore Hutters notes that the May Fourth classical/vernacular conflict was also in a sense the latest manifestation of an underlying struggle that had been going on for hundreds of years between writers favoring pattern and allusion on the one hand, and those who favored lack of adornment on the other. Classical prose is hobbled by a formal rhetorical baggage that draws attention to itself rather than to the thing being described, but if rhetoric is abandoned altogether, the style that remains is so lacking in resonance as to satisfy no one.<sup>5</sup>

What further complicated the problem was an uncritical imitation of European styles that grew out of writers' fear of being imprisoned by tradition. Such borrowings revealed the hollowness of the new vernacular and proved to be unacceptable for both the literary and political spectrum.<sup>6</sup> The result was the prevalence of such censorious terms as "Foreign eight-legged essays" (*yang bagu* 洋八股). Zhou Zuoren, writing in 1936, commented that what the vernacular created was, if not a new type of vulgar eight-legged essay, a preachiness in the old foreign manner.<sup>7</sup>

With a strong awareness of language and style, Zhang was especially conscious of this problem. In her English essay, "Still Alive," she comments, "Young writers in the early days of the Republic, in resolutely discarding classical speech, never succeeded in

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Hutters, *Qian Zhongshu*, Boston: G. K. Hall & Company, 1982, 73.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Qu Qiubai's (瞿秋白) criticisms in "The question of popular literature and art" (Dazhong wenyi de wenti 大眾文藝的問題), *Wenxue daobao* (文學導報), June 10, 1932. Paul Pickowicz trans., *Modern Chinese literary thought*, 418-427.

<sup>7</sup> Zhou Zuoren, Introduction to *Comprehensive anthology of the new Chinese literature* (Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi: daoyan 中國新文學大系、導言), in *Comprehensive Anthology of the New Chinese Literature* (Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi 中國新文學大系), vol. 1, Hong Kong: Wenxue Yanjiu, 1962, 12. Translation by Theodore Hutters, *Qian Zhongshu*, 73.

overcoming the Chinese attachment to quotations. The new literature too often combines the pedantry of the classical speech with the clumsy foreignized style freshly imported (sic).”<sup>8</sup> In “Poetry and Nonsense” (Shi yu hushuo 詩與胡說), she laments that modern Chinese literature was at an impasse: “When we try to express our feelings in the way of the Tang dynasty, it seems that everything has already been said by others. When we try to use our own words, it never sounds right, it’s hard to say why. This indeed causes anxiety.” (用唐朝人的方式來說我們的心事，仿佛好的已經給人說完了，用自己的話呢，不知怎麼總是說得不像話，真是急人的事。)<sup>9</sup>

The essay scene of Zhang’s time was dominated by two leading magazines: *Heaven and Earth* (Tiandi 天地) and *Past and Present* (Gujin 古今). *Heaven and Earth*, edited by Suqing (蘇青), was a light magazine publishing works on everyday life. *Past and Present*, founded by Zhu Po (朱樸), a deputy-minister of communications in the Nanking regime, was a literary magazine that followed the leisurely, humorous and erudite style of Zhou Zuoren and Lin Yutang. What its editors, Zhou Li’an (周黎庵) and Tao Kangde (陶亢德), advocated were humor and the Gongan school (公安派) of “self cultivation” (xingling 性靈).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Still alive,” 435. By “the clumsy foreignized style freshly imported,” Zhang means the style of foreign translations which prevailed China in the May Fourth Era.

<sup>9</sup> “Poetry and nonsense,” *Gossip*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> The Late Ming Gongan school, with Yuan Hongdao (袁宏道) and Yuan Zongdao (袁中道) as representatives, is celebrated for its fresh, lucid style. Best sources on the Gongan school in English are: Chou Chih-p’ing, *Yuan Hung-tao and the Kung-an school*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1988. Jonathan Chaves, “The panoply of images: a reconsideration of the literary theory of the Kung-an school,” *Theories of the arts in China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, 341-364. See also Prada Books, *Poetry and prose of the Ming and Qing*, Beijing: Chinese literature, 1986, 109. Edward Gunn considers the wartime essay scene as a “resurgence of tradition.” *Unwelcome muse*, 151-192.

However, adherents of this school easily fell into the following traps: naturalness becomes insipidity, erudition becomes copying from books. In fact, contributors to *Past and Present* were almost exclusively bibliophiles and antiquarians interested in studied trivia. Yu Qie (予且), a representative essayist in wartime Shanghai, serves as the best example of this trend. Following Lin's enthusiasm for British hobbies and Zhou's love for tradition, Yu's writings went off in the direction of popular Chinese hobbies such as fortune-telling. However, since he lacked Lin's skeptical humor and Zhou's learned style, much of Yu's works were tedious and insipid.

It was against this literary background that Zhang rapidly rose as an essayist. In contrast to her contemporaries' insipid style, Zhang's essays show her stylistic talent through witty satire, splendid imagery, epigrammatic sentences and shrewd arguments. This is significant in that, daring to go against a popular trend that valued implicitness she showed her brilliance to the full. What I would like to emphasize is that Zhang demonstrated a way to a new vernacular prose by drawing extensively from the traditional literary heritage. Her style is often marked by allusions, metaphors and subtle integration of classical and vernacular diction. It is her ability to balance all these factors in a vivid literary style that set her apart from her predecessors and contemporaries.

While Zhang's style bears the influence of classical Chinese literature, her tone and structure, as mentioned in the previous chapter, come mainly from modern British essays and the "Western magazine style" advocated by *West Wind*. A comparison between traditional and Western influences on Zhang and on her contemporaries shows

the following two points: while Zhang's contemporaries flocked to write in a Europeanized language, she retreated into tradition and created her own vernacular prose style. While most essayists of the occupation period followed the popular trend of "self cultivation" and archaeological studies, Zhang inherited Lin Yutang's witty humor and interest in western hobbies.

### The term "informal essay"

In a sense, Zhang can be considered as a successor to, or comrade of, the British-influenced modern Chinese essayists such as Liang Yuchun (梁遇春), Lin Yutang, Qian Zhongshu (錢鍾書) and Liang Shiqiu (梁實秋) in perpetuating their familiar style. In fact, her works repeatedly mention the British informal essayists whom she admired, such as Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley and Somerset Maugham.<sup>11</sup> She also translated *The Portable Emerson* into *Selected Collection of Emerson* (艾默森選集) in 1964.<sup>12</sup>

The European informal essay begins in the seventeenth century with the injection of personal elements into aphoristic and moralistic writings. Its main features include "humor, graceful style, rambling structure, unconventionality or novelty, freedom from stiffness and affectation, incomplete or tentative treatment of a topic."<sup>13</sup> With the

<sup>11</sup> "On women," "On dancing," *Gossip*, 82, 175. "Flowers and pistils floating on the waves," *Sense of loss*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Van Doren ed., *The portable Emerson*, New York: The Viking Press, 1946. *Selected writings of Emerson*, Hong Kong: Huangguan, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon, *A handbook to literature*, 181

appearance of periodical essays in the early eighteenth century, the genre became smaller in format and gossipy in manner. Its main purpose was to entertain and instruct. The genre later embraced a wider range of topics, became more intimate, more individualistic, and made more use of humor and satire.<sup>14</sup>

Zhang's informal essays show the influence of their western counterparts in a number of ways. Features of Western informal essays such as personal elements, whimsicality, humor and grace are also major elements in Zhang's essays. As "occasional papers" dealing with the "folly, extravagance, and caprice of the present age," western informal essays are designed for middle-class city readers. Similarly, Zhang's essays, directed at Shanghai city-dwellers, also excel in psychological studies of human relationships and in skeptical portrayals of human vanity. Common subjects for discussion in Western essays can also be found in Zhang's works. A large number of her essays are familiar talks on topics such as fashion, dancing, painting, music, money, eating and city lives.

The gossipy nature of the genre is another similarity between Western informal essays and Zhang's works. It is notable that the titles of Zhang's essays and essay collections, such as "Whispering Words," "The Guileless Words of a Child" and "Gossip," bear a strong mark of eighteenth-century western periodicals such as *The Whisperer*, *Tatler* and *Female Tatler*, which greatly contributed to the rise of the informal

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 179-181.

essay genre. In “The Fun of Living in an Apartment” (Gongyu shenghuo jiqu 公寓生活記趣), Zhang makes the following interesting comment,

It is a natural human tendency to be interested in others' business. Why not peep into the private lives of others? It brings temporary happiness to the one who peeps, while the one being peeped at suffers no great loss. Whenever it's a question of giving and receiving happiness, there is no need to calculate too much. What is the point of calculating? -- Suffering is long, life is short.

(人類天生的是愛管閒事。爲什麼我們不向彼此的私生活裏偷偷的看一眼呢，既然被看者沒有多大損失而看的人顯然得到了片刻的愉悅？凡事牽涉到快樂的授受上，就犯不著斤斤計較了。較量些什麼呢？——長的是磨難，短的是人生。) <sup>15</sup>

Zhang also frankly admits her interest in gossipy mosquito newspapers and scandalous stories.<sup>16</sup> This interest in gossip arises mainly from her love for secular life and her fondness for explicating the subtlety of human behavior.

Aphoristic sayings, which form one of the origins of western informal essays, are also one of the major features in Zhang's essays. Zhang's epigrammatic sayings are always shrewd and straight to the point. In “On Dancing” (Tan tiaowu 談跳舞), she says in the manner of a Biblical prophet:

Civilized men cannot be primitive even if they would like to. They have neither terror nor respect for the primitive. They think that when they are tired, they can

<sup>15</sup> “The fun of living in an apartment,” *Gossip*, 32-33.

<sup>16</sup> “Whispering words,” 149, “On writing,” 271.

escape into infancy or primitiveness and take a rest; in fact they cannot -- they can only find rest in stupidity.

(文明人要原始也原始不了；他們對野蠻沒有恐怖，也沒有尊敬。他們自以為他們疲倦的時候可以躲到孩子裏去，躲到原始人裏去，疏散疏散，其實不能夠——他們只能在愚蠢中得到休息。)<sup>17</sup>

In "See What's on the Road" (Daolu yimu 道路以目), she talks about the fascination with expectations:

All things are like this -- the cake already made is no match for the one in the manufacturing process [in the oven], the essence [essential attribute] of cake is all in its smoky smell while baking. Those who like to be preached at can learn a lesson here.

(天下事大抵如此——做成的蛋糕遠不及製造中的蛋糕，蛋糕的精華全在烘焙時期的焦香。喜歡被教訓的人，又可以在這裏找到教訓。)<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned above, Zhang started her literary career by contributing periodical essays to the English magazine *The Twentieth Century*. When she started writing essays in Chinese, she gradually freed herself from the limitations imposed by periodical publications and took up a more intimate and individualistic style. This change also parallels the development of the Western informal essays. In the nineteenth century, a revival of interest in informal essays accompanied the Romantic movement. Freed from the space restrictions of periodical publications, and encouraged by a public eager for

<sup>17</sup> "On dancing," 168.

<sup>18</sup> "See what's on the road," *Gossip*, 61-62.

“original” work, the modified informal essays became more personal, more intimate, longer in length and more varied in content. Their main features are whimsical humor, easy sentiment, nimble imagination, buoyant style, autobiographical interest, urbanity and refined literary taste.<sup>19</sup> However, it should be noted that, while Zhang’s autobiographical essays show a similarity to the Western autobiographical essays in their personal elements, they differ greatly from the sentimental tone and Europeanized diction of the May Fourth romantic essays.

#### **Variety in Zhang’s essays**

Borrowing the title of Zhang’s collection “Zhang’s outlook” and her essay title “whispered words,” Yu Bin proposes to group Zhang’s informal essays into the two above-named styles. While the “Zhang’s outlook” style is lively, dynamic and motivated by curiosity, the “whispered words” style is more personal and introspective. While the “Zhang’s outlook” style is learned and erudite, demonstrating arguments with insightful ideas, the “whispered words” style shows whimsical humor, subtle sentiment, nimble imagination, and creative metaphors. Her discursive essays, such as “The Change of Fashions,” “Westerners Watching Peking Operas and Other Issues” and “The Religion of the Chinese” serve as examples of the first group; her autobiographical essays, such as

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<sup>19</sup> Holman & Harmon, *Handbook*, 181.

“The Guileless Words of a Child,” “Whispering Words” and “Embers” belong to the second one.<sup>20</sup>

A comparison of Zhang’s early and later essays shows that she started with the “Zhang’s outlook” style in her *Twentieth Century* publications, shifted to the introspective “whispered words” style in *Gossip*, and finally returned to the more detached “Zhang’s outlook” style in her works after 1949, which are collected in *Zhang’s Outlook, Sequel and Lingerin Rhyme*. *Gossip*, published shortly after *Romances*, represents Zhang’s informal essays at their best. While her *Twentieth Century* period can be considered as a warm-up, her later essays reveal her interest turning to academic annotations, translation and textual research. For example, her later essays “On Reading” (Tan kanshu 談看書) and “Postscript to ‘On Reading’” (Tan kanshu houji 談看書後記) show an interest in anthropology and archaeological studies; while “‘Ah?’” (A “嘎?”) and “Grass Oven Cake” (Cao lubing 草爐餅) are basically linguistic research on dialects.

However, a closer look at Zhang’s informal essays shows that labels such as “Zhang’s outlook” style and “whispered words” style are far from being adequate to describe their wide variety of experimental styles, which distinguish her novelty and unconventionality as a modern essayist. Her essays take the form of aphorisms (“Aphorisms of Yanying” Yanying Yulu 炎櫻語錄, “Aphorisms of My Aunt” Gugu Yulu 姑姑語錄 and “Good Luck” Jili 吉利), anecdotes (“Love” Ai 愛 and

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<sup>20</sup> Yu Bin, *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 152.

“‘Weakening Heroic Spirit and Long-lasting Love’ and Other Issues” Qiduan qingchang ji qita 氣短情長及其他), reading notes (“On Reading” “Postscript to ‘On Reading’” and “On Women” Tan nüren 談女人), overhearings (“Women on the Same Tram” You nü tongche 有女同車) parables (“Under the Umbrella” Yüsan xia 雨傘下) and parodies (“Talking about Carrots” Shuo hulobo 說胡蘿蔔).

Zhang’s essays vary in length from four lines (less than a hundred and fifty words), to fifty pages (thirty thousand words). Her shortest essay, “Under the Umbrella,” shows the sadness of being a poor friend or poor relative of the rich through the following parable: In rainy days, people without umbrellas only get their heads all wet where they try to stay out of the rain by crowding under others’ umbrellas, since water keeps running down from the brims of the umbrellas. Towards the end of the essay, Zhang writes, “The poor who make friends with the rich always end up losing. I once thought about this on a rainy street, but did not write it down till now, because it is too similar to Mr. Na An’s tea-party style.”(窮人結交富人，往往要賠本，某一次在雨天的街頭想到這一節，一直沒有寫出來，因為太像納廠先生茶話的作風了。)<sup>21</sup>

Na An is the pen name of Yan Esheng (嚴謬聲), a famous writer for mosquito newspapers in the thirties and forties.<sup>22</sup> It is obvious that Zhang is making fun of the dry and tasteless “tea-party” style of her contemporaries. In “Talking about Carrots,” she further subverts the prevailing style by using it against itself-- ironically employing its form and style to show its hollowness. Here is the whole essay:

<sup>21</sup> “Under the umbrella,” *Gossip*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> Lai Fengyi ed., *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing’s essays*, 173

One day, there was a bowl of carrot and meat soup on our dinner table. I asked my aunt, “‘Western flowery carrots’ and barbarian carrots were both imported from other countries a long time ago, weren’t they?” She said, “Don’t ask me about things like that, I don’t know.” She thought for an instant, and continued,

“I first came across barbarian carrots when I was small and raised a small animal called “jiaoyouzi.” I fed it carrots. I remember at the time, grandmother used to cut the carrots in half, then cut them into halves again, and put them into the cage. Probably one can say that she cut them small -- or there has never been such thing as carrots in our food. I don’t understand why we let “jiaoyouzi” eat them.”

I secretly remembered what she said, wrote it down word for word, and could not help laughing because here was already a popular essay if the title “Talking about Carrots” were added. Though it is not natural and thought provoking, at least it could be published in a newspaper or magazine. Moreover, what was marvelous about it was that it was so short -- it ended immediately after it started, leaving a lingering aftertaste.

有一天，我們飯桌上有一樣蘿蔔煨肉湯。我問姑姑：『洋花蘿蔔跟胡蘿蔔都是古時候從外國傳進來的罷？』她說：『別問我這些事。我不知道。』她想了一想，接下去說道：

『我第一次同胡蘿蔔有接觸，是小時候養『叫油子』，就餵牠胡蘿蔔。還記得那時候奶奶（指我的祖母）總是把胡蘿蔔一切兩

半，再對半一切，塞在籠子裏，大約那樣算切得小了。——要不然我們吃的菜裏向來沒有胡蘿蔔這樣東西的。——爲什麼給『叫油子』吃這個，我也不懂。』

我把這一席話暗暗記下，一字不移地寫下來，看看忍不住要笑，因爲只消加上『說胡蘿蔔』的標題，就是一篇時髦的散文，雖說不上沖淡雋永，至少放在報章雜誌裏也可充充數。而且妙在短——才抬頭，已經完了，更使人低徊不已。<sup>23</sup>

Speaking of natural style in writing and in self-cultivation, Zhang wrote that in Shanghai one can easily find writings with a genuine, natural style. Shanghai people use language clearly and are sophisticated in manners. Even more important is that they always show a kind of resigned self-mockery and an indulgence of human foibles which arise from their tolerance and understanding.<sup>24</sup> In Zhang's works, one also finds a sympathetic tolerance for human follies and everyday, ordinary life. Instead of retreating into an ivory tower, she warns herself "to stay away from the intellectuals' old habit of being pedantic about words, and to seek practical, real life from daily necessities such as firewood, rice, oil, salt, soap, water and sunshine." (設法除去一般知書識字的人咬文嚼字的積習，從柴米油鹽、肥皂、水與太陽之中去找尋實際的人生。)<sup>25</sup> It is this passionate love for secular life that separates her from the hermetic "naturalness" of Zhou Zuoren and the bohemian lifestyle of Lin Yutang.

<sup>23</sup> "Talking about Carrots," *Gossip*, 110.

<sup>24</sup> "After all, I am a Shanghainese," 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> "Is it necessary to have the right name," *Gossip*, 40.

### Love for everyday life and a strong sensuality

*Gossip* shows Zhang's love for everyday life and her delight in the sensual world. She is able to find pleasure in the most trivial things. She likes bubbles floating on milk, and makes sure that she swallows these white pearls every time she drinks milk. She goes from shop to shop, comparing the patterns and prices of floral cloth, as if she is appreciating famous paintings.<sup>26</sup> Window shopping brings her joy, as she finds a motionless drama in the showcases.<sup>27</sup> Showing her prodigious appreciation for colors and smells, Zhang says in "On Music,"

Colors and smells always make me happy . . . for example, color: In a summer room, the curtain was down. There was a pile of neatly-folded old pajamas on the alpine rush mat: greenish-blue tops in summer cloth (summer materials), green pants in silk. The blue and green together created a rich and delicate beauty. Just an incidental glance at them as I was sitting nearby made me feel happy for a while. Another time, an air-defense shade was added to the lamp in the bathroom. The greenish-black light shining on the bathtub and basin made everything pale. Green and dark hues came out from the white enamel, adding a new layer of luster to it . . . Looking in from the door, the room appeared exactly like a modern painting, having a new kind of three dimensional effect. I felt that I was absolutely unable to go inside, but I did go in. As if I had done something

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<sup>26</sup> "The guileless words of a child," 15, 13.

<sup>27</sup> "See what's on the road," 60.

impossible, I felt happy and frightened at the same time, as if I was numbed by an electric shock, and had to come out immediately.

In short, colors are only sad when they are fading; whenever they attract one's attention, they are lovely. They make the world more real.

It is the same with smells. I am fond of many odors that people dislike: the slight mustiness of fog, the smell of dust after rain, leeks, garlic, cheap perfume . . . When milk is overboiled and when firewood is burned black, their charred fragrance makes me feel hungry. The odor of new paint, because of its newness, is invigorating: it is as if you are spending the new-year holidays in a new house, clean, cool and suggestive of prosperity.

(顏色與氣味常常使我快樂……譬如說顏色：夏天房裏下著簾子，龍鬚草蓆上堆著一疊舊睡衣，摺得很整齊，翠藍夏布衫，青綢褲，那翠藍與青在一起有一種森森細細的美，並不一定使人發生什麼聯想，只是在房間的薄暗裏挖空了一塊，悄沒聲地留出這塊地方來給喜悅。我坐在一邊，無心中看到了，也高興了好一會。

還有一次，浴室裏的燈新加了防空罩，青黑的燈光照在浴缸面盆上，一切都冷冷地，白裏發青發黑，鍍上一層新的潤滑……從門外望進去，完全像一張現代派的圖畫，有一種新的立體。我覺得是絕對不能走進去的，然而真的走進去了。仿佛做到了不可能的事，高興又害怕，觸了電似地微微發麻，馬上就得出來。

總之，顏色這樣東西，只有沒顏落色的時候是淒慘的；但凡讓人注意到，總是可喜的，使這世界顯得更真實。

氣味也是這樣的。別人不喜歡的有許多氣味我都喜歡，霧的輕微的霉氣，雨打濕的灰塵，蔥蒜，廉價的香水……牛奶燒糊了，火柴燒黑了，那焦香我聞見了就覺得餓。油漆的氣味因為簇嶄新，所以是積極奮發的，仿佛在新年房子裏過新年，清冷，乾淨，興旺。) <sup>28</sup>

Despite the fact that Zhang enjoyed urban sounds,<sup>29</sup> music made her sad. “All music is sad . . . I am most afraid of the violin, it is like flowing water. All the things that one cherishes and holds fast to in life flow away with it.” (一切的音樂都是悲傷的……我最怕的是凡啞林，水一般地流著，將人生緊緊把握貼戀著的一切東西都流了去了。) <sup>30</sup> Preferring Bach to Romantic composers such as Beethoven and Chopin, Zhang once again shows her anti-Romantic stance.<sup>31</sup> She comments that the symphony “is like the vast and mighty May Fourth movement that rushes forward, and makes everybody’s voice its own. As soon as one opens one’s mouth, one is startled by the depth and greatness of one’s own voice, which comes roaring out from all directions, including the front, the back, the left, and the right. It is also like hearing someone talk to you when you first wake up, you are not sure if it is you talking or if it is someone else, and feel a sense of blurred horror.” (浩浩蕩蕩五四運動一般地衝了來，把每一個人的聲音都變了它的聲音，前後左右呼嘯喊嚓的都是自己的聲音，人一

<sup>28</sup> “On music,” *Gossip*, 194-195. The last paragraph is based on C. T. Hsia’s translation, with slight alterations made. C. T. Hsia, in *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 393-394.

<sup>29</sup> “The fun of living in an apartment,” 28.

<sup>30</sup> “On music,” 195.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 200. In “On painting,” Zhang also professes her dislike for paintings of the Romantic tradition. *Gossip*, 184.

開口就震驚於自己的聲音的深宏遠大；又像在初睡醒的時候聽見人向你說話，不大知道是自己說的還是人家說的，感到模糊的恐怖。）<sup>32</sup>

Although Zhang professes to like music less than colors and smells, one finds the most brilliant use of synesthetic imagery in her description of various kinds of music.<sup>33</sup> Zhang's use of audio-visual sense transfer in describing piano music in the following passage may serve as an example,

The piano keys that rise and fall create a shaky, desolate feeling, as if it is a rainy dawn, and the sky would never lighten. The hollow sound of raindrops falling onto the western iron shed, so hollow that it makes one feel uneasy. The pianist occasionally employs the pedal, the tones are linked together, and that is merely like a strong wind that blows the rain into smoke. After the wind passes, there is again the scattered ticktack of the rain.

Playing the piano is also like hastily running up the back stairway used by servants, coolies or salesmen in a skyscraper. There are only the gray cement stairs, the black iron railings, the gray cement walls on both sides, the red western iron buckets, and the dusty, cold, odorless winter garbage piled in the corners of the stairs. One walks up all the way in that tall, gloomy, drafty building without meeting anyone. One can only walk upstairs.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>33</sup> Synesthesia "is the psychological term for experiencing two or more modes of sensation when only one sense is being stimulated. In literature the term is applied to descriptions of one kind of sensation in terms of another; color is attributed to sounds, odor to colors, sound to odors, and so on." M. H. Abrams, *A glossary of literary terms*, 187.

(紛紛的琴字有搖落、寥落的感覺，仿佛是黎明，下著雨，天永遠亮不起來了，空空的雨點打在洋鐵棚上，空得人心裏難受。彈琴的偶爾踩動下面的踏板，琴字連在一起和成一片，也不過是大風把雨吹成了煙，風過處，又是滴滴搭搭稀稀朗朗的了。

彈著琴，又像在幾十層樓的大廈裏，急急走上僕人苦力推銷員所用的後樓梯，灰色水泥樓梯，黑鐵欄干，兩旁夾著灰色水泥牆壁，轉角處堆著紅洋鐵桶與冬天的沒有氣味的灰寒的垃圾，一路走上去，沒遇見一個人；在那陰風慘慘的高房子裏，只是往上走。) <sup>34</sup>

As C. T. Hsia comments, Zhang developed “a prose fraught with the richest visual imagery of any modern Chinese writer.” <sup>35</sup> In the following two examples -- descriptions of Bach’s music and of Hawaiian music -- she shows her ability to associate different sounds with a varied range of richly visualized images:

Bach’s music lacks any courtly delicacy or royal, heroic spirit. The interior world is clumsy but endowed with facility. In a little wooden house, a clock on the wall ticks and its pendulum swings; people drink milk from wooden bowls; ladies curtsy with the hems of their skirts held up; on the green meadows, there are thoughtful cows and sheep, and white thoughtless clouds; a weighty joy is ringing loudly, like a golden wedding bell.

(巴黑的曲子並沒有宮樣的纖巧，沒有廟堂氣也沒有英雄氣，那裏面的世界是笨重的，卻又得心應手；小木屋裏，牆上的掛鐘滴搭搖擺

<sup>34</sup> “On music,” 199.

<sup>35</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 393.

；從木碗裏喝羊奶；女人牽著裙子請安；綠草原上有思想的牛羊與沒思想的白雲彩；沉甸甸的喜悅大聲敲動像金色的結婚的鐘。）<sup>36</sup>

Hawaiian music is very simple, it is forever the tinkling sound of a ukulele, as if at the end of summer or the beginning of autumn, a mat has been rolled up and hung on a bamboo pole under the sun. That is a yellow checked straw mat from Taiwan. There is a stripe of golden sunlight on the edge which has been rolled up by the wind. Someone sits on the ground, taking a nap with a straw hat covering his or her face. That someone is not alone -- a lover who leans against his or her shoulder is snoring like the sound of a hair dryer in a barber shop. It is the most simple immersion. If one is not very deeply in love with this sound, it would probably cause annoyance, since the feeling of time-wasting is so obvious that it makes one anxious.

(夏威夷音樂很單調，永遠是『吉他』的琮琤，仿佛在夏末秋初，蓆子要收起來了，掛在竹竿上曬著，花格子的台灣蓆，黃草蓆，風捲起的邊緣上有一條金黃的日色。人坐在地下，把草帽合在臉上打瞌睡。不是一個人——靠在肩上的愛人的鼻息咻咻地像理髮店的吹風。極單純的沉涵，如果不是非常非常愛著的話，恐怕要嫌煩，因為耗費時間的感覺太分明，使人發急。)<sup>37</sup>

Besides the use of synesthetic imagery, Zhang's essays also excel in their use of vivid personification. While Zhang's short stories are cold and detached, her essays are

<sup>36</sup> "On music," 200.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 202.

lively and filled with passion. The use of personification in them is very significant, as it provides a sharp contrast to her short stories, which tend to objectify human beings.<sup>38</sup>

Zhang's essays are urban narratives in which the city appears as an animated and lovable place.<sup>39</sup> She is especially skillful at defamiliarizing the everyday and ordinary. Hot water pipes in apartments have a hot temper; flies and insects are absent on upper floors, because they are afraid of height, and would faint if they looked down from the windows; trams which return to the train-yard one by one are compared to noisy children who happily queue up for home: "'Cling, clang, clang, clang!' In the middle of that noise, there is a kind of tameness that arises from exhaustion. They are children who are going to bed, waiting for their mothers to brush and wash them." (『克林，克賴，克賴，克賴！』吵鬧之中又帶著一點由疲乏而生的馴服，是快上床的孩子，等著母親來刷洗他們。)<sup>40</sup>

Zhang's prose style shows a kind of flamboyance which is uniquely her own. In "On Writing," she says that she loves writing because of the lingering taste of words.<sup>41</sup> Zhang strove for an ornate style ever since she began to write. In "My Dream of Genius," she comments on her own style:

<sup>38</sup> Examples include "Your new sister-in-law's lips, chop them up and they'll make a heaping dish!" (你新嫂子這兩片嘴唇，切切倒有一大碟子。) in "The golden cangue," *Romances*, 183, *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 172 and "Altogether, she looked like squeezed out toothpaste -- shapeless." (她的整個人像擠出來的牙膏，沒有款式。) in "Blockade," *Romances*, 492.

<sup>39</sup> Contrary to the common belief that a village is the ideal place to escape from the world, Zhang holds that an apartment is best for hermits. While some roasted meat may cause endless gossip in a village, one can change in front of the window in privacy if one lives on the top floor of a building. "The fun of living in an apartment," 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 27, 28-29.

<sup>41</sup> "On writing," 273.

I am especially sensitive to colors, musical notes, and diction. When I play the piano, I imagine that the eight notes have different personalities, dancing together hand in hand in colorful clothes and hats. When I began to write, I liked to use colorful and sonorous words like “pearl gray”, “dusk”, “subtle” “splendor,” and “melancholy.” As result, I always had the problem of being too elaborate. Even now, I still like to read *The Strange Tales of a Chinese Studio* and vulgar Paris fashion reports, only because of their attractive diction.

(對於色彩，音符，字眼，我極為敏感。當我彈奏鋼琴時，我想像那八個音符有不同的個性，穿戴了鮮艷的衣帽攜手舞蹈。我學寫文章，愛用色彩濃厚，音韻鏗鏘的字眼，如『珠灰』，『黃昏』，『婉妙』，『splendour』，『melancholy』，因此常犯了堆砌的毛病。直到現在，我仍然愛看聊齋誌異與俗氣的巴黎時裝報告，便是爲了這種有吸引力的字眼。)<sup>42</sup>

It should be noted that what is more important than a mastery of diction in Zhang's essays, is a persistent creative exploration. Zhang consistently searches for original expressions for her sensual perceptions. In “Go! Go Upstairs,” she comments on the disappointment of knowing that what she wants to say has already been said by others: You feel a sense of loss, if others say it better than you do. If their expressions are not as good as yours, that would be even sadder.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “My dream of genius,” 278.

<sup>43</sup> “Go! Go upstairs,” 94.

Zhang's use of metaphor shows her creativity at its best. Commenting on Malaysian civilization, she says, "covering their steaming, barbarous foundation with a layer of vulgar civilization," Malaysian civilization is "just like an under-sized Western floral quilt, failing to cover the legs after it has covered the head." (在蒸悶的野蠻的底子上蓋一層小家氣的文明，像一床太小的花洋布棉被，蓋住了頭，蓋不住腳。)<sup>44</sup> Describing the empty feeling of an overseas Chinese, she says, "Her emptiness is like a closed empty room, a little room with bugs on the white painted walls. As well, it is an inn on a gloomy day -- an overseas Chinese is an orphan in thought." (她的空虛是像一間空關著的，出了霉蟲的白粉牆小房間，而且是陰天的小旅館——華僑在思想上是無家可歸的……)<sup>45</sup> On the thoughts of city dweller, she says, "strapped curtains serve as the background for the city dwellers' thoughts. The pale white stripes are the running trams -- parallel, balanced and clear, the gurgling river which flows into their consciousness." (城裏人的思想，背景是條紋布的幔子，淡淡的白條子便是行馳著的電車——平行的，勻淨的，聲響的河流，汨汨流入下意識裏去。)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "On dancing," 171.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>46</sup> "The fun of living in an apartment," 28.

### Identification with the feminine and sympathetic understanding of life

Zhang's identification with the feminine is closely related to her identification with everyday life, since to her, the female sex represents the anchored and the ordinary aspect of life. In "On Women," she says,

In our imagination, superman is always a male. Why? Perhaps the reason is that . . . our civilization is a civilization of men . . . Superman is male, but god is feminine. Superman is different from god. Superman represents progress and living purposes. God represents an encompassing sympathy, benevolence, understanding and peace. (我們想像的超人永遠是個男人。爲什麼呢？大約是因爲……我們的文明是男子的文明。……超人是男性的，神卻帶有女性的成分，超人與神不同。超人是進取的，是一種生存的目標。神是廣大的同情，慈悲，了解，安息。)<sup>47</sup>

In Zhang's opinion, "women are most universal and fundamental. They stand for the cycle of the four seasons; stand for the earth; stand for the cycle of birth, aging, illness and death; stand for eating, drinking and reproduction. Women tie down to the pole the kind of human wisdom that would fly off into space." (女人是最普遍的，基本的，代表四季循環，土地，生老病死，飲食繁殖。女人把人類飛越太空的靈智拴在踏實的根樁上。)<sup>48</sup> Holding an anti-romantic attitude concerning commonly-accepted notions about classical goddesses, Zhang says,

<sup>47</sup> "On women," 84-85.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 84.

The goddess of the *Luo* river is merely a beautiful lady in ancient clothing; the goddess *Guanyin* who is worshipped by the masses is merely a beautiful lady in ancient clothing with bare feet. The half-naked, tall and voluptuous Greek statue is merely a female athlete; the Virgin Mary with golden hair is merely a pretty wet-nurse who has breast-fed in front of others for more than a thousand years.

(洛神不過是個古裝美女，世俗所供的觀音不過是個古裝美女赤了腳，半裸的高大肥碩的希臘石像不過是個女運動家，金髮的聖母不過是個俏奶媽，當眾餵了一千餘年的奶。)<sup>49</sup>

To her, it is the earth mother in Eugene O'Neill's play *The Great God Brown*, a prostitute who shows a great sympathetic understanding towards human limitations, who deserves the title of "goddess."<sup>50</sup>

Compassionate understanding is a thread that runs through Zhang's works in various genres, especially in her short stories and informal essays. In *Gossip*, two passages that describe the paintings of Gauguin and Cézanne serve as good examples of her compassion. The opening of "Unforgettable Paintings" (Wangbuliao de hua 忘不了的畫) carefully describes Gauguin's famous painting "Nevermore":

A Hawaiian woman lies naked on a sofa, quietly listening to a pair of lovers outside the door who are talking together as they walk past. Outside the door, in the rosy dusk, spring rises like mist, giving a sublime feeling. For this healthy woman around thirty, everything is over . . . we may suppose she must have been

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

deeply in love, but now it is “nevermore.” . . . In our society, a woman slightly older has no chance of love, and if she still hopes for it, she must run into endless trivial disappointments and embarrassing irritations, which deeply wound her self-esteem. However, this woman does not have any superfluous sadness; because of her clear understanding, she is calm and at peace. There is even the trace of a detached smile on her expressionless brown-yellow face.

(一個夏威夷女人裸體躺在沙發上，靜靜聽著門外的一男一女一路說著話走過去。門外的玫瑰紅的夕照裏的春天，霧一般地往上噴，有昇華的感覺，而對於這健壯的，至多不過三十來歲的女人，一切都完了……想她必曾經結結實實戀愛過，現在呢，『永遠不再』了……在我們的社會裏，年紀大一點的女人，如果與情愛無緣還要想到愛，一定要碰到無數小小的不如意，齷齪的刺惱，把自尊心弄得千瘡百孔，她這裏的卻是沒有一點渣滓愛戴悲哀，因為明淨，是心平氣和的，那木木的棕黃臉上還帶著點不相干的微笑。) <sup>51</sup>

This Hawaiian woman reminds one of A Xiao in “Indian Summer,” who views the love games between Mr. Schacht and his mistresses as “*déjà-vu*.” To both A Xiao and the Hawaiian woman, nothing is new and unique in a world which they view with a kind of tranquil understanding.

Commenting on Cézanne’s two portraits of his friend, Victor Chocquet, Zhang says that the first portrait “does not lack warm-heartedness in the midst of satire” (諷刺並不缺少溫情), while in the second one, “there is love in every stroke, love for his

<sup>51</sup> “Unforgettable paintings,” *Gossip*, 156-157.

friend, and love for his friend's attachment to the world.” (這張畫每一筆都有愛，對於這人的，這人對於人生的留戀。) <sup>52</sup>

This kind of warm-heartedness in the midst of satire shows a great significance. Zhang finds it extremely sad that, for the majority of people, what follows the disillusionment with blind passion and sentimentality is always bitter satire, instead of compassion and affection. As she says in “Westerners Watching Peking Operas and Other Issues,”

Most young people love China without knowing what it really in that they love. Unconditional love is admirable -- the only danger is that sooner or later idealism will encounter the reality, which . . . gradually extinguishes their passion.

(多數的年輕人愛中國而不知道他們所愛的究竟是一些什麼東西。無條件的愛是可欽佩的——唯一的危險就是：遲早理想要撞著了現實，每每使他們……把心漸漸冷了。) <sup>53</sup>

In “I See Suqing,” Zhang makes the following comment on the contemporary literary scene:

Nowadays in China, satire pleases people easily. In the previous period (May Fourth), people were sentimental. Filled with the dreams and sighs of adolescence, they were like people in a fog, who did not have real understanding of life. Once they acquired real understanding, they saw through everything and started to satirize everything . . . In fact, satire is a necessary stage in getting rid of

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<sup>52</sup> “On paintings,” 188.

<sup>53</sup> “Westerners watching Peking Operas and other issues,” 100.

trite sentimentality. However, it is easy to stay at the stage of satire, not knowing that there is an affection which goes beyond the sentimental.

(在中國現在，諷刺是容易討好的。前一個時期，大家都是感傷的，充滿了未成年人的夢與嘆息，雲裏霧裏，不大懂事。一旦懂事了，就看穿一切，進到諷刺。——本來，要把那些濫調的感傷清除乾淨，諷刺是必須的階段，可是很容易停留在諷刺上，不知道在感傷以外還可以有感情。) <sup>54</sup>

Zhang's essays show a subtle combination of a passionate love for life and a desolate weariness. As a result, a suppressed sadness always underlies her witty, delightful tone. On the one hand, she enjoys identifying herself as a "common citizen" (小市民) and a "money worshipper" (拜金主義者); on the other hand, she understands that "materialistic stimulation is like a shallow basin of water, though one may feel a misty delight sitting in the hot rising steam, the water is, after all, too shallow for total immersion." (刺激性的享樂，如同浴缸裏淺淺地放了水，坐在裏面，熱氣上騰，也感到昏濛的愉快，然而終究淺……也難求得整個的沉涵。) <sup>55</sup> There is always a "desolate threat" (惘惘的威脅) at the back of her mind. <sup>56</sup> She says repeatedly that "this is a chaotic era" (這是亂世), and keeps wondering if all human efforts and striving for glory are "doomed to be destroyed" (注定了要被打翻的). <sup>57</sup> She laments, "After all, life is cruel. Watching our timid wishes that keep becoming

<sup>54</sup> "I see Suqing," *Lingering rhymes*, 93.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Preface to the second edition of *Romances*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 99, 87-88.

smaller, I feel a boundless sorrow.”(總之，生命是殘酷的。看到我們縮小又縮小的、怯怯的願望，我總覺得有無限的慘傷)。<sup>58</sup>

It is this tragic awareness of life's vicissitudes and futility that makes her cherish every little bit of transient happiness. In “On Music,” she writes about the experience of hearing, late one night from afar, the pop song “Roses open everywhere”:

The night of vast Shanghai looked boundless, since few families had turned on their lights . . . In the cruel, vast and fragmented night, it was impossible to imagine roses opening everywhere. However, with a tiny voice, this woman kept insisting optimistically that roses were indeed opening. Even if they were just roses embroidered on top of mosquito-nets, on lampshades, on the brims of hats, on sleeves, on the tips of shoes, or on parasols, that tiny completeness is lovely and kind.

(偌大的上海，沒有幾家人點著燈，更顯得夜的空曠……在這樣凶殘的，大而破的夜晚，給它到處開起薔薇花來，是不能想像的事，然而這女人還是細聲細氣的很樂觀地說是開著的。即使不過是綢緞的薔薇，綴在帳頂，燈罩，帽沿，袖口，鞋尖，陽傘上，那幼小的圓滿也有它的可愛可觀。) <sup>59</sup>

Zhang is unwilling to accept a naive optimism. However, in an era in which nothing is dependable, even a “tiny completeness” is cherishable. As Zhang says in her “Preface to the Second Edition of *Romances*” and “I See Suqing”: “Time rushes by, larger destruction

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>59</sup> “On music,” 204.

is coming.”<sup>60</sup> “Peace in the future will not belong to us when it comes. Each of us can only seek our own peace nearby.” (將來的平安，來到的時候已經不是我們的了，我們只能各人就近求得自己的平安。) <sup>61</sup>

As a skeptical modern person, Zhang is aware of the incompleteness of life. What distinguishes her from total cynics such as Aldous Huxley, is her willingness to discover the humane and lovable in a dirty and chaotic world.<sup>62</sup> As she says in “Poetry and Nonsense,”

There is something lovely about living in China. In the middle of all that dirtiness, chaos and weariness, one can always discover cherishable things which make one happy for a whole morning, a whole day, or even a whole life.

(活在中國就有這樣可愛：髒與亂與憂傷之中，到處會發現珍貴的東西，使人高興一上午，一天，一生一世。) <sup>63</sup>

Despite the fact that Zhang at times mocks human follies in an ironical and detached manner, she never gives up her hope and her love for life. I shall end this chapter with Zhang’s description of a photograph of herself:

I stood on the veranda and looked at that photo under the blue moon. The smile in the photo seemed to have a feeling of contempt -- perhaps it was because I was

<sup>60</sup> Preface to the second edition of *Romances*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> “I see Suqing,” 99.

<sup>62</sup> Zhang used to like Huxley, but later found him too simple-minded. “Two voices,” *Lingering rhymes*, 64-65. This essay is translated into English by Edward Gunn under the title “International Shanghai, 1941: coffee house chat about sexual intimacy and the childlike charm of the Japanese” in *Modern Chinese writers: self-portrayals*, ed. Jeffrey Kinkley & Helmut Martin, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992, 278-301.

<sup>63</sup> “Poetry and nonsense,” 136-137.

too interested, so interested that I did not seem to have any feeling at all.

However, in that gaze, there was still a subtle love and an attachment to this world.

(我立在陽台上，在藍藍的月光裏看那張照片，照片裏的笑，似乎有藐視的意味——因為太感到興趣的緣故，仿佛只有興趣沒有感情了，然而那注視裏還是有對這世界的難言的戀慕。) <sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Photographs in the preface and other issues” (Juanshou yuzhao ji qita 卷首玉照及其他), *Lingering rhymes*, 50-51.

## Chapter Seven: Novels

From 1944 to 1968, Zhang Ailing wrote nine novels altogether, including two unfinished early works, *Interlocking Rings* (Lianhuantao 連環套) and *Genesis* (Chuangshi ji 創世記). Since her career as a novelist involves a long time span, an analysis of her novels can observe the changes between her early and her later psychology. For the purposes of analysis, I shall group her novels chronologically into four groups:

The first group includes *Interlocking Rings* (1944) and *Genesis* (1945). Showing the great influence on Zhang of such traditional novels as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (Jin Ping Mei 金瓶梅) and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*,<sup>1</sup> this group represents her early abortive attempts at longer works. The second group includes *So Much Regret* (Duoshao hen 多少恨, 1947), *Eighteen Springs* (Shiba chun 十八春, 1950) and *Little Ai* (Xiao Ai 小艾, 1950). This group approaches the style of the popular novel, which is shown in the greater emphasis on plot, the use of simple diction and a reduction in the use of artistic devices, such as metaphor and imagery. In *Eighteen Springs* and *Little Ai*, written after 1949, political overtones are present which had been absent in Zhang's previous works. This could be explained by the Communist literary control policy after

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<sup>1</sup> Qi Yan (齊煙) & Ru Mei (汝梅) annot., *Plum in the golden vase with newly carved illustrative figures* (Xinke Xiuxiang Piping Jin Ping Mei 新刻繡像批評金瓶梅), Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1990. Hsiao-hsiao-sheng, *The golden lotus*, trans. Clement Egerton, New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1959. There is a better but unfinished translation by David Tod Roy, *The plum in the golden vase or, Chin p'ing mei*, vol 1, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. See also C. T. Hsia, *The classical Chinese novel*, 165-202.

they took over China. Since Zhang was basically uninterested in politics, these political overtones can be regarded as her means of protecting herself from leftist criticisms. The third group includes *The Rice-Sprout Song* (English and Chinese version with the title Yangge 秧歌, 1954) and *Love in Redland* (Chidi zhi lian 赤地之戀 1954, English version *Naked Earth* 1964), which are her “anti-Communist” novels, written in Hong Kong. The fourth and last group includes *Embittered Woman* (Yuannü 怨女 1966, English version *Rouge of the North*, 1967) and *Romance of Half a Lifetime* (Bansheng yuan 半生緣 1969). These two novels are rewritings of her earlier short story “The Golden Cangue” and her novel *Eighteen Springs*. *Rouge of the North* was written in Hong Kong, while *Romance of Half a Lifetime* was written in the United States.

### *Interlocking Rings and Genesis*

Novel-writing for Zhang was a long process of experimentation. Her first two novels can be considered as forming an experimental period, during which she struggled hard with the genre. Both works are episodic and unfinished. The theme which the two novels have in common is Zhang’s concern for women’s destiny.

*Interlocking Rings* appeared in consecutive issues of the monthly literary magazine *Phenomena* (Wanxiang 萬象) from January to June, 1944. It tells of the story of a Cantonese woman, Nixi (霓喜), who is sold to an Indian, Ya Heya (雅赫雅), by her foster-mother at the age of fourteen. Ya owns a medium-sized textile shop and has to work behind the counter himself. He needs her to take care of the household, but is

unwilling to marry her, because of her fierce personality. They live together without formal marriage for twelve years, and raise a son and a daughter. Nixi, a charming coquette, always stands in front of their textile shop and flirts with passersby. Ya, for his part, is having an affair with a rich widow to advance his business. After Nixi and Ya discover each other's disloyalty, they have a serious quarrel, which leads to their break-up. This is the end of the first "ring" in the story.

Nixi leaves with her two children and becomes the concubine of Dou Yaofang (竇堯芳), an old Chinese who owns a prosperous medicine shop. They live together for five years, during which time Nixi gives birth to another boy and girl. Jealous of Dou's wife on the Mainland and sexually unsatisfied, Nixi seeks compensation in an affair with a young shopkeeper in the medicine shop, Cui Yuming (崔玉銘). Dou knows of the affair, but nevertheless puts up with it. When he becomes seriously ill, he gives a branch-shop to the young shopkeeper and tells Nixi to marry him. However, Nixi discovers that Cui is only after her money, and moreover he has been married for two years without telling her about it. After Dou's death, Nixi leaves with her four children, and this ends the second "ring."

Moving out of the medicine shop, Nixi becomes the lover of a British engineer, Mr. Thomason. He visits her every day and provides her with a wealthy life. She gives birth to a girl, who greatly resembles him in appearance. He loves this daughter very much, and Nixi believes that he will eventually marry her because of this child. However,

her dream shatters when she learns of his marriage to a socially important lady in England. In the end, she receives only a cheque for her “services” throughout the years.

The fourth “ring” in the story is an incomplete one. Nixi happens to meet Ya Heya’s Indian relative, Francis, whom she for once fails to entice. He asks someone to deliver a marriage proposal. Nixi mistakenly thinks that he wants to marry her, only to find out that it is her eldest daughter whom Francis is interested in. For Nixi, “flirting is the only way to maintain her self-esteem;” she once believed that “in the realm of sex, she was a strong person” (在色情的圈子裏她是個強者).<sup>2</sup> However, this time she comes to realize that she is past her prime -- “She knew that she was old, she held onto the sofa and stood up, her stiff knee suddenly cracked, she felt as if something inside her had broken.” (霓喜知道她是老了。她扶著沙發站起身來，僵硬的膝蓋骨克啦一響，她裏面仿佛有點什麼東西，就這樣破碎了。)<sup>3</sup>

It is understandable that this loosely-structured novel met with criticism. In May 1944, the famous translator, Fu Lei (傅雷), published his “On Zhang Ailing’s Fiction” (Lun Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo 論張愛玲的小說) in *Phenomena*, under the pen-name Xun Yu (迅雨). He criticized *Interlocking Rings* as being poor in content and lacking in psychological development. The work lacks a main theme, and its characters lack typicality. Showing the local color of modern Hong Kong, Zhang awkwardly borrows out-dated diction from *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

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<sup>2</sup> “Interlocking rings,” *Zhang’s outlook*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

In short, to Fu *Interlocking Rings* is merely an obscene novel which aims to entertain its readers.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that Fu's criticism, which stresses character portrayal and typical circumstances, was mainly based on his views of eighteenth and nineteenth-century European literature, which was one of the sources of the "orthodox style" of modern Chinese novels in the thirties.<sup>5</sup> His opinions conspicuously clashed with Zhang's individualistic style, which kept its distance from fashionable views and interests. Zhang took the opportunity to defend her position and candidly expressed her literary views in "Works of My Own," an essay which I have discussed in Chapter Five.

In this essay, Zhang states her dislike of "the kind of classic narration that resorts to irreconcilable antagonisms between good and evil, body and soul." In response to Fu Lei's opinion that her characters lack typicality, she states that it is the ordinary mass of people, instead of typical heroes and villains, which better represents an era. She claims that what she aims at is a frank portrayal of reality -- "Today living together [before marriage] has become a common phenomenon" (姘居在今天成了很普遍的現象); "my original idea was very simple: since this sort of thing does occur, I will describe it." (我的本意很簡單：既然有這樣的事情，我就來描寫它。)<sup>6</sup> She compares her

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<sup>4</sup> Xun Yu, "On Zhang Ailing's fiction," in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing, 125-126.

<sup>5</sup> Qian Liqun, "An overview of Chinese theories of fiction from the 1940s," 59 & 68.

<sup>6</sup> "Works of my own," 24. Translation by Wendy Larson, with slight modifications, "My writing," in *Modern Chinese literary thought*, ed. Kirk A. Denton, 440.

choice of subject matter with the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school and with the May Fourth literati, and makes the following comment,

This kind of cohabitation is more common in China than in other countries, but no one has ever tried to write about it seriously. The literati of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies entertainment school of writing feel they don't have enough sentiment of the "beauty and the scholar" kind, and new-style literati feel they are relationships neither of love nor of prostitution, neither healthy nor perverse. They lack the clarity of a main theme.

(這種姘居生活中國比外國更多，但還沒有人認真拿它寫過，鴛鴦蝴蝶派文人看看他們不夠才子佳人的多情，新式文人又嫌他們既不像愛，又不像嫖，不夠健康，又不夠病態，缺乏主題的明朗性。)<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that *Interlocking Rings* lacks such a main theme, it is significant that in this work, Zhang shows great concern for the modern marriage system, which echoes the attitude expressed in her earlier cultural and film criticisms, and serves as a cross-reference to Western modernist works by Russell, Huxley, and the Bloomsbury group. She says,

Modern people are exhausted, and the modern marriage system is irrational. So there is silence between husbands and wives; there are those who fear responsibility but look for momentary relief in sophisticated flirting; there are those who return to an animalistic sexual desire in their visits to prostitutes . . .

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<sup>7</sup> "Works of my own," 25. "My writing," 441, with one minor change in the translation.

And there are couples living together out of wedlock. Living together lacks the solemnity of the husband and wife relationship but is more responsible than flirting and more dignified than prostitution.

(現代人多是疲倦的，現代婚姻制度又是不合理的。所以有沉默的夫妻關係，有怕致負責，但求輕鬆一下的高等調情，有回復到動物的性慾的嫖妓……還有便是姘居，姘居不像夫妻關係的鄭重，但比高等調情更負責任，比嫖妓又是更人性的。)⁸

The subject of love and marriage is one of the major themes in Zhang's short stories and novels. Yu Duanfeng and Mr. Mi in "Lingering Love" represent the type of silent husbands and wives mentioned by Zhang, each of whom lives in his or her own world; Mr. Schacht, in "Autumnal Lament," represents those who return to simple animal instinct; Jizhe, in "the Golden Cangue," who flirts with Qiqiao but refuses her love, represents those who fear responsibility; Mr. and Mrs. Pan, in "Youthful Years," represent a couple who live together out of wedlock, but have no real communication.

As mentioned earlier, at the age of eight Zhang attempted a chapter-linked novel modeled on *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, and at thirteen she wrote a modern version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Interlocking Rings*, which is her first published novel, obviously follows the same creative method. It shows great the considerable influence of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, as well as the Song *huaben* (話

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⁸ "Works of my own," 24. "My writing," 440.

本) short stories, such as those collected in *Wise Words to Enlighten the World* (Yushi mingyan 喻世明言) and *Common Words Warn the World* (Jinshi tongyan 警世通言).<sup>9</sup>

Nixi is very similar to Pan Jinlian (潘金蓮), the heroine of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. Both are enchanting coquettes who like to dress up and stand in front of their shops flirting with passersby. Vamps who remarry several times and flirt behind their husbands' backs are very common in the *huaben* stories. Examples include Liang Shengjin (梁聖金), in "The Apotheosis of Ren the Filial Son" (Ren xiaozhi liexing wei shen 任孝子烈性為神), and Jiang Shuzhen (蔣淑珍), in "The Lovers' Rendezvous at Which Murder is Committed." (Zhang Shuzhen wenjing yuanyang hui 蔣淑珍別頸鴛鴦會).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Portuguese catholic nun, Melanie (梅臘妮), in *Interlocking Rings* also reminds one of Dame Wang (王婆), in *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, and the go-betweens in the *huaben* stories, many of whom are Buddhist nuns.

However, it should be noted that despite the similarities with traditional vernacular fiction in character portrayal, Zhang's attitude towards her characters differs greatly from that of the *huaben* authors. Instead of uttering didactic warnings against the femme fatale, Zhang shows a great sympathy for her female characters. It should be noted that in the forties cohabitation was a sensitive topic in China. In expressing sympathy for

<sup>9</sup> According to Patrick Hanan, "the earliest *huaben* texts were originally scripts for storytellers to speak from; when printed, they became popular reading matter; writers then imitated them and produced a vernacular fiction." They appeared in the Song dynasty. Their main features are brief prologues and didactic comments from the narrator. Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese vernacular story*, 1981, 28-33.

<sup>10</sup> Feng Menglong ed., "The apotheosis of Ren the filial son," *Wise words to enlighten the world*, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1978, 571-586. "The Lovers' rendezvous at which murder is committed," *Common words to warn the world*. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1957, 330-336.

women who live with men outside of the formal marriage relationship, Zhang shows her courage in going against conventional views. She writes,

What moves me about Nixi's story is her pure love for material life, something she must sometimes grasp with all her might. She wants the love of a man and at the same time wants security, but cannot get them both at once; so she ends up with neither the man nor the money. She feels that she can depend on nothing and puts all her resources into the lives of her children, hoarding a little human strength -- the most inhuman sort of hoarding. It isn't that Nixi has no feelings; she wants to love this world but can find no way to do so. She is not totally without love, but the love she receives is just the cold porridge and leftover meat of someone else's dinner.

(霓喜的故事，使我感動的是霓喜對物質生活的單純的愛，而這物質生活卻需要隨時下死勁去抓住。她要男性的愛，同時也要安全，可是不能兼離，每致人財兩空。結果她覺得什麼都靠不住，還是投資在兒女身上，囤積了一點人力——最無人道的囤積。霓喜並非沒有感情的，對於這個世界她要愛而愛不進去。但她並非完全沒有得到愛，不過只是撫食人家的殘羹冷炙……)<sup>11</sup>

Zhang's appreciation for these women's life force also serves as a cross-reference to her essays,

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<sup>11</sup> "Works of my own," 25-26. "My writing," 441. I have made slight modifications to Larson's translation.

Women who live with men have always had a lower social status than men, but most of them have a sharp, fierce life force. As far as men are concerned, these women have a kind of beguiling power, but it is the beguiling power of a healthy woman. Because if they were overly perverse, they would not be appropriate for those men's needs. They cause trouble, get jealous, argue and fight, and can be very wild, but they don't lose control. There is only one thing about them that is insufficient: their status is never clear. Doubt and fear cause them gradually to become selfish.

(姘居的女人呢，她們的原來地位總比男人還要低些，但多是些有著潑辣的生命力的。她們對男人具有一種魅惑力，但那是健康的女人的魅惑力。因為倘使過於病態，便不合那些男人的需要。她們也操作，也吃醋爭風打架，可以很野蠻，但不歇斯迭里。她們只有一宗不足處：就是她們的地位始終是不確定的。疑忌與自危使她們漸漸變成自私者。)<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to her contemporaries, who would either condemn Nixi or portray her as a pitiful lower-class woman oppressed by the "foreign bourgeoisie," Zhang writes her story from a humanist viewpoint,<sup>13</sup> and attributes Nixi's tragedy to the defects in her own

<sup>12</sup> "Works of my own," 25. "My writing," 441.

<sup>13</sup> In a comparison between Western and Chinese humanism, Michael S. Duke notes, "Chinese humanism . . . shares with its Western counterpart the supreme value of human dignity within the confines of a rational universe. It also shares the values of rationality and tolerance (a religious tolerance often considerably greater than in the Christian West) and the recognition of human frailty and fallibility; although the Chinese never made sin and guilt the essence of human nature, they were well aware of the persistent danger of evil, and thus of the necessity of stressing individual moral responsibility . . . the value of individual freedom of choice was present in Confucianism, despite the fact that political freedom in the liberal democratic sense and legal protection of human rights vis-à-vis the state were always more subordinate to the interests of the

personality. She says: "If Nixi could get along with him (Ya Heya) without conflict, it wouldn't be difficult for them to continue on together and even become old and gray together. The failure of their life together comes from defects in Nixi's personality."<sup>14</sup>

Despite its sympathetic attitude towards modern marriage and cohabiting women, *Interlocking Rings* can hardly be considered a satisfying work. In fact, its serial publication in *Phenomena* was cut short a month after Fu Lei's criticism appeared. In "Works of My Own," Zhang confesses the work's lack of a main theme, and agrees that too much borrowing of diction from traditional novels leads to artificiality. She explains that the reason she borrows this kind of out-dated vocabulary is to create a sense of distance when describing Hong Kong of fifty years ago. "It seems overdone," writes Zhang, "I think in the future I can alter this a bit." (有些過分了。我想將來是可以改掉一點的。)<sup>15</sup>

However, Zhang's second novel, *Genesis*, does not seem to show any improvement. Even Zhang herself considers it worse than *Interlocking Rings*.<sup>16</sup> *Genesis* appeared in the literary monthly *Magazine* from March to May, 1945. In a manner similar to *Interlocking Rings*, it was cut short in the middle of serialization, since Zhang

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group." Michael S. Duke, *Blooming and contending: Chinese literature in the post-Mao era*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, 127. See also Lin Yü-sheng, "The Evolution of the pre-Confucian meaning of *Jen* and the Confucian concept of moral autonomy," *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974-75): 172-204.

<sup>14</sup> "Works of my own," 24-25. "My writing," 440.

<sup>15</sup> "Works of my own," 26. "My writing," 422.

<sup>16</sup> Preface to *Zhang's outlook, Zhang's outlook*, 12

considered it to be too badly written. The existing text falls into two parts, without a clear transition between them. It opens as a love story between Yingzhu (莹珠), a nineteen year old girl working in a pharmacy, and Mao Yaoqiu (毛耀球), the twenty-six year old owner of an electrical supply company. Yingzhu comes from a traditional family in decline, which fails to support her studies but opposes her working outside. When her mother learns about their love, she entertains the idea that Yingzhu can marry into the wealthy Mao family. Yaoqiu is far from serious in his relationship with Yingzhu, however, and puts her off by his sexual advances. After this incident, Yingzhu is treated with contempt and despised by her grandmother and sisters.

In the first part of the story, Yingzhu seems to be portrayed as a pitiful character, while her grand-mother, Ziwei (紫微), seem to play the role of an oppressor who always sneers at her. The second part of the story suddenly abandons the love story and concentrates on Ziwei's inner thoughts. Zhang describes Ziwei's family background in great detail. Ziwei's father is an important late Qing official. According to Zhang's "Preface to *Zhang's Outlook*," the character Ziwei is modeled upon the younger sister of Zhang's grandmother.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Ziwei's father is modeled upon Li Hongzhang. The claim that the second part of *Genesis* basically derives from Zhang's family history finds ample support in a later work, *Album*, in which her descriptions of her grandmother's younger sister closely correspond with those of Ziwei. For example, both

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Li Hongzhang and Ziwei's father marry their youngest daughters to their subordinates' sons, who in both cases are six years younger than the daughters.<sup>18</sup>

Besides borrowings from her family history, other elements which appear in Zhang's earlier short stories are also repeated in *Genesis*. The most obvious example is the subtle relationship between Ziwei and her son, which resembles the Oedipal relationship between Qiqiao and her son in "The Golden Cangu." Moreover, the way Yingzhu's sisters take pleasure in the break-up of her relationship with Yaoqiu also reminds one of Tangqian (棠倩) and Tangli's (棠梨) jealousy about Yuqing's (玉清) wedding in "Happy Matrimony" (Hong Luanxi 鴻鸞禧).

In 1975, some thirty years after the publications of *Interlocking Rings* and *Genesis*, Tang Wenbiao re-discovered these two missing works among the old Shanghai magazines collected at the university of California. He wrote to Zhang for permission to republish them, but refused her request to review or revise the works before sending them to print. Zhang agreed to the republication, as she believed that these works would be republished even without her consent. Even worse from her point of view, was the possibility that they might be mistaken as recent works. Her consent to the republication at least gave her a chance for an explanation. Tang subsequently sent *Interlocking Rings* to *Young Lion Literature* (Youshi wenyi 幼獅文藝) and *Genesis* to *Literary Season* (Wenji 文季). When Zhang read the proofs from *Young Lion Literature*, she found them even worse than she had remembered. In "Preface to *Zhang's Outlook*," she attributes her

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<sup>18</sup> "Interlocking rings," 146. *Album*, 43.

failure to pressure from the original editors and the fact that she was exhausted by having written too much at the time.<sup>19</sup>

*So Much Regret, Eighteen Springs and Little Ai*

It was not until 1947 that Zhang attempted another novel. *So Much Regret* (Duoshao hen 多少恨), which appeared in the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school magazine *All of Us* (Dajia 大家), from May to June 1947, was her first completed novel. It was rewritten from her movie script “Endless Love” (Buliao qing 不了情), written earlier in the same year. After painful struggles with the traditional novel and the *huaben* style attempted in *Interlocking Rings* and *Genesis*, Zhang eventually settled for a light, popular style in her novel-writing. *So Much Regret* represents her first attempt to approach her readers by sacrificing artistry. This tendency continues in her subsequent novels *Eighteen Springs* and *Little Ai*. The only difference is that, while *So Much Regret* remains purely a love story, political elements are added in *Eighteen Springs* and *Little Ai* in order to avoid severe criticism from the left-wing writers and critics who dominated the literary scene from the late forties onwards.

*So Much Regret* tells of the unfruitful love between Xia Zongyu (夏宗豫) and his daughter’s private tutor, Lu Jiayin (盧家茵). Zongyu is a thirty-five year old manager with an uneducated wife whom he married following his parents’ wishes. He falls in love with Jiayin, a gentle lady ten years younger than he, but is unable to marry her. Jiayin

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<sup>19</sup> Preface to *Zhang’s outlook*, 13-14.

eventually sacrifices herself, deceiving him by saying that she is going to marry her cousin in her hometown when in reality she is going alone to a remote city to be a teacher.

As mentioned above, Zhang was fond of reading popular novels, especially those by Zhang Henshui. In a preface to *So Much Regret*, Zhang writes,

I have always had a special fondness for popular novels, especially for the characters whom the author does not need to explain, and for their sadness, happiness, separations and unions. If one says that popular novels are too superficial and lack depth, one still cannot deny that bas relief is still art.

However, I find the popular novel form too difficult to write. I am afraid that, as far as my ability is concerned, this work is my closest approach to a popular novel.

As a result, I always feel a subtle attachment to this story.

(我對於通俗小說一直有一種難言的愛好；那些不用多加解釋的人物，他們的悲歡離合。如果說是太淺薄，不夠深入，那麼，浮雕也一樣是藝術呀。但我覺得實在很難寫，這一篇恐怕是我能力所及最接近通俗小說的了，因此我是這樣的戀戀於這故事。)<sup>20</sup>

Despite her attachment to this story, and her belief that it is the nearest she can get to writing a popular novel, Zhang does not consider *So Much Regret* a satisfying work because many special effects in the movie script were left out in the rewriting process. When Zhang left the Mainland for Hong Kong in 1952, she did not have a chance to bring this work with her.<sup>21</sup> When it was recovered and republished in the collection *Sense*

<sup>20</sup> "So much regret," *Sense of loss*, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Preface to *So much regret*, *Sense of loss*, 116.

of *Loss* in the seventies in Hong Kong, many of Zhang's readers in Taiwan and Hong Kong were disappointed by the superficiality and simplicity of the work. *So Much Regret* is no match in artistry for her short stories, or even for her two earlier novels.

Sima Xin's (司馬新) recent study, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, provides an insightful interpretation of *So Much Regret* from a biographical perspective. He notes the following similarities between Zhang and the female protagonist: their age (Zhang was twenty-five when she wrote this novel, while Jiayin is twenty five); their being self-supporting (rare in the forties in Shanghai); and their falling in love with a man around ten years older than themselves (Hu Lancheng was fifteen years older than Zhang, while Zongyu is ten years older than Jiayin). The image of Zongyu's wife, an uneducated villager, also corresponds with that of Mrs. Si (斯太太), whom Hu Lancheng lived with after he fled to Wenzhou. The difference between Zhang's real life and the story lies in the fact that in *So Much Regret*, the villains who cause the breakup of Jiayin and Zongyu's relationship are Jiayin's father and Zongyu's wife, while in reality, Hu was unfaithful to Zhang. As a result, Sima Xin holds that *So Much Regret* serves as a kind of "wish fulfillment" for Zhang. She projected Hu Lancheng's attractive qualities onto the male protagonist, and developed a love story that ends because of outside pressure instead of infidelity. This involvement of strong personal emotion may explain the failure of the work.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sima Xin (Stephen Cheng), *Zhang Ailing and Reyher* (Zhang Ailing yu Laiya 張愛玲與賴雅), Taipei: Dadi chubanshe, 1996, 49-53.

By 1949, with the Communist take-over of China, the literary scene basically became dominated by leftist writers.<sup>23</sup> Zhang's position became especially embarrassing. Not only were her works considered to be written in praise of the decadent "feudal" system, even more sensitive was her former marriage with Hu Lancheng, a propagandist for the Nanking Regime of Wang Jingwei's (汪精衛) puppet government.<sup>24</sup> After 1949, Zhang mostly remained silent. Before she left for Hong Kong, the only works she published were two novels written under the pen-name Liang Jing (梁京).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For the Communist literary control in China in the forties and fifties, see Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> With Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945, Hu left Shanghai and fled to Wenzhou (溫州). In 1946, Zhang visited him in Wenzhou and discovered that he was living with a young widow, Fan Xiumei (范秀美). However, Zhang continued to support him financially until he was able to find a teaching post in a high school in 1947. Zhang then wrote to him and proposed a divorce: "I do not love you anymore, and I know that you have not loved me for a long time. It is after careful consideration of a long period, a year and a half, that I make this decision. Earlier, because of your difficulties, I did not want to add to your burden. Do not come to see me, I would not read your letters even if you wrote to me." (我已經不喜歡你了。你是早已不喜歡我了。這次的決心，我是經過一年半的長時間考慮的，彼時惟以小吉故，不欲增加你的困難。你不要來尋我，即或寫信來，我亦是不看的了。) Hu Lancheng, *This life*, 473. For a detailed account of Zhang and Hu's relationship, see Hu's autobiography, *This life*, and other autobiographical essays, "On Zhang Ailing" (Lun Zhang Ailing 論張愛玲), "Zhang Ailing and the leftist" (Zhang Ailing yu zuopai 張愛玲與左派), "Reading Zhang Ailing's 'Happy reunion'" (Du Zhang Ailing de Xiangjian huan 讀張愛玲的相見歡), in his *On modern Chinese literature* (Zhongguo wenxue shihua 中國文學史話), Taipei: Yuanliu, 1991, 203-220, 221-228, 271-276.

<sup>25</sup> Taiwan critic Xiao Mienmien (蕭綿綿) speculates that "Liang Jing" is a pen-name expressing Zhang's fear of the Communist. Since the pronunciation of "Liang" is similar to that of "cool" (涼), and "Jing" similar to "frightened" (驚). "Little Ai in my heart" (Xiao Ai zai woxin 小艾在我心), *Ming Pao Monthly* 255 (April 1987): 23-24. However, in the preface to *Lingering rhymes*, the editor clarifies on behalf of Zhang that "Liang Jing" in fact comes from Zhang's name: "Liang" comes from the vowel of "Ling," "li," and the consonant of "Zhang," "ang;" "Jing" comes from the vowel of "Zhang," "zh," which is pronounced in the same way as "ji" in Taiwan, and the consonant of "Ling," "ing." There is no other significance apart from that. Preface to *Lingering rhymes* written on behalf of the author (Yuyun daixu 《餘韻》代序), *Lingering rhymes*, 10. It is also notable that in the preface, the editor happens to mistake vowel for consonant, and vice-versa.

From March 1950 to February 1951, *Eighteen Springs* appeared in *Yi Bao* (亦報), a popular mosquito newspaper edited by the original staff of the discontinued magazine *All of Us*, in which *So Much Regret* had been published. *Eighteen Springs* is basically a sentimental love story which strictly follows the dramatic formulas of popular novels: twisting plots, conflicts, dilemmas and resolutions. It tells of the sorrows and joys, partings and reunions of the hero, Shen Shijun (沈世鈞), and the heroine, Gu Manzhen (顧曼楨), over a period of eighteen years. The novel opens with their first meeting and falling in love. The main obstacle to their love is Manzhen's elder sister, Manlu (曼璐), who is a taxi dancer before she marries Zhu Hongcai (祝鴻才). Knowing that her husband is interested in Manzhen, Manlu is cold-blooded enough to confine her and force her to become Hongcai's concubine. She believes that the situation would be worse for her if her husband took another woman as a concubine -- one's own little sister is always easy to manipulate. Manzhen finally consents to marry Hongcai after she finds herself pregnant with his baby. She remains indifferent to him and divorces him when she discovers that he has another mistress.

It is significant that *Eighteen Springs* differs greatly from *Romances* and Zhang's early novels. In the first place, political overtones are added as a protective element against leftist criticism. For example, Xu Shuhui (許叔惠), Shijun's best friend, is discontented with the traditional social system and strongly criticizes the decadence of the KMT government. He goes to Yan'an for reconstruction (jianshe 建設) and returns in

good spirits. Zhang Mujin (張慕瑾), Manzhen's relative, is falsely accused of being a traitor by the KMT government and his wife dies under torture. The novel ends on a bright and hopeful note without precedent in Zhang's previous works: Manzhen, Shijun and his wife, Cuizhi (翠芝), all respond to the call of the communist government, by going to the north-east for reconstruction. Manzhen has a good relationship with Cuizhi, and the reappearance of Mujin at the end of the story strongly suggests possible further developments in the relationship between him and Manzhen.<sup>26</sup>

More significant than the plot's protective political overtones is Zhang's tendency to sacrifice her tragic vision and artistry for the sake of the public interest. The main plot of *Eighteen Springs* is based primarily on a series of misunderstandings and coincidences. In order to increase the novel's emotional appeal, Zhang expends great effort to prevent Shijun from meeting Manzhen after her imprisonment: Shijun mistakenly believes that Mujin is going to marry Manzhen, and therefore takes Cuizhi as his wife. Manzhen's letter to Shijun after she regains her freedom happens to fall into the hands of Shijun's mother, who conceals the matter, for fear that it will affect her son's marriage. In short, the tragedy between Shijun and Manzhen results from coincidences and conspiracies.

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<sup>26</sup> Zhang Ailing told her friend Lin Yiliang (林以亮) that *Eighteen springs* is based on J. P. Marquand's novel *H.M. Pulman Esq.*. Lin then carefully read Marquand's work twice, but found nothing in common between the two novels, except that both tell of the unhappy marriages of two couples. Lin Yiliang, "Whispered words on Zhang Ailing" (Siyu Zhang Ailing 私語張愛玲) in *Yesterday and today* (Zuori jinri 昨日今日), Taipei: Huangguan, 1981, 143. Marquand subsequently became Zhang's friend in her years in the United States. He was also Zhang's guarantor when she applied for residence in MacDowell Colony. Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 80.

This attitude differs greatly from that of *Romances*, in which Zhang holds that tragedies arise from the follies, blindness and stubbornness which lie deep inside the human heart.

In terms of artistry, *Eighteen Springs* is written in a plain, simple style. It abandons the use of splendid imagery, which was a hallmark of Zhang's earlier works. In order to suit the public's clear-cut moral values, Zhang polarizes her characters into the kind, gentle protagonists, Manzhen and Shijun on the one hand; and the selfish, wicked antagonists, Manlu and Hongcai on the other. This tendency towards moral polarization contrasts sharply with her previous treatment of characters. In *Romances*, there are neither heroes nor villains. Zhang may mock her vain characters, but none of them is considered a villain. She is sympathetic to her weak characters but, due to their limitations, none of them can be considered a "good" person.

In short, *Eighteen Springs* can be regarded as a compromise made in the face of political pressure and public demand.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned above, Zhang was by no means very productive after the end of the war. Since she basically depended on her writings for her living, the compromises she made are understandable. Despite the fact that *Eighteen Springs* received hardly any attention from Zhang's contemporary literary critics, it was a

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<sup>27</sup> In 1947, there was a controversy over Zhang's screenplay "Long live my wife" (Taitai wansui 太太萬歲). Zhang was denounced as a national traitor and a pathetic writer who failed to point a way out for the ignorant characters she wrote about. Chen Zishan, "A Controversy over Zhang Ailing's *Long live my wife*" (Weirao Zhang Ailing taitai wansui de yichang lunzheng 圍繞張愛玲《太太萬歲》的一場論爭), in *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing* (Siyu Zhang Ailing 私語張愛玲), ed. Chen Zishan, Zhejiang: Zhejiang wenji chubanshe, 1995, 266-267. I shall return to this controversy in the next chapter.

great success among the public.<sup>28</sup> *Yi Bao*'s editor received a huge amount of mail pleading for a better ending for *Manzhen*. A woman who had had a similar experience as *Manzhen* even came to Zhang personally begging for her sympathy. Zhang had to hide upstairs and tell her aunt to ask the woman to go away.<sup>29</sup>

*Eighteen Springs* can be considered another peak in Zhang's literary career after *Romances*. Whatever its sacrifices in artistry, it succeeded in reaching a vast number of lower-middle class readers. Before the serial publication of *Eighteen Springs* ended, *Yi Bao* had already invited Zhang to write another novel.<sup>30</sup> However, Zhang was not satisfied with *Eighteen Springs* as a work of art. Not only did it deviate greatly from her original design, but the fact that it was published while in the process of writing made it impossible for Zhang to make changes in the published installments.<sup>31</sup> As a result of this experience, Zhang finished her next novel, *Little Ai*, before its serial publication in *Yi Bao* from November 1951 to January 1952.

*Little Ai* tells of the life of a Shanghai maid servant, little Ai. She is sold to the Xi family when she is about nine. At the age of ten, she is raped by the old master, Xi Jingfan (席景藩). After the old master's concubine discovers that little Ai is pregnant,

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<sup>28</sup> The reason why *Eighteen springs* received hardly any attention from serious critics may be due to the fact that it was published under a pen-name, and, more importantly, it was probably considered an old-fashioned, sentimental story which was not "progressive" enough.

<sup>29</sup> Chen Zishan, "The Creative background of Zhang Ailing's novella *Little Ai*," (Zhang Ailing chuanguo zhongpian xiaoshuo *Xiao Ai* de Beijing 張愛玲創作中篇小說〈小艾〉的背景), *Ming Pao Monthly* 253 (Jan 1987): 85-86.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Preface to *Lingering rhymes* written on behalf of the author, 7 & 10.

she kicks little Ai in the abdomen, causing a miscarriage. Little Ai is later married to a type-setter, Feng Jinhuai (馮金槐), with whom she has fallen in love. Jinhuai leaves Shanghai when the factory in which he works moves to Hong Kong. Little Ai loses contact with him after Hong Kong falls to the Japanese, but continues working as an amah and even as a coolie to support Jinhuai's family. Jinhuai returns after the war, and they adopt a little girl, because, after her miscarriage, little Ai is unable to have children. After 1949, they both enjoy their lives in the new society, and Jinhuai becomes especially keen on learning Communist theory. Eventually, little Ai is able to become pregnant, since the hospital she consults takes care to "serve the People." The novel ends with her optimistic belief that there will be a bright world waiting for her child: "Nowadays the world is changing so fast, I just can't imagine how wonderful the world will be when my child grows up. He will find his mother's sorrowful experiences incredible if he has a chance to hear them." (現在什麼事情都變得這樣快，將來他長大的時候，不知道是怎樣一個幸福的世界，要是聽見他母親從前悲慘的遭遇，簡直不大能想像了吧？)<sup>32</sup>

Despite the fact that Zhang finished the whole novel before its serial publication, *Little Ai* turned out to be a work which she "strongly disliked."<sup>33</sup> One of the reasons may be that *Little Ai* deviates greatly from its original design, to an even greater degree than does *Eighteen Springs*. According to Zhang, in her original plan, Little Ai is not raped or maltreated. Instead, she is a vain girl who attempts to seduce her young master. The

<sup>32</sup> "Little Ai," Jin Hongda & Yu Qing ed., *An anthology of Zhang Ailing*, vol. 2, 398.

<sup>33</sup> Preface to *Lingering rhymes* written on behalf of the author, 9.

young master is the child of a maid who is raped by the old master. The old master's concubine sells the maid to a brothel, and raises the child as her own. Little Ai keeps dreaming of becoming rich, but her dream is shattered when the Communists come to power.<sup>34</sup>

A comparison of Zhang's original plot with that of the completed novel reflects an increase of literary control on the one hand, and Zhang's compromise in bowing to the political demand for optimistic literature on the other hand. The Little Ai of the original plan is a vain, sophisticated girl similar to the maid Di Di (睇睇) in "Aloeswood Ashes: The First Burning." However, in the published novel, she is presented as a member of an oppressed class. In contrast to the humanist point of view and the detailed psychological descriptions of *Romances*, *Little Ai* is built on class confrontation, with special emphasis placed on protesting against the darkness and corruption of traditional society. Zhang is also unprecedentedly optimistic in her treatment of marriage in this work, which contrasts markedly with her previous tragic vision of love.

The discovery and republication of *Little Ai*, by Chen Zishan in 1987, aroused great attention in literary circles. While Mainland critics interpreted this work as Zhang's welcoming of the "new society," Taiwan critics were alarmed by her pro-Communist stance.<sup>35</sup> Yu Bin, in an attempt to explain Zhang's change in political stance, holds that it is her consistent practice to compromise, whenever it is needed.<sup>36</sup> Sophisticated and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Chen Zishan, "The creative background of Zhang Ailing's novella *Little Ai*," 87. Xiao Mienmien, "Little Ai in my heart," 23-25.

<sup>36</sup> Yu Bin, *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 251.

pessimistic, Zhang well understands human insignificance in the face of a complicated era. In the fifties, adding protective color to one's work was the only way to avoid political threats.

Zhang's reluctance regarding this compromise is revealed in the changes she made when *Little Ai* was republished in *Lingering Rhymes* in 1987. In the revised edition, the novel ends before 1949. Little Ai becomes seriously ill, and Jinhuai takes her to the hospital. Praise for the medical advances of the new society is omitted, along with optimistic passages like the following: "Well-equipped new factories will be built, large and comfortable workers' dormitories will also be built. In fact, the beautiful future is not far away. Through study she [Little Ai] has broadened her horizons and understands more about things." (新的設備完美的工廠就會建造起來，寬敞舒適的工人宿舍也會造起來，那美麗的遠景其實也不很遠了。她現在通過學習，把眼界也放大了，而且明白了許多事情。) <sup>37</sup>

From *So Much Regret* and *Eighteen Springs* to *Little Ai*, there is a constant tension for Zhang between the imposition of political and popular demands, and her artistic conscience and tragic vision. *Little Ai* shows her effort to balance these two factors. Early in 1944, Zhang says in "On Writing,"

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<sup>37</sup> "Little Ai," *An anthology of Zhang Ailing*, 397. Three paragraphs describing a "post-49" prosperity are also taken out. See *An anthology of Zhang Ailing*, 392-393 and *Lingering rhymes*, 217.

Just give them [the readers] what they want. On top of it, give them a little something more . . . writers may give whatever they can give, while readers may get whatever they can get.

(要什麼，就給他們什麼，此外再多給他們一點別的……作者可以儘量給他們所能給的，讀者儘量拿他所能拿的。)<sup>38</sup>

To remain true to one's own vision in the midst of compromise is the phrase which best describes Zhang's strategy for creative writing after 1949. In *Little Ai*, she shows great sympathy for Little Ai's fifth mistress, who on the one hand, suffers from the traditional marriage system, and on the other hand, becomes one of the oppressors of the weak. The fifth mistress can be considered as the first successfully developed character in Zhang's post-war novels. In contrast to such stereotyped characters as the kind, gentle Manzhen and the pitiful, rebellious Little Ai, the fifth mistress is a complex character, who arouses both hatred and sympathy. In creating such a character, Zhang maintains her artistic integrity in the midst of her various compromises.

The fifth mistress, in her thirties, is not a physically attractive woman. Her husband stays in other cities with his concubines and leaves her in Shanghai as if she were a widow or a deserted wife. Failing to attract her husband, her status in the family is far from high. As a result, she is weak and timid even in front of the old servants. Being generous and open-hearted, she is sympathetic even to her husband's concubine, who is supposed to be her rival. However, she beats her servants just like any other mistress. She

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<sup>38</sup> Zhang's *outlook*, 271.

hurries to scold Little Ai when Little Ai angers her husband, for fear that if she does not take any action, others will think that she is protecting her own maid. When the concubine kicks Little Ai, causing a miscarriage, she is outraged, but is too timid to stop her. Ironically, she is infuriated, not because Little Ai is in danger, but because it is a loss of face for one's maid to be punished by others.

Just as the love story between Yingzhu and Yaoqiu in *Genesis* digresses into Ziwei's story, so the fifth mistress's role in *Little Ai* is disproportionately expanded, compared with Zhang's original plan. This expansion reveals Zhang's consistent concern with the role played by females in a male-centered traditional society. A link between *Genesis* and *Little Ai* can be established, through their common concern with themes such as the absurdity of old-style family-arranged marriages, the pain of putting up with a marriage without love, and the difficulties of positioning oneself in an extended family with complicated human relationships. The fifth mistress, despite her cruelty to Little Ai, remains a pitiful and somewhat ridiculous character: "She blames her own family for marrying her into the Xis, she blames her mother-in-law for not pressing her son to live with his wife, she blames the indifference of her brothers-in-law to her husband that contributes to her husband's leaving Shanghai. Nevertheless, she never blames her husband." (她一恨自己娘家，二恨她那婆婆不替她做主叫她跟著一塊兒去，三恨他們兄弟們，都是他們那種冷淡的態度把他逼走了。也不知怎麼，恨來恨去，就是恨不到他本人身上。) <sup>39</sup> She keeps hoping for her husband's

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<sup>39</sup> "Little Ai," *An anthology of Zhang Ailing*, 328.

love, despite the fact that he requests her presence only to send her home again, after using up her dowry.

*Little Ai* did not enjoy the kind of wide popularity that *Eighteen Springs* had. One of the reasons is that it is no match for *Eighteen Springs* as a touching love story with ever-twisting plots. But a more significant factor in the novel's unpopularity may be Zhang's attempt to retain more of her compassionate vision and "to give the reader a little something more." Popular readers would find her ambivalent attitude towards the fifth mistress, who is supposed to be one of the villains in the novel, difficult to accept. Despite its progressive political elements, *Little Ai* remains an out-dated story of traditional families, and thus was not welcomed by the leftists in the early fifties.

### ***The Rice-Sprout Song and Love in Redland***

In 1952, Zhang left the Mainland for Hong Kong, under the pretext of completing her studies at Hong Kong University. Communism had always been a desolate threat in her mind. She says in "Remembering Hu Shizhi,"

From the thirties onwards, I felt the pressure from the left in whatever I read.

Although I felt an instinctive dislike for it, and was always outside popular trends, I knew that, unlike western communism, its influence would not be limited to the thirties."

(自從一九三幾年起看書，就感到左派的壓力，雖然本能的起反感，而且像一切潮流，我永遠是在外面的，但是我知道它的影響不止於像西方的左派只限於一九三零年代。)<sup>40</sup>

Zhang reported to Hong Kong University in September, but withdrew after two months. She did not have much faith in Hong Kong, the British Colony, and subsequently went to Tokyo, where her best friend Yanying was staying. It is notable that in her later autobiographical short story, "Flowers and Pistils Floating on the Waves" (Fuhua langrui 浮花浪蕊), the female protagonist, Luozhen (洛貞), is also determined to leave the Mainland for Hong Kong, and subsequently for Japan, to avoid political oppression. Zhang failed to find a job in Japan. As a result, she returned to Hong Kong in February 1953, and worked in the Hong Kong branch office of the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) for three years.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, she embarked on her first English novel, *The Rice-Sprout Song*. In July 1954, she published the Chinese version of *The Rice-Sprout Song* after its serialization in the weekly *The World Today* (Jinri Shijie 今日世界). In the following year, the English version came out in the United States, and was received with favorable reviews in prestigious newspapers and periodicals, such as *The New York Times*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *The Herald Tribune* and *Time*

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<sup>40</sup> Zhang's outlook, 172.

<sup>41</sup> Wang Kangxian, "Zhang Ailing and Hong Kong University," 11.

magazine. Copyrights were sold to twenty-three publishers around the world for the translation of the work into various foreign languages.<sup>42</sup>

In two respects, *The Rice-Sprout Song* marks a break with her works written on the Mainland after the War, especially with *Eighteen Springs* and *Little Ai*: In the first place, the pro-Communist stance, which served as a protective element in those works, is replaced by the humane vision of *Romances*, which represents Zhang's original perspective. Zhang was always a humanist. While her works immediately preceding *The Rice-Sprout Song* attempted to follow the style of popular novels, trying to be simple and plain, *The Rice-Sprout Song*, with its striking imagery and symbolism, is most closely related to *Romances*. Comparing the style of *Romances* and that of *The Rice-Sprout Song*, C. T. Hsia comments,

In keeping with its rural subject matter, *The Rice-sprout Song* is much sparer in style than the author's earlier fiction. Its sentences and paragraphs are shorter, its imagery is less lavish . . . the more chastened style of the novel retains the essential metaphorical strength of her language, and a striking imagery and symbolism are in evidence here as in the best of the *Romances*.<sup>43</sup>

As a work of art, *The Rice-Sprout Song* can be considered Zhang's first and most successful novel. It therefore deserves detailed discussion, in terms of both its theme and artistry. The novel tells of a peasant family living in a village, after the Land Reform

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<sup>42</sup> Lin Yiliang, "Whispered words on Zhang Ailing," 148, 154-155. Sima Xin's *Zhang Ailing and Reyher* includes at the beginning of the book an illustration of the cover of *The rice-sprout song*'s Arabic version.

<sup>43</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 417.

(Tugai 土改).<sup>44</sup> The story begins with the return home of Moon Scent (Yuexiang 月香), who has been working in Shanghai as an amah for three years. Upon her return, she finds that the village is experiencing great poverty and tension: people are suffering from hunger, but are required to donate food to the families of Communist soldiers. Near the Chinese New Year, the peasants ask the government for a loan to tide them over. On being refused, they attempt to rob the local granary, which is guarded by the militia. In the riot, Moon Scent's daughter is trampled to death while her husband, Gold Root (Jin'gen 金根), is seriously wounded. Moon Scent then desperately seeks help from her sister-in-law, Gold Flower (Jinhua 金花), who does not dare to harbor a dying criminal, despite her love for her brother. For fear of compromising his family, Gold Root drowns himself in a river. On the same night, Moon Scent returns and sets fire to the granary. She dies in the blaze, but the fire is soon put out. The riot is then interpreted by the authorities as a conspiracy by the Nationalist government, and the celebrations of the Chinese New Year go on. The surviving villagers are required to dance to the rhythm of the rice-sprout song as they bring their gifts to the soldiers' families.

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<sup>44</sup> The Land Reform is a campaign launched by the Chinese Communist Party. All land-holdings were evaluated and redistributed on a more equal basis according to categories that gave each individual his status as a rich, middle, or poor peasant or landless laborer. Land Reform meant the dispossession and destruction of the economic and social influence of landlords and other local magnates, with a corresponding advancement of the activists among the poor peasantry, who under CCP leadership could dominate the village. The campaign had been largely carried through in the North China and Northeast areas under Communist control before 1949, and spread to the larger body of Chinese south of the Yangzi in the fifties and sixties. Works teams entered the villages after military pacification and organized the peasantry to attack and destroy landlords. Some millions of people were killed in the public trials, mass accusations, and executions. John King Fairbank, *China: a new history*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, 318, 334 & 350.

It should be noted that Zhang's portrayal of the village under the Communist regime differs greatly from those of her contemporaries. Instead of turning the peasants into archetypes of the oppressed and the Communist comrades into saviors, her work focuses on how ordinary humanity struggles futilely to maintain its dignity and affection under the trials of an alien and inhuman system. The image of Big Aunt Tan (Tan Daniang 譚大娘) is also far from being that of a "typical" frank, honest peasant. For fear of trouble, she wears a mask of cheerful obedience and praises the Communist by monotonous set phrases whenever there are people around. Ironically, she always mixes up the Nationalists and the early Revolutionists who have overthrown the Manchu dynasty with the Communists.<sup>45</sup> Gold Flower, who faces a painful struggle between saving her brother and protecting her own family, selfishly sacrifices her brother for the sake of her own security. Moon Scent also possesses a calculating streak and is narrow-minded. She refuses to lend money to Gold Flower and, when Gold Flower stays for supper, she is careful to serve her nothing but the thin gruel that the family has every day, so as to drive home to her the fact that her family is as destitute as Gold Flower's.<sup>46</sup>

*The Rice-Sprout Song* also differs from other Western anti-Communist fiction in that it neither overstates its case in propagandist terms nor sacrifices ordinary reality for ideological debates. Instead, Zhang presents the Communist horror in humane, rather than dialectical terms.<sup>47</sup> Even Comrade Wang (Wang Tongzhi 王同志), who shoots the

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<sup>45</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 15. *Yangge*, 20.

<sup>46</sup> For a perceptive account of peasant life under Communism, see Edward Friedman & Paul G. Pickowicz, *Chinese village, socialist state*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 417.

rioting peasants, is presented as an “earnest and pleasant” (懇切，和氣) official, who also shows paternal benevolence.<sup>48</sup> After shooting the peasants in desperation, he regretfully confesses that “We have failed. We have had to shoot at our people” (我們失敗了，我們對自己的百姓開鎗).<sup>49</sup> However, his blind loyalty to the Party leads him to the absurd conclusion that Nationalist spies must be responsible for the uprising. This is the only possible conclusion for a man who is left with nothing by the Party. Zhang’s portrayal of this putative villain does not lack sympathy. In his youth, he was enthusiastic to save China through communism, but now he is often disappointed with the Party.

Zhang describes his ambivalence:

He often got angry, but his was the helpless fury of lonely old people slighted by their only friends. He never sulked for long, but always came round of his own accord. The Party was all he had left in the world.

(他常常感到憤懣，但是他這是一種無可奈何的氣憤，像一個孤獨的老年人被他唯一的朋友所侮蔑，自己生一回子氣，也並沒有人去勸他，他熬不了多久，自己倒又去轉圜。他除了黨以外，在這世上實在是一無所有了。) <sup>50</sup>

Gu Gang (顧剛), another Party comrade in the novel, deserves even greater attention than Comrade Wang. Gu is a Shanghai director-writer, assigned by the Literary and Artistic Workers’ Association to live among the villagers, so as to “experience life”

<sup>48</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, US: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955, 54. *Yangge*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 146. *Yangge*, 156.

<sup>50</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 82. *Yangge*, 87.

and collect material for his next film. His aim is to search for story material that might be interpreted as demonstrating the flourishing and progressive state of the peasantry after the Land Reform. However, constantly suffering from hunger, he begins to wonder if the villagers' set phrases which glorify the Party are, in fact, lies for the sake of self-protection. Those who mistake him for some visiting dignitary, with power to improve their lot, even reveal to him that they are actually worse off than before the Land Reform.

Like the I-narrator in Lu Xun's "Sacrifice," Gu is an intellectual who fails to live up to his role. Instead of facing his conscience and revealing the truth, Gu expediently dismisses the villagers as "non-typical" characters, so as to avoid trouble. He abandons the idea of writing about the village and starts on his "Story of the Dam," which illustrates the union of technical knowledge and peasant wisdom by telling of an engineer from the city and some old farmers who put their heads together to build a dam. After the riot, Gu forces himself to overcome his "Petty-bourgeois tender emotionalism" (Xiao zican jieji wenqing zhuyi 小資產階級溫情主義), believing in the Party for his own good, so that he can deaden all of his disquieting thoughts.<sup>51</sup>

Zhang ironically shows how a tragic uprising is twisted into a standard cliché in the final version of Gu's story. The final scene of the granary on fire strikes Gu as a "splendid and stirring spectacle" (驚心動魄的景象).<sup>52</sup> which can be used as the climax of his film. He then revises his story, as follows: The engineer and the old peasants collaborate to build a dam. However, in the village lives a landlord who has survived the

<sup>51</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 166-167. *Yangge*, 179-180.

<sup>52</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 170. *Yangge*, 184.

Land Reform through the generosity of the Communist government. He collaborates with the Nationalists and attempts to bomb the new dam. Upon his failure, he sets fire to the government storehouse and is caught red-handed. An even more ironic touch is that, in Gu's version, the landlord has a beautiful concubine who resembles Moon Scent, whom Gu secretly admires. The concubine's main function in the film is to "lean decoratively against the table by the light of the flickering lamp and lend atmosphere to the various treasonable dealings of the dispossessed landlord." (她主要的功用是把她那美麗的身體斜倚在桌上，在那閃動的燈光裏，給那地主家裏的秘密會議造成一種魅豔的氣氛。 ) In a similar vein: "In the film, it would be summer and the girl would be wearing a striped cotton summer shirt. It would have to be decorously sacklike, but stripes could do wonders." (這是夏天，她不穿著棉襖，而是穿著一件柳條布短衫。衣服盡管寬大，那直條子很能表現出曲線來。)<sup>53</sup>

According to Zhang, the story of *The Rice-Sprout Song* was inspired by the confession of a young writer she read in the magazine *People's Literature*. During the spring famine of 1950, the young government worker witnessed the local militia opening fire on the hungry townspeople who attacked the public granary. An old cadre, aghast at the necessity of turning their guns against the people, confessed that "something has gone wrong -- we have failed." Suffering from what he later called "the same blurriness of vision and instability of viewpoint," the writer wrote the incident into a story, which

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<sup>53</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 179. Yangge, 185-186.

led to his severe self-criticism in the subsequent Three-Antis Movement.<sup>54</sup> This story impressed Zhang deeply. She was obviously concerned with such issues as the production of a faithful historical account and literary independence. By adding the sub-plot of Gu's script-writing to the major one of the uprising, Zhang not only creates an ironic perspective by paralleling reality with its unfaithful account, but also enriches her novel with thematic complexities.

Besides being concerned with lies and twisted accounts of history, *The Rice-Sprout Song* is also a novel about hunger. Hu Shi commented, "This novel is about hunger from beginning to end . . . it is delicately written, frank and reliable. It can be said that it has reached the level of being 'plain and nearly natural.' It is the best among the modern Chinese literary works I have read in the past few years." (此書從頭到尾，寫的是『饑餓』……寫得真細緻，忠厚，可以說是寫到了『平淡而近自然』的境界。近年我讀的中國文藝作品，此書當然是最好的了。) <sup>55</sup> In fact, the whole story turns on food, something which "aroused the lowest and most savage instincts in all of them [the villagers] and becomes the object of quite indecent cravings."<sup>56</sup> Narrating part of the novel from Gu's viewpoint, Zhang ironically reveals the village's poverty and the absurdity of the Communist regime: "It would seem, he told himself, rather admiring his own sense of satire, that in the matter of ill-nourishment and

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<sup>54</sup> In 1951-52, the CCP launched the Three-Antis Campaign against corruption, waste and bureaucraticism. The movement was targeted on officials in government, in industry, and in the party. John King Fairbank, *China: a new history*, 349.

<sup>55</sup> *Yangge*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 101. *Yangge*, 107-108.

long working hours the Party Comrades departed from their materialistic standpoint and became extreme spiritualists, forever asserting the superiority of mind over matter.” (顧岡是很以他的幽默感自負的。他對自己說，共產黨雖然是唯物主義者。但是一講到職工的待遇方面，馬上變成百分之百的唯心主義者，相信精神可以戰勝物質。) <sup>57</sup>

Animal imagery and personification are skillfully employed in the novel, in order to depict hunger. In their poverty and malnourishment, the peasants are always described in terms which reduce them to animals. Gold Root is compared to a dog, searching for food under the table: “A yellow dog looking for nonexistent scraps under the table burrowed under Gold Root’s chair. The fluffy tail waved at Gold Root’s rear exactly as if it were Gold Root’s tail.” (一隻黃狗鑽到金根椅子底下尋找食物。一條蓬鬆的尾巴在金根背後搖擺著，就像是金根的尾巴一樣。) <sup>58</sup> Big Aunt Tan is compared to a big cat: “Big Aunt sat on the ground, boo-hooing. Stray short hair, white and tough like the cat’s whiskers, fell over her cheeks.” (譚大娘一把眼淚一把鼻涕，坐在地下嗚嗚哭著。許多散亂的頭髮，又白又硬像貓鬚一樣，披在她臉頰上。) <sup>59</sup> Upon being tortured, the men arrested in the riot scream a “bestial howl” (畜類的嚎叫). <sup>60</sup> On the other hand, animals waiting to be slaughtered are personified, to hint at the destiny of the peasants. The pig-killing scene near the Chinese New Year serves as a good example:

<sup>57</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 85. *Yangge*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 59. *Yangge*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 108. *Yangge*, 115.

<sup>60</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 166. *Yangge*, 179.

The pig went right on calling out with undiminished volume long after the pointed knife had been plunged into its throat . . . After a while it made a low grunt as if saying: No use arguing with these people. And it became silent . . . They lowered the pig into the tub, forcibly pressing its head into the water. When the head emerged again into view, the black hair was all messed up and fluffy like that of child taking a bath . . . The little snow-white ankle ending in a tiny pink sole looked as if it belonged to a woman with bound feet, where the toes were all bunched together . . . Made to sprawl over the side of the tub, facing downward, the pig now looked alarmingly human . . . it was a laughing face, the merry little eyes squeezed into curved slits . . . Following tradition -- a tradition that showed a somewhat grotesque sense of fun -- they made the slain pig hold its curly little tail in its mouth with a playful, kittenish air.

(尖刀戮進豬的咽喉……牠仍舊一聲聲地嚷著……過了一會，牠低低地咕嚕了一聲，仿佛表示這班人是無理可喻的。從此就沉默了……他們讓那豬坐了進去，把牠的頭極力捺到水裏去。那顆頭再度出現的時候，毛髮蓬鬆，像個洗澡的小孩子……那雪白的腿腕，紅紅的攢聚的腳心，很像從前女人的小腳……這時候牠臉朝下，身上雪白滾壯的，只剩下頭頂心與腦後的一攤黑毛，看上去真有點像個人，很有一種恐怖的意味……竟是笑嘻嘻的，兩隻小眼睛彎彎的眯成一線……也不知道他們是遵守一種什麼傳統——這種傳統似乎有一種

陰森怪異的幽默感——他們給那豬嘴裏啣著牠自己的蜷曲的小尾巴，就像一個快樂的小貓咬著自己的尾巴一樣。)<sup>61</sup>

In the novel's final scene, the pigs' heads sit in trays, as the peasants wriggle their way forward to bring their gifts to the soldiers' families. The dead pigs' heads, with "little pink paper flowers tucked rakishly in their ears" (豬耳朵裏很俏皮地掖著一兩朵粉紅的小紙花),<sup>62</sup> suggest the peasants, who are required to paint their cheeks bright red. The elders, forced to join the dance due to the loss of men in the riot, half-frown and half-smile, as they reluctantly throw their arms creakily back and forth. Dancing to the rice-sprout song was originally a cultural ritual, invoking the sprouting of rice. However, as the spontaneous folk-dance is turned into a hollow mass activity, for propaganda purposes under an alien regime, the peasants, with their heads bound in yellow kerchiefs and their eyebrows pulled up, merely look like some "warlike and fearsome strangers."<sup>63</sup> Zhang's use of the title "The Rice-Sprout Song," thus contributes to an irony which reveals the contrast between superficial ritual and painful reality.

Despite the fact that Zhang says *The Rice-Sprout Song* is quite unlike anything else she has written,<sup>64</sup> the novel echoes *Romances* both in its use of symbolic imagery and in its characteristically desolate tone. As noted by C. T. Hsia, Zhang "visualizes her bleak village as an eerie other world, a nightmare, a ghost-haunted landscape."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 125-127. Yangge, 132-135.

<sup>62</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 181. Yangge, 187.

<sup>63</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 96. The Chinese version differs slightly from the English one. It goes as 年輕人頭上繫著黃巾，把眉毛眼睛高高地吊起來，使他們忽然變了臉，成為凶惡可怕的陌生人。Yangge, 102.

<sup>64</sup> Preface to *The rice-sprout song*, vi.

<sup>65</sup> Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 423.

Persuasive theatrical imagery and evocative supernatural elements are employed to enhance the artistic texture and contribute to the thematic depth of the novel. The story begins with a description of thatched privies, which have a deserted air, despite the occasional whiff of a faint odor on the wind. Sun imagery is used repeatedly to create a desolate atmosphere: “The afternoon sun shone palely on the bleached thatch.” (下午的陽光淡淡地晒在屋頂上白蒼蒼的茅草上。)<sup>66</sup> “Sunlight lay across the street like an old yellow dog, barring the way. The sun had grown old here.” (太陽像一隻黃狗攔街躺著。太陽在這裏老了。)<sup>67</sup> Zhang’s descriptions of street scenes further build up a sense of theatrical eeriness:

A woman came out of one of the shops with a red enamel basin full of dirty water, crossed the street, and dashed the water over the parapet. The action was somehow shocking, like pouring slops off the end of the world. Almost every shop was presided over by a thin, fierce-looking dark yellow woman with . . . a strong and disturbing resemblance to the headgear of highwaymen in Chinese operas . . . Another shop displayed tidy stacks of coarse yellow toilet paper. In a glass showcase standing near the door there were tooth pastes and bags of tooth powder, all with colored photographs of Chinese film stars on them. The pictures of those charmers smiling brightly into the empty street somehow added to the feeling of desolation.

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<sup>66</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 1. Yangge, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 3. Yangge, 8.

(這邊一片店子裏走出一個女人，捧著個大紅洋磁臉盆，過了街，把一盆髒水往矮牆外面一倒。不知道爲什麼，這舉動有點使人喫驚，像是把一盆污水潑出天涯海角，世界的盡頭。差不多每一片店裏都有一個殺氣騰騰的老板娘坐鎮著，人很瘦，一張焦黃的臉……倒有點像戲台上武生扮的綠林大盜，使過往行人看了很感到不安……另一片店櫃檯上一刀刀的草紙堆積如山。靠門卻懸空釘著個小玻璃櫥，裏面陳列著牙膏牙粉。牙粉的紙袋與髮夾的紙板上，都印有五彩明星照片，李麗華、周曼華、周璇，一個個都對著那空空的街道倩笑著。不知道怎麼，更增加了那荒涼之感。)<sup>68</sup>

In the novel, everything seems unreal. Gold Flower as a bride is described as “a clay figure painted pink and white, seated in the dusty path of the sun. There was about her an air of unreality and also, oddly, of permanence.” (新娘子坐在那滿是浮塵的陽光裏，像一個紅紅白白的泥人，看上去有一種不真實的感覺，然而又很奇異地仿佛是永久長存的。)<sup>69</sup> In Gold Root’s and Gu Gang’s eyes, Moon Scent is “some obscure goddess in a broken down little temple,” (一個破敗的小廟裏供著的一個不知名的娘娘)<sup>70</sup> and “the fairy mistress stepping out of a book for the scholar in an old story.” (像那些故事裏說的，一個荒山野廟裏的美麗的神像)<sup>71</sup> Comrade Wang’s wife, Bright Sand (Shaming 沙明), is described as “a yellowed photograph, looking so young and yet faded.” (她像一張泛了黃的照片，看上去那樣年輕，

<sup>68</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 1-2. *Yangge*, 7-8.

<sup>69</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 13. *Yangge*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 31. *Yangge*, 35

<sup>71</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 99. *Yangge*, 105. The Chinese version differs slightly from the English one in that Moon Scent is again described as statue of a goddess instead of a fairy mistress.

而是褪了色的。) <sup>72</sup> Due to the war, Bright Sand has to come to her husband at night and leave at dawn, "like a ghost mistress in those old stories." (像那些古老的故事裏幽靈的情婦一樣) <sup>73</sup> In spite of the lack of food, the villagers cook thin rice gruel three times a day. Smoke pours out from the chimneys, "like the soul leaving the body and melting away in a moment of holy ecstasy." (仿佛在一種宗教狂熱裏，靈魂離開了軀殼，悠悠上升) <sup>74</sup>

The theatrical imagery in the novel builds to a climax when Moon Scent rushes to the temple after hearing of the riot, in search of her husband and daughter:

The sun shone bright in the huge courtyard, which was quite empty. Sparrows twittered under the eaves. But suddenly a militia-man dashed out of the eastern wing with an arm out-stretched, holding an archaic lance, the tuft of red hair under the blade fluffed out by the wind. It was a dream-like, fantastic sight hauled down off the stage and thrust into the noonday sun. Moon Scent stood rooted to the spot while he charged past her and disappeared through the gate.

(滿院子的陽光，只聽見幾隻麻雀在屋簷下啁啾作聲。但是突然有一個民兵從東配殿裏衝了出來，手裏縛著一隻紅纓鎗，那一撮紅纓在風中蓬了開來。那簡直是像夢境一樣離奇的景象，平常只有在戲台上看得見的，而忽然出現在正午的陽光下。月香站在那裏呆住了，眼看他在她身邊衝了過去，從廟門裏出去了。) <sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 68. *Yangge*, 71

<sup>73</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 69. *Yangge*, 73.

<sup>74</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 84. *Yangge*, 89.

<sup>75</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 143. *Yangge*, 153.

While she and Gold Root desperately duck the bullets, she dreamily feels that “they were running hand in hand like children in a game.” (他們這樣手牽手跑著；像孩子在玩一種什麼遊戲。)<sup>76</sup> After the riot, the temple in which the arrested are tortured is compared to an infernal court. To Gu, “it was like a traveler in one of those ghost stories taking shelter in the porches of a temple at night and being awakened by the sound of the gods holding court over the dead. Peeping at the brightly lit scene, the man in the story recognized a dead relative undergoing cruel tortures.” (這就像從前那些鬼故事裏，一個旅行的人在古廟裏投睡，睡在廊下，半夜裏忽然被刑訊的聲音驚醒了，這廟裏的神道正在坐堂，審問亡人。那故事裏的主角偷偷地向裏面窺視著，殿上燈燭輝煌，他忽然在犯人裏面認出一個故世已久的親戚，正在受著最慘酷的刑罰。)<sup>77</sup>

By using theatrical imagery, Zhang powerfully contrasts the theatrical artificiality of Communism with the frightening reality. Bloodshed and killing, which belong on the stage, happen dramatically in the village. By comparing the Communist world to the underworld as well, she also shows its cruelty and its impingement upon basic humanity.

In October 1954, Zhang published *Love in Redland*, after its serialization in *The World Today*. From 1956 to 1957, during her stay in Peterborough, she translated it into English as *Naked Earth*, which was published in Hong Kong in 1964. Encompassing the turbulent period from the Land Reform to the Three-Antis Movement to the Korean

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<sup>76</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 150. Yangge, 162.

<sup>77</sup> *The rice-sprout song*, 166. Yangge, 179.

Armistice, *Love in Redland* represents Zhang's most ambitious attempt at depicting Chinese life under Communist rule. The novel focuses on the experience of a young man, Liu Quan (劉荃, Liu Ch'uen in *Naked Earth*). As an idealistic university student, Liu volunteers to work in a northern village during the Land Reform. He is assigned to live in the home of a "middle peasant,"<sup>78</sup> Tang Zhankui (唐占魁, Tang Yu-hai in *Naked Earth*), whom Liu assures that the Land Reform is only aimed at the landlords, not at the "middle peasants." However, Tang is finally killed in the Movement, because he is labeled a Big Feudal Exploiting Landlord. To Liu's grief, he is among those ordered to carry out the execution.

After the Land Reform, Liu is assigned to work in the propaganda department, where he witnesses how one of the cadres betrays his best friend in order to save himself during the Three-Antis Movement. As a subordinate of the betrayed, Liu is also sent to prison. His girl-friend, Huang Juan (黃絹, Su Nan in *Naked Earth*), appeals to an influential cadre, Shen Kaifu (申凱夫, Sheng Kai-fu in *Naked Earth*), and consents to become his mistress in exchange for Liu's release.<sup>79</sup> Totally disillusioned, Liu volunteers for the Korean front after regaining his freedom, so as to ease his pain by risking death.

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<sup>78</sup> According to the Chinese Communist Party, the peasants are divided into three groups: the rich peasants, the middle peasants and the poor peasants.

<sup>79</sup> In *Love in redland*, Huang Juan becomes Shen's mistress and disappears from Liu's life. There is also a scene of her saying farewell to Liu. *Love in redland*, chapter 11. However, in *Naked earth*, she gives her chastity to Shen, and dies during an abortion performed by a quack doctor. *Naked earth*, Hong Kong: The Union Press, 1964, chapter 25-26. According to Sima Xin, this alternation is closely related to Zhang's having an abortion in 1956. *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 101-108.

Captured by US troops in Korea, he is given the freedom to choose to be repatriated either in Taiwan or China. He chooses to return to China as a witness of history:

And all the while he'd keep hidden the slow flame of hatred. He'd wait -- he was in no hurry now. Ten years, twenty years; his chance would come. As long as one man like him remained alive and out of jail, the men who ruled China would never be safe. They're afraid, too, he thought, afraid of the people they rule by fear.<sup>80</sup>

The major theme of *Love in Redland* is betrayal and disenchantment. The Communists betray the peasants and the students who cooperate with them. However, despite Zhang's eagerness to document momentous events, *Love in Redland* falls short of *The Rice-Sprout Song's* artistry. There are large amounts of ideological exposition in the work, and contemporary political protest sounds louder than the timeless universal cry against oppression. It should be noted that the writing of *Naked Earth*, as propaganda, was probably part of Zhang's job requirement in the United States Information Agency. In an interview with Shui Jing, Zhang revealed that *Love in Redland* was a

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<sup>80</sup> *Love in redland* (Chidi zhi lian 赤地之戀), Taipei: Weilong chubanshe, 1978, 286. *Naked earth*, 364. The Chinese version is shorter than the English one: 他要回大陸去，離開這裏的戰俘，回到另一個俘虜群裏。只要有他這樣一個人在他們之間，共產黨就永遠不能放心。(He wanted to go back to the mainland, to leave his fellow prisoners of war here and to return among the other captives. So long as there was a person like him in their midst, the Communist party could never feel secure.) English translation by C. T. Hsia, *A history of modern Chinese fiction*, 430.

“commissioned” work. She was very dissatisfied with it, since, given a fixed story outline, she had little room for creativity.<sup>81</sup>

It is only in the use of imagery that *Love in Redland* shows Zhang’s personal style. *Love in Redland* takes over *The Rice-Sprout Song*’s eerie atmosphere and its use of theatrical imagery. For instance, during the Land Reform, a Great Struggle Meeting is held on the stage of an ancestral temple. Zhang describes,

Pale blue dust floated in slow waves down the broad beam of sunlight which had lit up the stage as it had always done in the past whenever there was a show on. The villagers watched with a vague sense of surprise and unreality. Some of the troupes coming to play here were pretty down-and-out but the costumes had never been so ragged.

(如夢的陽光照在臺上，也和往年演戲的時候一樣，只是今年這班子行頭特別襤褸些。)<sup>82</sup>

The cadres in charge of the meeting, who call upon the workers to accuse their landlords, are ironically compared to nervous “stage directors on an opening night,” who are disappointed to find their “brightest discovery” suffering from “stage-fright.” The people shouting the slogans are also compared to “the chorus in a Szechuan opera” (川劇裏的幫腔).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Shui Jing, “Cicada -- an interview with Zhang Ailing by night” (Chan -- Yefang Zhang Ailing 蟬——夜訪張愛玲), *The art of Zhang Ailing’s fiction*, 27. Lin Yiliang, “Whispered words on Zhang Ailing,” 149.

<sup>82</sup> *Love in redland*, 69. *Naked earth*, 67. The sentence “The villagers watched with a vague sense of surprise and unreality” does not appear in the Chinese version.

<sup>83</sup> *Love in redland*, 67, 69 & 70. *Naked earth*, 63, 65 & 66.

As in the *Rice-Sprout Song*, the Communist world in *Love in Redland* is described as a nightmarish underworld. Liu's encounter with Er Niu (二妞, Erh Nu in *Naked Earth*), Tang's daughter, when the officials are trying to arrest Tang, serves as a good example:

He [Liu] could not understand. It was the kind of thing that only happened in nightmares . . . He never looked at Erh Nu but he was aware of her bright stare, her face a pale blue mask in the moonlight, her eyes glittering stupidly like large silver beads hung suspended in the black peepholes of the mask.

(他可以覺得二妞站在旁邊呆呆地向他望著，她的臉在月光中是一個淡藍色的面具，兩隻眼珠子掛了兩顆圓而大的銀色薄殼玻璃珠。)<sup>84</sup>

*Love in Redland* is a satirical and ironic record of the Communist assault on human dignity and loyalty. Sooner or later, everybody in the novel has to endure this assault. A desolate sense of threat is always present. Liu's thoughts, as he encounters the city-dwellers who are unaffected by the Land Reform, best demonstrate Zhang's sense of foreboding and her compassion:

These people here were hardly touched yet by the change of government. Maybe life was a bit harder . . . still they were able to carry on much as before and find comfort in the texture of life itself. Nothing as big and sweeping as Land Reform had swept over them yet. But how long would it be before it was their turn? . . .

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<sup>84</sup> *Love in redland*, 64-65. *Naked earth*, 59-60.

Even if their time was borrowed and running out, that did not make their lives any less real.

(這些人都是在時代的輪齒裏偷生的人，他悵惘地想著。眼前他們不過生活苦些，還是可以容許他們照常過日子，可以在人生味中得到一點安慰。像土地改革那樣巨大的變動還沒有臨到他們身上。遲早要輪到他們的，他們現在只是偷生。但是雖然是偷來的，究竟是真實的人生。) <sup>85</sup>

In “Words of My Own,” written in Shanghai in 1944, the time when Zhang’s early literary career was at its peak, she proclaims,

I can’t write one of those works often called a “monument to the era,” and I don’t plan to try, because it seems that such objective, concentrated subject matter is not yet available. Things are even to the point where I only write about trivial things between men and women. There are no wars or revolutions in my works.

(一般所說『時代的紀念碑』那樣的作品，我是寫不出來的，也不打算嘗試，因為現在似乎還沒有這樣集中的客觀題材。我甚至只是寫些男女間的小事情，我的作品裏沒有戰爭，也沒有革命。) <sup>86</sup>

With *The Rice-Sprout Song* and *Love in Redland*, it seems that, to Zhang, an “objective, concentrated subject matter” had arrived with the Communists. These two novels mark a change in subject matter and a broadening of concern in her creative writings. More important, they prove Zhang’s ability to handle large scale, historical topics. Despite the

<sup>85</sup> *Love in redland*, 140. *Naked earth*, 148. The Chinese version is slightly different from the English one.

<sup>86</sup> “Works of my own,” 22. Translation by Wendy Larson, “My writing,” 438-439.

fact that *Love in Redland* repeats the imagery of *The Rice-Sprout Song*, and falls short as propaganda, one has every reason to believe that Zhang could have achieved something greater in this genre, which she terms “monument to the era,” if she had persisted in this direction. Wang Zhenhe (王禎和), the Taiwan writer who served as a guide for Zhang on her visit to Taiwan in 1961, commented: “Her *The Rice-Sprout Song* is so well-written. She should stay on the Mainland and write about the Cultural Revolution. Her observation is so keen.” (她的《秧歌》寫得太好了，她應該多留在大陸寫“文革”，她是那麼觀察敏銳的人。) <sup>87</sup>

However, Zhang did not think that way. She did not have much faith in the political security of the British colony of Hong Kong. In Autumn 1955, she applied through the United States Refugee Act and left for the United States on the steamer President Cleveland. She arrived in New York in November of the same year, and stayed in the Salvation Army’s women dormitory near the Hudson River. In February 1956, she moved to Edward MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, a place that provided board and residence for writers and artists. There she met Ferdinand Reyher, her second husband. Reyher was born in 1891. After receiving his Master’s degree from Harvard University, he worked as a professor, reporter and writer. He had been working as a screen writer in Hollywood for twelve years before moving into the MacDowell

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<sup>87</sup> Wang Zhenhe, “Zhang Ailing in Taiwan” (Zhang Ailing zai Taiwan 張愛玲在台灣), in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing, 83.

Colony. Reyher and Zhang married in August 1956. By that time, Zhang was thirty-six, while Reyher was already sixty-five.<sup>88</sup>

### *Embittered Woman and Romance of Half a Lifetime*

During her stay at the MacDowell Colony, Zhang worked on an English novel *Rouge of the North*, which was originally titled "Pink Tears." As her first novel written in the United States, Zhang had high expectations for this work. However, novels about Asia did not have a market in the sixties in the United States, and Zhang encountered great difficulty finding a publisher.<sup>89</sup> The work was eventually published as *Rouge of the North* in London in 1967, one year after the publication of its Chinese version, *Embittered Woman* (Yuannü 怨女), in Taiwan.

*Embittered Women* is an extended version of her well-known story, "The Golden Cangue." The nature of the novel genre enables Zhang to pay closer attention to characterization and psychological description. The main plot basically remains the same: The beautiful female protagonist of humble origin is married to the ailing second master in a wealthy extended family. She is attracted to her younger brother-in-law, the third master, a handsome playboy who flirts with her, but refuses her love. After her husband

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<sup>88</sup> Zheng Shusen, "Zhang Ailing, Reyher, Brecht" (Zhang Ailing, Laiya, Bulaixite 張愛玲·賴雅·布萊希特), *Unitas* 3, no. 5, (March 1987): 78-79. Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 74-93.

<sup>89</sup> In 1957, Charles Scribner's Son, the publisher of *The rice-sprout song*, refused to publish *Pink tears*. Zhang did not have a fixed income in the States, and mainly depended on her publications for a living. This refusal was a blow to her and she fell sick for nearly a month. Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 115, 174.

dies, she inherits part of the family fortune. Her brother-in-law approaches her again, but to her disappointment, she finds out that he is merely after her money. In her later years, she intensifies her control over her son, who is the only man remaining in her life.

Apart from minor changes, such as the fact that Qiqiao in the short story is renamed Yindi (銀娣), and that her husband is now blind instead of being paralyzed, there are three major alterations in the novel. First, the character Chang'an (長安), the female protagonist's daughter, is removed. This change serves to make the novel more focused. "The Golden Cangue," falls into two parts, concerning Qiqiao and her daughter, respectively. This alteration removes the story's sense of repetition and endless circularity, created by the mirroring of Qiqiao's life in her daughter's.

Second, an episode describing Yindi's attempted suicide is added. The fact that she attempts suicide for fear that the third master will tell others about the flirtation between them is quite significant. In contrast to Qiqiao in the story, who bitterly destroys her children's lives in compensation for her own unhappiness and misfortune, Yindi is more human and realistic in that she is a weak, ordinary woman capable of feeling shame.

Third, the moon imagery framing the short story is replaced by an echo between the first and the last chapter of the novel: the novel opens with Yindi's suitor, a young carpenter, calling her name outside the sesame shop. Yindi comes out to him, he grasps her by the hand and is unwilling to let go. She then burns his hand with the oil lamp she happens to be holding. Towards the end of the novel, Yindi again burns the hand of her sleeping servant with an oil lamp. The act reminds her of her youthful years:

Suddenly it all came back, the banging on the boarded shopfront, she standing right behind it, her heart pounding louder than that, the hot breath of the oil lamp in her face, her fringes coming down muffling the wet forehead and her young body picked out in the dark by the prickly beads of perspiration. Everything she drew comfort from was gone, had never happened. Nothing much had happened to her yet.

(忽然從前的事都回來了，蓬蓬蓬的打門聲，她站在排門背後，心跳得比打門聲還更響，油燈熱烘烘薰著臉，額上前溜海熱烘烘罩下來，混身微微刺痛的汗珠，在黑暗中戮出一個個小孔，劃出個苗條的輪廓。她引以自慰的一切突然都沒有了，根本沒有這些事，她這輩子還沒經過什麼事。) <sup>90</sup>

Instead of revealing the darkness of the human heart through a horrifying revenge, as in “The Golden Cangue,” *Embittered Woman* settles down into describing the on-going dreariness of life. Yindi is eventually left with nothing but resignation and youthful memories. It seems as if nothing has happened to her after all the years. Life is to her hollow and unreal.

The low emotional tone and the sense of resignation found in *Embittered Woman* may be explained by Zhang’s personal experiences. After all the changes in her life and in the world, such as divorcing her first husband, leaving China after the Communist’s victory, moving to the US and being remarried, Zhang was no longer a young woman

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<sup>90</sup> *The rouge of the north*, London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1967, 185. *Embittered woman* (Yuannü 怨女), Taipei: Huangguan, 1982, 189.

with an avid curiosity about the people and things around her and a strong desire to become famous. She had become more withdrawn, and began to aim at a plainer style in her writings. As a result, the imagery in the novel is also not as intense as that in the short story.<sup>91</sup>

*Embittered Woman* still has some subtle touches which show Zhang's sophistication and creativity. Yindi's metaphorical likening of two gowns hanging in the sun to herself and the third master serves as a good example:

Lying across the width of the couch she found herself looking at two plain silk gowns hung side by side, of peacock blue and a pinkish red. They cut a figure against the blue sky with the graceful droop of the long sleeves and the hips swaying forward a little, borne on a light wind. Every now and then the blue sleeve slapped at the red sleeve guardedly without lifting itself as if afraid to be seen. After a while the red sleeve slapped back and it was the blue one's turn to seem indifferent. At times they appeared to join hands. She was somehow reminded of herself and Third Master. They had just happened to be near. He was always teasing her. She was fool enough to take him seriously and he got frightened, that was all . . . Sunlight touched the corner of the red sleeve. It was all so long ago.

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<sup>91</sup> Jeannine Bohlmeyer also holds the same view. She comments: "To read 'The golden cangue' first and then turn to *The rouge of the north* is to enlarge the picture and to soften the outlines and colors in proportion to the enlargement. To read *The rouge of the north* first would be to turn from diffused light to light focused into burning intensity." "Eileen Chang's bridges to China" *Tamkang review* 5, no.1 (April 1974): 121.

(躺在煙炕上，正看見窗口掛著的一件玫瑰紅綢夾袍緊挨著一件孔雀藍袍子，掛在衣架上的肩膀特別瘦削，喇叭管袖子優雅地下垂，風吹著胯骨，微微向前擺盪著，背後襯著藍天，成爲兩個漂亮的剪影。紅袖子時而暗暗打藍袖子一下，仿佛怕人看見似的。過了一會，藍袖子也打還它一下，又該紅袖子裝不知道，不理它。有時候又仿佛手牽手。它們使她想起她自己和三爺。他們也是剛巧離得近。他老跟她開玩笑，她也是傻，不該認真起來。他没那個膽子。不過是這麼回事……有一點太陽光漏進來，照在紅袖子的一角上。這都是多少年前的事了。) <sup>92</sup>

Another example is the echo between the dried chrysanthemum imagery used at the beginning of the novel and that of dried roses at its end. The handsome pharmacy clerk who is attracted to Yindi gives her a package of dried chrysanthemums:

When she got home she found wrapped with the other herbs a big package of dried white chrysanthemums that was not in the prescription. Several of these flowers soaked in a cup of hot water make a cooling summer drink. She was not too fond of the grassy fragrance but she enjoyed making it every day watching the small white chrysanthemums plump out under water. She never had a chance to thank him. He would not want others to know that he had made free with the shop's goods.

(回到家裏，發現有一大包白菊花另外包著，藥方上沒有的。滾水泡白菊花是去暑的，她不怎麼愛喝，一股子青草氣。但是她每天泡著

<sup>92</sup> *The rouge of the north*, 110-111. *Embittered woman*, 112.

喝，看著一朵朵小白花在水底胖起來，緩緩飛升到碗面。一直也沒有機會謝他一聲，不能讓別人知道他拿店裏東西送人。) <sup>93</sup>

The little white chrysanthemums, swelling and floating to the water's surface, symbolize the opening of Yindi's heart at her first experience of love. A similar use of flower imagery occurs when the third master visits Yindi. She orders the servant to serve him a wine called "burning roses" (玫瑰燒). The amah inserts a packet of dried roses into the bottle of wine, and the roses hang in a cluster at the bottleneck:

Miraculously the withered tiny roses turned a luscious deep red. She had never noticed it before and would never have thought wine could resurrect dead flowers. She added powdered sugar, sprinkling it like scraped ice over the blossoms on the surface. The white flakes drifted slowly down through the greenish twilight in the bottle. The bottom was soon covered with snow with one or two rose petals lying on it, a strange scene. The dead flowers that bloomed again shook her a little.

(乾枯的小玫瑰一個個豐豔起來，變成深紅色。從來沒聽見說酒可以使花復活。冰糖屑在花叢漏下去，在綠陰陰的玻璃裏緩緩往下飄。不久瓶底就鋪上一層雪，雪上有兩瓣落花。她望著裏面奇異的一幕，死了的花又開了。) <sup>94</sup>

Like a dead rose blooming again in the wine, Yindi begins to anticipate further developments from this man who once rejected her. However, her sugary dream is soon shattered when she finds out that he is only after her money. She slaps him in the face,

<sup>93</sup> *The rouge of the north*, 110-111. *Embittered woman*, 112

<sup>94</sup> *The rouge of the north*, 9. *Embittered woman*, 13.

and he leaves in resentment. After his departure, “she uncorked the bottle that he was to take with him and took a sip. All the dried roses crowding on the surface almost stopped the flow. It was slightly rasping and tasted bitter. The sugar was all at the bottom.”(桌上那瓶酒是預備給他帶回去的。她拔出瓶塞，就著瓶口喝了一口。玫瑰花全都擠在酒面上，幾乎流不出來。有點苦澀，糖都在瓶底。)<sup>95</sup> Few writers are Zhang’s equal in term of the vivid sensuality of such symbolic moments.

It should be noted that *Embittered Woman* can also be seen as echoing Zhang’s earliest, abortive novel, *Interlocking Rings*. Both works focus on the female protagonist’s experiences from youth to old age, and both show the strong influence of the traditional novel, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. There is a great similarity between the opening of the seventh chapter of *Embittered Woman*, and that of the fifteenth chapter of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. In *Embittered Woman*, the Yaos (姚家) celebrate posthumously the sixtieth birthday of the long-dead master of the house. All the ladies dress up and go to the Temple of the Bathing Buddha in a string of open carriages. Zhang vividly describes the ladies’ clothing, and how they, and Yindi especially, attract the attention of the crowd:

The ermine lining showed white around the edges of her [Yindi’s] high collar cutting across the deep pink plane of the cheek. Everybody turned to look, startled in spite of the others that had gone before her, young faces encased in the same pearl cap and bars of heavy rouge . . . Alighting from the carriages the three daughters-in-law stood out in their scarlet panelled skirts . . . Their sheath jackets

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<sup>95</sup> *The rouge of the north*, 132, *Embittered woman*, 135.

were violet, turquoise and apricot respectively. They all wore the long necklace called the many-treasured chain, twisted ropes of pearls with rubies, emerald and sapphires woven in.

(她的出鋒皮襖元寶領四周露出銀鼠裏子，雪白的毛托著濃抹胭脂的面頰。街上人人都回過頭來，吃了一驚似的，儘管前面已經過了好幾輛車，也儘有年輕的臉，嵌在同樣的珍珠頭面與兩條通紅的胭脂裏……大家紛紛下車，只有三個媳婦是大紅裙子，特別引人注目。上面穿的緊身長襖是一件青蓮色，一件湖色，一件杏子紅。三個人都戴著『多寶串』，珠串絞成粗繩子，夾雜著紅綠寶、藍寶石，成爲極長的一個項圈。)<sup>96</sup>

In the fifteen chapter of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, titled “Beauties Enjoy the Sights in the Lantern-viewing Belvedere, Hangers-on Abet Debauchery in the Verdant Spring Bordello,” (jiaren xiaoshang wandenglou, xiake bangpiao lichunyuan; 佳人笑賞翫燈樓，狎客幫嫖麗春院) Ximen Qing’s ladies (西門) are depicted celebrating the Lantern Festival. The ladies, who lean out of the windows to look down on the Lantern Market, attract a crowd of onlookers. Pan Jinlian, especially, is the focus of attention. The ladies’ clothing is described in detail:

Wu Yueliang was wearing a full-sleeved jacket of figured scarlet material, a stylish green silk skirt, and a sable cloak. Li Jiaoer, Meng Yulou, and Pan Jinlian all wore white satin jackets and blue silk skirts, over which Li Jiaoer also wore a brocaded aloeswood-colored vest, Meng Yulou a brocaded green vest, and Pan

<sup>96</sup> *The rouge of the north*, 72-73. *Embittered woman*, 74-75.

Jinlian a brocaded scarlet vest. On their head: Pearls and trinkets rose in piles;  
Phoenix hairpins were half askew.

(吳月娘穿著大紅粧花通袖襖兒，嬌綠段裙，貂鼠皮襖。李嬌兒、孟玉樓、潘金蓮都是白綾襖兒，藍段裙。李嬌兒是沉香色遍地金比甲，孟玉樓是綠遍地金比甲，潘金蓮是大紅遍地金比甲，頭上珠翠堆盈，鳳釵半卸。)<sup>97</sup>

The similarities between the two descriptions can be no accident. It seems that, after some twenty years, after all her experiments with popular novels and with works with political overtones, Zhang has returned to her original style, and now attempts to produce a sophisticated work in that style. In a certain sense, *Embittered Woman* can be considered Zhang's last novel, since her next work, *Romance of Half a Lifetime*, is merely a slightly-revised version of *Eighteen Springs*.

In 1969, two years after her husband died, Zhang published *Romance of Half a Lifetime* in Taiwan. This novel is basically a rewriting of *Eighteen Springs*, with three major alterations to remove the pro-Communist elements. First, in *Eighteen Springs*, Zhang Mujin (張慕瑾) is falsely accused of being a traitor by the Nationalist government, and his wife is tortured to death. In *Romance of Half a Lifetime*, Zhang Mujin, renamed Zhang Yujin (張豫瑾), and his wife are arrested by the Japanese. His

<sup>97</sup> David Roy trans., *The plum in the golden vase*, 300. Qi Yan & Ru Mei annot., *Plum in the golden vase with newly carved illustrative figures*, 186.

wife dies in captivity and he goes to Chongqing on his release.<sup>98</sup> Second, Xu Shuwei, instead of going to Yan'an, goes to the United States to further his studies. Third, instead of ending the novel on a bright, hopeful tone, with all the characters going to Yan'an for reconstruction, *Romance of Half a Lifetime* ends with the re-encounter of Manzhen and Shijun, after Shijun has married Cuizhi. Manzhen and Shijun, knowing that they have been on each other's minds throughout the years of misunderstanding and separation, both feel a sense of desolation and resignation.

This chapter has traced the development of Zhang's career as a novelist. She experienced a long experimental period before producing such a sophisticated work as *The Rice-Sprout Song*, which represents the peak of her art as a novelist. The fact that her last two novels are rewritings of earlier works shows a decline in inspiration, which, as I shall further discuss in the following chapter, is closely related to her financial pressure and the reclusive life of her later years. In "On Reading," Zhang comments on the communicative function of literature, and holds that a piece of good literature can either deal with common topics, especially what others have not yet said, so that the reader will think: "it is like that" (是這樣的); or it can deal with rare or extreme events, so that the reader will quietly say: "there are even things like this" (是有這樣的) after reading it.

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<sup>98</sup> *Romance of half a lifetime*, Taipei: Huangguan, 1969, 400. Yu Bin, in his *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, retells Zhang Yujin's episode in *Romance of half a lifetime* as follows: Zhang Yujin's wife is raped by the Japanese, and Zhang is arrested. Nobody knows what happened to him afterwards. *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 289. I have no idea how Yu Bin comes up with this plot.

Both kinds of writing broaden the horizons of human experience, and add to the reader's understanding of life.<sup>99</sup>

I think that the distinction that Zhang makes between these two kind of literature describes well the change in style between Zhang's early and later works. In the forties, Zhang started her literary career by writing on sensitive and sensational topics, such as living together before marriage (*Interlocking Rings*), sexual slander ("Aloeswood Ashes: The Second Burning"), and incestuous relationships ("The Golden Cangue" and "Heart Sutra"). As she says in "Works of My Own," one of her aims in writing on such topics was that she wanted her readers to know that "this sort of things does occur,"<sup>100</sup> that is, "there are even things like this." However, in the later period, she adopted a more withdrawn style, and concentrated more on the ordinary life of common people, as seen by comparing the striking power of "The Golden Cangue" with the sense of resignation of *Embittered Woman*, which seems to tell the reader, "life is like that."

I would like to end this chapter with two quotations from Zhang. This first one, describing handicrafts which are unskillfully made, may serve to describe Zhang's early, abortive novels:

In handicrafts which are not so skillfully made, there are signs of struggle, weariness, panic and risk-taking. As a result, "the human element" in such works is especially high. I like them, because "there is a real person inside them, who will come out, if you call."

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<sup>99</sup> "On reading," 213.

<sup>100</sup> "Works of my own," 24. "My writing," 440.

(在不純熟的手藝裏，有掙扎，有焦愁，有慌亂，有冒險，所以『人的成份』特別濃厚。我喜歡它，便是因為『此中有人，呼之欲出。』)<sup>101</sup>

The second quotation, a metaphor describing her feelings after reading the poorly-written works of her friend, Su Qing, also well describes my attitude towards Zhang's less successful novels, whether their artistic shortcomings are due to the fact that they are commissioned works, or because they are works with protective political elements reluctantly added:

Reading these works is like walking into an old friend's room. The decor remains the same, but the master is not at home, and I feel a strong sense of forlorn emptiness.

(我讀了，仿佛是走進一個舊識的房間，還是那些擺設，可是主人不在家，心裏很惆悵。)<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "See what's on the road," 64.

<sup>102</sup> "I see Suqing," 83.

## Chapter Eight: Scripts, Translations and Academic Annotations

Apart from creative writings, Zhang also established herself as a screenplay writer, translator and scholar. This chapter focuses on her later works, which have a common point of being more withdrawn. Zhang's later life echoes her striving for a simpler, more natural creative writing style. This is shown in her novel writing, as was discussed in the previous chapter. However, this change is by no means merely a change in her writing style, but a change in her entire attitude towards life. In her youth, Zhang was eager to become famous, and was attention-seeking in both the way she wrote and the way she dressed. However, after all the changes in her life, she came to the appreciation of an ordinary, common life. The acceptance of herself as "common" was manifested in her mentality towards "work." She worked for a living, and made great efforts to support her ailing husband. Having enjoyed the fame of being a "blue stocking," she became a writer who was at the center of controversy in post-War and Communist China, a situation which was anything but pleasant to her. She later moved to Hong Kong, working as an employee in the U.S.I.A, and subsequently to the United States, working as a screenplay writer and translator for a Hong Kong film company, as well as the U.S.I.A. After her husband died, she worked as an academic researcher and subsequently led the life of a recluse.

## Drama, movie and broadcasting scripts

### Hong Kong and Shanghai period

Zhang's script-writing career had a successful start. Both her first drama script and first screenplay were very popular. Her first, and her only, drama script is "Love in a Fallen City," adopted from her short story of the same title. Zhang says in "Frank Words on *Love in a Fallen City*": "Since it was my first attempt at script-writing, I tried my best to make it well-balanced. I hope everything will go smoothly with the show, and that it can reach a lot of people." (編成戲，因為是我第一次的嘗試，極力求其平穩，總希望它順當地演出，能夠接近許多人。) <sup>1</sup> The drama script was written in 1944, one year after the serialization of the short story in *Magazine*. Ke Ling (柯靈) recommended her script to Zhou Jianyun (周劍雲), who was in charge of the Greater China Drama Art Company (Da zhong juyi gongsi 大中劇藝公司). The drama, with four acts and eight scenes, premiered in the newly renovated New Light Cinema (Xinguang da xiuyuan 新光大戲院) on the December 16, 1944. It was unprecedentedly successful, running for eighty performances altogether, and being reviewed in more than ten Shanghai newspapers. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Frank words on 'Love in a fallen city,'" *Album*, 104. In "Go! Go upstairs," an essay written in April 1944, Zhang mentioned that she wrote a script in which there was a line "Go! Go upstairs." *Gossip*, 92. The script mentioned was probably written earlier than "Love in a fallen city." However, it does not survive and there is no further information on it.

<sup>2</sup> In his "Watching 'Love in a fallen city'" (Guan qingcheng zhi lian 觀傾城之戀), internationally-known scholar, Liu Ts'un-yan (柳存仁), claimed that "Love in a Fallen City" was the best show he saw between 1944-1945. *Zhonghua ribao* (中華日報), 28 Dec. 1944, supplement. See Chen Zishan, "Searching in the boundless sea of newspaper" (Zai mangmang baohai zhong souxun: Zhang Ailing yiwen gouchen ji 在茫茫報海中搜尋——張愛玲佚文鈞沉記) and "About Zhang Ailing's drama script 'Love in a fallen city'" (Zhang Ailing huaju

The staging of “Love in a Fallen City” brought Zhang both fame and a sense of accomplishment. However, in the post-war years, script-writing became mainly a means of making a living. Zhang started writing screenplays in 1947. Her first work in this form is “Endless Love” (Buliao qing 不了情), written for the Shanghai Cultural China Film Company (Shanghai wenhua dianying gongsi 上海電影文化公司),<sup>3</sup> and directed by Sang Hu (桑弧). She subsequently rewrote “Endless Love” as the novel, *So Much Regret*, which is discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>4</sup> Her second screenplay for the same company, “Long Live My Wife,” written in the same year and directed also by Sang, can be considered as Zhang’s most important screenplay.<sup>5</sup> It is important, not only because it once more shows Zhang’s identification with the female through an ordinary female protagonist’s concrete story, but also because it led to a heated controversy in the Shanghai of the fifties.

### The Controversy over “Long Live My Wife”

“Long Live My Wife” is a comedy, which tells of a wife from a middle-class household, Chen Sizhen (陳思珍), who tries hard to fulfill her traditional role in a Chinese family. She ingratiate herself with every family member: she impresses her

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qingcheng zhi lian er san shi 張愛玲話劇傾城之戀二三事), in *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Chen Zishan, 244-252, 259-265.

<sup>3</sup> “Shanghai Cultural Film Company,” my own translation. The original English name of the company has to be verified.

<sup>4</sup> The original screenplay of “Endless love” did not survive. “Sense of loss” (Wangran ji 惘然記), *Sense of loss*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> “Long live my wife,” *Lianhe bao* (聯合報), 25-30 May, 1989, supplement.

mother-in-law as a good wife, and helps her husband, Tang Zhiyuan (唐志遠), to start a business by borrowing money from her father. However, her husband becomes unfaithful to her once he becomes rich. His mistress, Shi Mimi (施咪咪), plots against him for his money together with her brother. Sizhen discovers their scheme and saves the family in time.

“Long Live My Wife” differs greatly from “Endless Love,” a sad story in both its style and atmosphere. It shows the influence of the Hollywood “screwball comedies” of the thirties, which feature a detached, sarcastic portrayal of family problems or middle-class love affairs.<sup>6</sup> In this kind of comedy, coincidences and witty dialogue are the indispensable elements. However, Zhang’s original artistic aim was much higher than this. Sang’s direction of the movie considerably lightened the tone of Zhang’s original script.

On 3 December 1947, Zhang published a “Preface to *Long Live My Wife*” in the weekly *Dagong Bao: Drama and Movie* (大公報·戲劇與電影). In this essay, Zhang shows once more her anti-romantic and anti-heroic stance through her affirmation of ordinary life and her humanist view that in the face of life everybody is equal. Zhang says,

For the characters in “Long Live My Wife,” their experiences are tears and laughter which are predestined to be forgotten; even they themselves will forget them. For a long time, we all share the burden of life; only this should make

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<sup>6</sup> Zeng Shusen, “Zhang Ailing’s *Long live my wife*,” (Zhang Ailing de taitai wansui 張愛玲的太太萬歲), in *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Chen Zishan., 218.

people feel close to each other, shouldn't it? "Death makes everyone equal," but why should we wait till death? Doesn't life itself make everyone equal? Isn't it true that in one's life, what really shakes one's heart and stirs one's soul are only a few events? Why do we think that death is so important? Is it because death is more dramatic-- while, on the other hand, life is trivial and ordinary?"

(出現在《太太萬歲》的一些人物，他們所經歷的都是些注定了要被遺忘的淚與笑，連自己都要忘懷的。這悠悠的生之負荷，大家分擔著，只這一點，就應當使人與人之間感到親切的罷？『死亡使一切都平等』，但是為什麼要等死呢？生命本身不也使一切都平等麼？人之一生，所經過的事，真正使他們驚心動魄的，不都是差不多的幾件麼？為什麼偏要那樣的重視死亡呢？難道就因為死亡比較有傳奇性——而生活卻顯得瑣碎，平凡？)<sup>7</sup>

Zhang reveals that her original intention in "Long Live My Wife" was, in fact, an affirmation of basic human nature in the form of a "silent drama." She says,

John Gassner, in his review of the film "Our Town," comments that it "affirms human nature -- a kind of simple human nature, which only wishes to fulfill its cycle of life, love and death, in a peaceful way." The subject matter of "Long Live My Wife" belongs to this type. My screenplay should progress like the moving sun, the way it mistily moves from one corner of the room to the other. One cannot see its movement, but suddenly it is there.

<sup>7</sup> Preface to *Long live my wife, The Female* (Nüxing ren 女性人) 1 (Feb. 1989): 144.

(John Gassner 批評『Our Town』那齣戲，說它『將人性加以肯定——一種簡單的人性，只求安靜地完成它的生命與戀愛與死亡的循環。』《太太萬歲》的題材也屬於這一類。我的進行也應當像日光的移動，濛濛地從房間的這一個角落照到那一個角落，簡直看不見它動，卻又是倏忽的。)<sup>8</sup>

However, in order to guarantee its box-office receipts, “Long Live My Wife” turned out to be a Hollywood-style comedy with coincidences and witty dialogues. Zhang says,

At the present stage, we can only aspire toward this kind of drama. For instance, in “Long Live My Wife” it was necessary to add many extra plots, to keep the actors busy. Strictly speaking, this is not something to be taken as a rule . . .

(然而我們現在暫時對於這些只能止乎嚮往，例如《太太萬歲》就必須弄上許多情節，把幾個演員忙得團團轉，嚴格地說來，這本來是不足為訓的。)<sup>9</sup>

In “Preface,” Zhang also openly expresses her disappointment and her discontent with the taste of her audience:

As for the audience’s psychology, to be frank, up to this point I still have no confidence in it, although I have always experimented with it. My occasional discoveries are merely discoveries which make one feel sad . . . literature can be something for a minority, but such a thing as “movie” is not something for

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 143-144.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 144.

circulation among a few really good friends . . . The most difficult thing to cope with in the Chinese audience is not their low-class taste or their poor powers of comprehension, but their addiction to romances. Unfortunately, the wife in “Long Live My Wife” does not have a complicated and touching background . . .

Nevertheless, I have tried to replace romance with a more genuinely cinematic technique, so as to dilute the audience’s insatiable desire for romances. Shouldn’t these good intentions of mine be pardoned?

(對於觀眾的心理，說老實話，到現在我還是一點把握都沒有，雖然一直在那裏探索著。偶然有些發現，也是使人的心情更為慘淡的發現……文藝可以有少數人的文藝，電影這樣東西可是不能給二三知己互相傳觀的……中國觀眾最難應付的一點並不是低級趣味或是理解力差，而是他們太習慣於傳奇。不幸《太太萬歲》裏的太太沒有一個曲折離奇可歌可泣的身世……但我總覺得，冀圖用技巧來代替傳奇，逐漸沖淡觀眾對於傳奇劇的無魔的欲望，這一點苦心，應當可以被諒解的罷？)<sup>10</sup>

Despite its compromises, “Long Live My Wife” remains Zhang’s most successful screenplay. It is successful, not only due to its popularity with the public,<sup>11</sup> but also because it echoes Zhang’s concern for the situation of modern women in other genres of her creative writing, especially her informal essays and novels. “Long Live My Wife”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>11</sup> “Long live my wife” was received with great popularity among the public, a fact which serves as a sharp contrast with the heated controversy the film triggered among critics, as I shall discuss below. See Chen Zishan, “A Controversy concerning Zhang Ailing’s *Long live my wife*” (Weirao Zhang Ailing’s taitai wansui de yichang zhenglun 圍繞張愛玲的太太萬歲的一場爭論), in *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, 267.

shows an appreciation of modern wives who voluntarily maintain traditional wifely virtues even though they are often far from heroic and usually have a tendency to become narrow-minded:

“Long Live My Wife” is about an ordinary wife. In any lane in Shanghai, in any apartment building, you will find any number of them . . . There is an unfortunate tendency for such a woman to become a narrow-minded, stingy and vulgar person. As a result, the majority usually say the word “Mrs.” with a sense of scorn.

Modern China does not expect much from a wife, except chastity. A lot of irresponsible wives peacefully pass their lives in this way. For those wives who are responsible, such as Chen Sizhen in this play, dealing with a family not so big and not so small, always sacrificing herself out of consideration for the overall situation, although they make a great effort, they still pale into insignificance in comparison to those virtuous wives and loving mothers of ancient times. Chen Sizhen, after all, is not a character in *A Biography for Virtuous Women*. Compared to those characters, she lacks the air of the saint and the air of the hero. As a result, she is more friendly and approachable. However, her situation is, after all, unreasonable. Without pressure from the environment, why would she be repress herself so? This kind of psychology is difficult to understand. If there is anything great about her, I think this greatness lies in the fact that her behavior is voluntary; we cannot see her as a person sacrificed to a particular system.

(《太太萬歲》是關於一個普通的太太。上海的弄堂裏，一幢房子裏就可以有好幾個她……她的生活情形有一種不幸的趨勢，使人變成狹窄，小氣，庸俗，以致社會上一般人提起『太太』兩個字往往都帶著點嘲笑的意味。

現代中國對於太太們似乎沒有多少期望，除貞操外也很少要求。而有許多不稱職的太太也就安然渡過一生。那些盡責的太太呢，如同這齣戲裏的陳思珍，在一個半大不小的家庭裏周旋著，處處委屈自己，顧全大局，雖然也煞費苦心，但和舊時代的賢妻良母那種慘酷的犧牲精神比較起來，就成了小巫見大巫了。陳思珍畢竟不是《烈女傳》上的人物。她比起她們少一些聖賢氣，英雄氣，因此看上去要平易近人得多。——然而實在是更不近人情的。沒有環境的壓力，憑什麼她要這樣克己呢？這種心理似乎很費解。如果她有任何偉大之點，我想這偉大倒在於她的行為都是自動的，我們不能把她算作一個制度下的犧牲者。) <sup>12</sup>

Zhang's appreciation for Chen Sizhen's self-sacrifice is striking -- part of her entire psychology or world-view -- and certainly flies in the face of the those who would make of her a modern feminist in their own image. As discussed in Chapter Three, Zhang's works show a unique feminine instead of feminist stance. It is also notable that instead of stereotyping the wife as the oppressed female and the husband as the oppressive male, Zhang shows sympathy for both characters, an attitude which is consistent with almost all of her works. When Tang Zhiyuan discovers that he is able to start a business simply because his wife has borrowed money from her father, his pride is

<sup>12</sup> Preface to *Long live my wife*, 142.

greatly hurt. As a result, he loses his temper with her. Zhang says, “This is natural and normal in human relationships. Perhaps those members of the audience who are more experienced in life will not condemn him too harshly, will they?” (這也是人之常情。觀眾裏閱歷多一些人，也許不會過分譴責他的罷？)<sup>13</sup> As for her female protagonist, Zhang says,

She is not very happy, even after eventually coming to a happy ending.

This is what is called “The sorrows and joys of middle age,” which largely means that in the midst of happiness there is always a trace of sadness, while the sadness experienced is not totally without comfort. I very much like the phrase, “the sorrow of the floating life,” but if it is “the sorrows and joys of the floating life,” it is even more sorrowful than “the sorrow of floating on life,” as there is a feeling of large and sudden changes.

Chen Sizhen uses her skill in dealing with the world to smooth the way for everybody around her, to make life quietly disappear. Whether her tactics, her stratagems, are necessary, whether this kind of attitude toward life is beyond criticism, is obviously an open question. In “Long Live My Wife,” I have not favoured or protected this character, Chen Sizhen; I just want to propose that such a person exists.

( 她最後得到了快樂的結局也並不怎麼快樂：所謂『哀樂中年』，大概那意思就是他們的歡樂裏面永遠夾雜著一絲辛酸，他們的悲

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 143.

哀也不是完全没有安慰的。我非常喜歡『浮世的悲哀』這幾個字，但如果是『浮世的悲歡』，那比『浮世的悲哀』其實更可悲，因為有一種蒼茫變幻的感覺。

陳思珍用她的處世技巧使她四周的人們生活圓滑化，使生命的逝去悄無聲息，她運用那些手腕，心機，是否必須的——她這種做人的態度，是否無可疵議呢？這當然還是個問題。在《太太萬歲》裏，我並沒有把陳思珍這個人加以肯定或袒護之意，我只是提出有過這樣一個人就是了。）<sup>14</sup>

However, this sympathetic attitude became a target of attack in a heated controversy concerning the film. The controversy was triggered by Hong Shen (洪深), the editor of the weekly *Dagong Bao: Drama and Movie*. He added an addendum to the issue that published Zhang's "Preface to *Long Live My Wife*," and expressed his appreciation for Zhang's artistry:

I have not read such a good informal essay as "Preface to *Long Live My Wife*" for a long time. I just can't wait to see this "tears and laughter which is predestined to be forgotten" . . . She (Zhang) is going to be the best writer of high comedy of our age.

(好久沒有讀到像《〈太太萬歲〉題記》那樣的小品了。我等不及地想看這個“注定要被忘記的淚與笑”……她將成爲我們這個年代最優秀的High Comedy作家中的一人。)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Chen Zishan, "A controversy concerning Zhang Ailing's *Long live my wife*," 268.

Nine days later, on 12 December, an essay titled “Expressing My Anger” (Shufen 抒憤) was published in *Time Newspaper: New Birth* (Shidai ribao: xinsheng 時代日報 : 新生), under the name Hu Ke (胡珂). Hu sarcastically says, “We suddenly hear a hysterical cry in the lonely literary scene. The reason is that someone is able to smell the scent of High Comedy from a walking corpse of the puppet government!” (寂寞的文壇上，我們突然聽到歇斯底里的絕叫，原來有人在敵僞時期的行屍走肉上聞到 High Comedy 的芳香！)<sup>16</sup> It is obvious that he is accusing Zhang of being “a walking corpse of the puppet government” and comparing Hong’s praise for Zhang as “a hysterical cry.”<sup>17</sup> However, it is notable that, at the time “Expressing My Anger” was published, “Long Live My Wife” had not yet been shown. Hu certainly had no idea of what kind of film it was, and was not interested in the “Preface” at all. His comment, instead of a film or literary criticism, was merely a personal attack.<sup>18</sup>

After the publication of “Expressing My Anger,” numerous criticisms of “Long Live My Wife” appeared in the Shanghai newspapers, including *Dagong Bao*, *Xinmin Wanbao* (新民晚報) and *Zhongyang Ribao* (中央日報). Most of these criticisms concentrate on thematic issues, such as the film’s social significance and its didactic function. For instance, Wang Rong (王戎) criticizes “Long Live My Wife” as a “negative, pathetic” film, since Zhang not only fails to point the way for her female

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang’s first husband, Hu Lancheng, was a collaborator of the Wang Jingwei puppet government under the Japanese regime. The fact that Zhang published under the Japanese government in the occupational period was viewed as inappropriate in the eyes of patriots.

<sup>18</sup> There is no information on who Hu Ke is. From his criticism, one can speculate that he was a representative of leftist ideology or old-fashioned patriotism.

protagonist, who is a “vulgar, unrefined” city woman, but even shows a great appreciation for her. Fang Cheng (方澄) holds that “Long Live My Wife” fails to reveal the “truth of life,” Zhang is totally lost and does not have any feeling for the pain of life. Sha Yi (沙易) criticizes Zhang for not giving enough thought to the theme of the film, but merely trying to please the public and win their tears with her wit and technique. As a result, the film’s artistic value is very low. Xu Zeng (徐曾) expresses his worry and discontent with “Long Live My Wife,” since he views it as seemingly-sympathetic but didactic, tempting real women like Chen Sizhen to continue sacrificing themselves willingly. In the midst of the controversy, there were nearly no positive comments, except for those of Li Junwei (李君維), who affirms that “Long Live My Wife” is a high comedy which gives the audience a taste of bitterness, after making them laugh.

Hong Shen, who triggered the whole controversy, remained silent until the first run of “Long Live My Wife” ended on 7 January. In issue sixty-four of *Da Gong Bao: Drama and Movie*, he published two long essays. The first one was written by Xin Xie (莘薤), titled “We Neither Beg for Nor Give in Charity Cheap Sympathy — a Wife Viewing *Long Live My Wife*” (Women bu qiqiu, yebu shishe lianjiade lianmin 我們不乞求，也不施舍廉價的憐憫——一個太太看〈太太萬歲〉); the second one was written by himself, titled “Forgive Me for Not Accepting This Good Will — a Husband’s response to *Long Live My Wife*” (恕我不願領這番情——一個丈夫對於〈太太萬歲〉的回答).

Xin Xie holds that Chen Sizhen, in her concern for her family, loses her dignity and her own self. She also considers that “Long Live My Wife” has a great negative influence on its audience, since the laughter and tears it gives to them are “poisonous.” In Hong’s essay, he indulges in severe self-criticism and repudiates his original claim. He explains that he published “Preface to *Long Live My Wife*” merely because he failed to detect that this work is a self-appreciation by Zhang. He now holds that the movie cannot be considered a high comedy. It is merely an irrational work, in which Zhang aims at amusing herself and her audience. Its sympathetic attitude and lack of criticism for the unfaithful husband serves as an encouragement to adultery. Hong especially thanks Hu for the insightful opinions he offered in the essay “Expressing My Anger.” From Hong’s open apology and self-repudiation, one can see how powerful a figure Hu must have been in contemporary literary circles.<sup>19</sup>

### **The aftermath and influence of the controversy**

This controversy had surprisingly severe affects on Zhang’s writing career. She never published under her own name on the Mainland again. Her most significant work at this period, *Eighteen Springs*, was published under a pen-name. During the three years between the controversy and the publication of *Eighteen Springs*, Zhang wrote a screenplay titled “The Sorrows and Joys of Middle Age” (Ale zhongnian 哀樂中年), the main idea of which was provided by Sang Hu, the director of the film. However, when

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<sup>19</sup> Chen Zishan, “A controversy concerning Zhang Ailing’s *Long live my wife*,” 269-274.

the movie was shown, it was announced as being written by Sang, and Zhang was not credited with it.<sup>20</sup> At this time Zhang also adapted “The Golden Cangue” as a screenplay. However, since the short story was too well known to have allowed the movie to be shown without her authorship being credited, the project of shooting the movie was finally given up. After the close of the Shanghai Cultural China Film Company, the screenplay was lost.<sup>21</sup>

After the War, Xia Yan (夏衍), president of the Shanghai Screenplay Association (Shanghai dianying juben chuangzuosuo 上海電影劇本創作所), attempted to invite Zhang as a screenplay writer. Xia revealed to his assistant, Ke Ling, who was a good friend of Zhang, that he had to wait for a while, since there was opposition from the League of Left-wing Writers to Zhang’s joining the Association. In 1952 Zhang left for Hong Kong, before Ke had a chance to inform her of the issue.<sup>22</sup>

### United States period

Zhang started the second phase of her script-writing after she moved to the United States. During her stay in the Edward MacDowell Colony (February 1956 to October 1958) and subsequently in the Huntington Hartford Foundation center in Pacific

<sup>20</sup> Charles A. Liu ed., “A Study-manual for *The sorrows and joys of middle age*,” Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 1-51. Zheng Shusen, “Zhang Ailing and *The sorrows and joys of middle age*” (Zhang Ailing yu aile zhongnian 張愛玲與《哀樂中年》), in *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Chen Zishan, 220.

<sup>21</sup> Lin Yiliang, “Whispered words on Zhang Ailing,” 143; “Filling the gap between literature and film” (Wenxue yu dianying zhijian de bubai 文學與電影之間的補白), *Unitas* 3, no. 6 (April 1987): 223.

<sup>22</sup> Ke Ling, “To Zhang Ailing from afar” (Yaoji Zhang Ailing 遙寄張愛玲), in *Research materials on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Yu Qing, 9.

Palisades, California (November 1958 to May 1959), her economic situation was by no means favorable. These writer-in-residence programs and foundations provided either residence and board or a small amount of research funds. As a result, Reyher and Zhang lived without a fixed income, and depended mainly on Zhang's translations and screenplay-writing for a living.

With the assistance of Lin Yiliang, Zhang's good friend, she started to write screenplays for a company in Hong Kong, Grand China Film Company (Dianying huamao gongsi 電影華懋公司),<sup>23</sup> where Lin worked as a reader of screenplays. According to Lin Yiliang, from 1956 to 1961 she wrote a number of scripts: "Love is Like a Battlefield," (Qingchang ru zhanchang 情場如戰場), "Winning Both the Heart and the Money" (Rencai liangde 人財兩得), "Peach Blossom Fortune" (Taohua yun 桃花運) "The Bride of June" (Liuyue xinniàng 六月新娘), "The Tender Land" (Wenrou xiang 溫柔鄉), and "Little Children" (Xiao ernü 小兒女).<sup>24</sup> Only the scripts for "Love is Like a Battlefield" and "Little Children" have survived.

"Love is Like a Battlefield," filmed in 1956 and reprinted in *Sense of Loss* in 1983, is a comedy adapted from the American drama, "The Tender Trap," by Max Shulman.<sup>25</sup> The heroine, Ye Weifang (葉緯芳), tries her best to be the center of attraction among the men around her, only to arouse the jealousy of her cousin, Shi Rongsheng (史榕生), a

<sup>23</sup> "The Grand China Film Company" is my own translation. The original English name of the company has to be verified.

<sup>24</sup> Lin Yiliang, "Whispered words on Zhang Ailing," 153. "Filling the gap between literature and film," 223.

<sup>25</sup> "Sense of loss," 9. "Love is like a battlefield," *Sense of loss*, 219-294.

quiet and sarcastic young man. The story ends with her success in winning Shi's love, while her suitor, Tao Wenbing (陶文炳), finally becomes the boyfriend of her elder sister. This movie starred the famous actress, Lin Dai (林黛), and broke the box-office record for Mandarin films in Hong Kong.

"Little Children," reprinted in *Sequel* in 1988, is a film about social problems.<sup>26</sup> It continues with "The Sorrows and Joys of Middle Age" in dealing with the social pressure faced by middle-aged widowers when they try to remarry. "Little Children" is a story about a middle-age widower, Wang Hongchen (王鴻琛), and his daughter, Wang Jinghui (王景慧). Knowing that her father is in love and is planning to remarry, Jinghui worries that, true to stereotype, her stepmother will be mean. Believing that her two younger brothers are too young to stand maltreatment, she decides to leave her boyfriend, Sun Chuan (孫川), and teach in a primary school on a remote island, in order to support them. Meanwhile, the step-mother-to-be, Li Qiuhuai (李秋懷), also retreats to the same place out of self-sacrifice, for she knows that her marriage to Hongshen is not welcomed by his children. The two women then become good friends, and the film ends happily, with the reunion of both pairs of lovers.

"Little Children" has two points of significance. First, both females, Qiuhuai and Jinghui, are at the center of the story, being the ones who are determined, capable, independent and self-sacrificing -- while Hongshen is cowardly and indecisive, and Sun Chuan is irritable and lacking in understanding for his girlfriend. Similarly, Manzhen in

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<sup>26</sup> "Little children," *Sequel*, 91-171.

*Half a Lifetime's Love* and Jiayin in *So Much Regret* are also the ones who take action and sacrifice themselves. Zheng Shusen, in his "Zhang Ailing's *Long Live My Wife*," also points out that the main plot and structure of "Long Live My Wife" represents the disintegration of patriarchy. Chen Sizhen, who represents the matriarchy, saves the family by discovering the conspiracy of Shi Mimi, who plays the role of *femme fatale*.<sup>27</sup> Even Sizhen's mother-in-law and sister-in-law are manipulative, have power in the family and act on their own ideas. In contrast, both Sizhen's husband and her father are weak and dependent. This kind of "feminist" thinking, if I may borrow the term, is rare if not unprecedented in China in the forties.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Zhang's concern with the status of modern women can be traced back as early as her film review, "Wife, Vamp and Children," published in *Twentieth Century* in 1943. It is also her consistent viewpoint that the female represents the earth-mother who takes care of the male, as she reveals in her informal essays, such as "On Women." Zhang's view of the relationship between the sexes, as I shall show, is closely related to her own experience.

Second, "Little Children" echoes Zhang's own life in various ways. As discussed in Chapter One, Zhang came from a broken family. When she was small, she was always afraid that her father would remarry and that her step-mother would maltreat her. This step-mother complex is revealed in the screenplay, in the episode in which Jinghui and her brothers see how their neighbor maltreats her step-daughter. It is also notable that

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<sup>27</sup> Zheng Shusen, "Zhang Ailing's *Long live my wife*," 219.

<sup>28</sup> Ding Ling's female characters are also independent and capable, but they seldom create such a positive image as in Zhang's works.

Zhang herself became a step-mother after she married Reyher. Reyher had a daughter, Faith, by his first wife, Rebecca Hourwich, a feminist whom he married in 1917.<sup>29</sup> Zhang and Faith were about the same age. Zhang had no children and does not seem to have been prepared psychologically to become a step-mother. As a result, as Reyher's diary records, Zhang and Faith did not seem to get along very well.<sup>30</sup> By the time Zhang wrote "Little Children," she might have already met Faith. According to Lin Yiliang and Zheng Shusen, the screenplay "Little Children" was written between 1956 and 1961, while the film premiered in October 1963.<sup>31</sup> Zhang first met Faith in 1960.<sup>32</sup> In the character of Qiuhuai, Zhang may have been projecting her hope that she would get along well with her daughter-in-law.

Zhang was very productive in the late fifties. She spent most of her time on translation and the writing of screenplay and broadcasting-script. In 1957, she adapted *The Rice-Sprout Song* as a television script, and the series was broadcast on Studio One N.B.C. Television. Two years later, she adapted *Fool in the Reeds*, her English translation of Chen Jiying's (陳紀滢) novel *A Story of Reed Village* (Dicun zhuan 荻村傳), into both an English and a Chinese screenplay for a total of US\$3,000. Upon the termination of her grant from the Huntington Hartford Foundation, Zhang moved to San Francisco with Reyher in May 1959. Zhang's scripts written for the Grand China Film Company in

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<sup>29</sup> Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>31</sup> Lin Yiliang, "Filling the gap between literature and film," 223. Zheng Shusen, "Zhang Ailing, Reyher, Brecht," 81.

<sup>32</sup> Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 139.

Hong Kong earned her the reputation as a popular screenplay writer. Her pay for each script ranged from US\$ 800 to \$1,000, which was the highest among that of the Hong Kong screenplay-writers at the time. Meanwhile, Reyher's health got better, and he started to work on a screenplay, as well as a biography of his friend, Sinclair Lewis.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that their financial situation was much improved, Zhang understood that she was writing these commercial screenplays merely for the sake of earning a living, while feeling sorry that her creative writings were not recognized in American literary circles. *The Rouge of the North* was not published until 1967; another novel in English, finished in 1957, *The Shanghai Loafer* (Shanghai Youxianren 上海悠閑人), was never even published.<sup>34</sup> However, she persisted with her creative writing and started a new English novel titled *Young Marshal* (Shao Shuai 少帥).

In October 1961, by invitation of The Grand China Film Company, Zhang planned to go to Hong Kong to adapt *The Dream of the Red Chamber* into a screenplay. She took the chance to stop over in Taipei, so as to gather material for *Young Marshal*, a historical novel that was intended to use the Xi'an Incident (Xi'an shibian 西安事變) of December 12, 1936, as its background.<sup>35</sup> However, to her dismay, Reyher had a stroke in Pennsylvania, while he was taking a bus to Washington. He fell into a coma, staying in a Washington hospital near Faith's home. Zhang did not have enough money for the airfare to Washington; she therefore decided to stay in Hong Kong and finish the screenplay

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 112, 116, 131-132.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 115, 120.

<sup>35</sup> An authoritative English source on the Xi'an incident is Wu Tien Wei, *The Sian Incident: a pivotal point of view*, New York: John Day, 1950.

“The Dream of the Red Chamber,” for which she was paid almost US\$ 2,000, before returning to the States.

However, due to the fact that another company had already made *The Dream of the Red Chamber* into a film, Zhang’s screenplay was not used. She fell into great financial difficulties and had to live on a loan from Lin Yiliang during her stay in Hong Kong. Lin subsequently asked her to write another screenplay, “North and South as an Intimate Family” (Nanbei yijia qin 南北一家親), a sequel to the popular movie “North and South in Harmony” (Nanbei He 南北和). He offered her US \$800. Zhang worked night and day on these screenplays and her eyes became ulcerated. Failing to attain recognition from American literary circles, she hoped to establish herself in Hong Kong, but now her dream was shattered. The sole consolation for her at this difficult time was that Reyher’s health got better, and he moved into an apartment in Washington. After nearly half a year of difficulties in Hong Kong, Zhang went back to the United States, in March 1961.<sup>36</sup>

From 1962 to 1964, she wrote three more screenplays for The Grand China Film Company, including “Please Remember Me” (Yiqu nanwang 一曲難忘), “North and South in Happy Union” (Nanbei xi xiangfeng 南北喜相逢) and “Soul Returning to the Ambivalent Sky” (Hun gui lihentian 魂歸離恨天).<sup>37</sup> “Please Remember Me,” premiered in July 1964, is the only one of Zhang’s screenplays that has an English title

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 142-157.

<sup>37</sup> “Please remember me,” *Unitas* 9, no. 6 (April 1993): 76-94. “North and south in happy union” (abridged version), *Unitas* 3, no. 5 (March 1987): 38-45. “Soul returning to the ambivalent sky,” *Sequel*, 175-238.

included in its Chinese programme-booklet. It is an adaptation, from a Chinese angle, of the famous movie of the forties, “Waterloo Bridge,” with Vivian Lee and Robert Keller. “Waterloo Bridge,” which had the old song “Should Old Acquaintance be Forgotten” as its theme song, was very popular when it was shown in Shanghai. In the twelve scenes of “Please Remember Me,” Zhang also uses this song to create atmosphere and to point out the theme of the movie. The title “Please Remember Me” also echoes a line said by the character played by Vivian Lee in “Waterloo Bridge.”<sup>38</sup>

“North and South in Happy Union” is adapted from the popular British comedy, “Charley’s Aunt.” It was finished in the first half of 1962, and mailed to Hong Kong from Washington.<sup>39</sup> Similar to the other works in the “North and South” series, such as “North and South in Harmony” and “North and South as an Intimate Family”, this film focuses on the cultural differences between local inhabitants and immigrants from the Mainland in the Hong Kong of the fifties. The language barrier and differences in customs between the north and the south contribute to the comic elements in these films, and their endings are usually happy ones. Since Zhang was not good at Cantonese, the Cantonese dialogue in “North and South in Happy Union” was written by Lin Yiliang, following Zhang’s ideas.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Zheng Shushen, “On ‘Please remember me’” (Guanyu yiqu nanwang 關於一曲難忘), *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, ed. Chen Zishan, 223-224.

<sup>39</sup> Lin Yiliang, “Filling the gap between literature and film,” 223.

<sup>40</sup> Zheng Shushen, “The cinematic art of Zhang Ailing” (Zhang Ailing de dianying yishu 張愛玲的電影藝術), in Chen Zishan ed., *Farewell to Zhang Ailing* (Zuobie Zhang Ailing 作別張愛玲), Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 1996, 37.

“Soul Returning to the Ambivalent Sky” is an adaptation of Emily Brontë’s “Wuthering Heights.” This was Zhang’s last screenplay, as The Grand China Film Company closed down in 1964 after its owner died in a plane crash. The film was never shot. After her major source of income was cut off, Zhang and Reyher had to depend on Reyher’s small amount of social security income for a living. They subsequently moved to Kentucky Court, a government low-rent housing. Even worse, Reyher had another stroke and was paralyzed for two years. In 1964, Zhang adapted a number of Western and Russian novels by Maupassant, Henry James and Solzhenitsyn into radio scripts for The Voice of America. She also stepped up her translation work for the U.S.I.A., through her connections with her former superior there, Richard MaCarthy.<sup>41</sup>

## Translations

### Translation of works by others

Apart from screenplay-writing, translation was another source of income for Zhang during her Hong Kong and US years. She translated works both by others and herself, from English to Chinese, and vice versa. Zhang had shown a great sensitivity for language since she was a child. As discussed in Chapter Three, in her high school essays she showed an early interest in translating verses from classical Chinese. Her first published translation was “Maltreat through Jokes” (Nüe er nüe 謔而虐), which appeared in *The Essence of Western Books* (Xishu jinghua 西書精華) in 1941,<sup>42</sup> one

<sup>41</sup> Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 165-167.

<sup>42</sup> “Maltreat through jokes”(Nüe er nüe 謔而虐), *The essence of western books* (Xishu jinghua 西書精華) 6 (summer 1941): 168-173.

year after she won the consolation prize in *West Wind* magazine's essay competition. *The Essence of Western Books* was a magazine very similar in nature to *West Wind*; both aimed at introducing Western books and lifestyles through translations. Even its motto, "Translate the essence of Western books, and introduce European and American reading" (譯述西書精華，介紹歐美讀物), bore a great similarity to that of *West Wind*, which is "Translate the essence of Western magazines, and introduce European and American life and society" (譯述西洋雜誌精華，介紹歐美人生社會).

"Maltreat through Jokes" was unknown to scholars working on Zhang, until my accidental discovery of it through an advertisement in *West Wind*, announcing the sixth issue of *The Essence of Western Books*.<sup>43</sup> It is an abridged translation of Margaret Halsey's *With Malice Toward Some*, which is her diary on the experience of accompanying her husband, an exchange professor, from the United States to Britain.<sup>44</sup> Zhang's translation focuses on the cultural differences between the British and Americans. She chose several paragraphs of Halsey's book, which she arranged in her own sequence into a six-page Chinese translation.

This very first translation of Zhang's to be published is significant in that it shows Zhang's preliminary mastery of English-Chinese translation skills, despite the fact that some of the translated sentences are still awkward and anglicized. Zhang follows the original text closely and aptly captures Halsey's ironic and satirical tone. The translated paragraphs are rearranged in a way which can be easily understood, with topic sentences

<sup>43</sup> *The west wind monthly*, 61 (Sept. 1941):1.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Halsey, *With malice toward some*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938.

added at the beginning of each paragraph. The translation of the title “With Malice toward Some” as “Nüe er nüe” also shows Zhang’s wit, since the first “nüe,” which means ‘joke’, sounds the same as the second one, which means ‘maltreat.’

Zhang’s choice of Halsey’s book for translation shows her interest in the cultural differences between the Americans and the British. The following comparison between the original text and Zhang’s translation provides a glimpse of Zhang’s translation skills and achievement up to that time, and shows the nature of Halsey’s book and Zhang’s reasons for choosing it.

It seems to me one of the principal differences in the feeling-tone of English and American life comes from the fact that Americans are prone to favor you with their opinions . . . whereas the English think of an opinion as something which a decent person, if he has the misfortune to have one, does all he can to hide.

(據我看來，英國人與美國人生活情調主要的分別之一就是：美國人喜歡給你聽聽他們的意見……英國人呢，覺得一個規矩人如果不幸有了『意見』這麼一個東西的話，總要把它竭力藏匿起來。)<sup>45</sup>

Englishmen, from what I can see, do not talk to women if they can possibly avoid it, and if they must talk to them they keep the conversation inexorably down to their idea of the level of feminine understanding. And Englishwomen -- even the brainy ones, apparently -- meekly concur.

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<sup>45</sup> “Maltreat through jokes,” 172. *With malice toward some*, 192.

(英國人，只要能躲避過，便不想跟女人說話；假如他們非和她們談不可，他們矢志不移地把談話維持在他們意想中的女流見識的水平線上。英國女人——顯然，連有腦子的都在內——謙卑地表同意。) <sup>46</sup>

Anne Hathaway's cottage and Mary Arden's [Anne Hathaway was Shakespeare's wife, and Mary Arden, his mother] are sufficiently beautiful, with their brilliant gardens, to soften the most obdurate foe of quaintness. But like all the other high spots in Stratford, they have been provided with postcard standards and with neat custodians whose easy, mechanical Poet-worship had me looking sharply to see if they were plugged into the wall. All of Stratford, in fact, suggests powdered history -- add hot water and stir and you have a delicious, nourishing Shakespeare.

(司脫拉福城 (Stratford 莎士比亞 誕生地) —— 安痕哈薩威 (莎翁 的太太) 的茅舍與 瑪麗娜登 (莎翁 之母) 的茅舍都極美，加上鮮艷的花園，足夠軟化最厭恨古色古香的人。但是，像司脫拉福 其他的名勝一般，這裏也設有名信片攤子，又有整潔的看守人，他們機械化的詩人崇拜使我尖著眼看他們是不是無線電，有插銷插在牆上的。實在，整個司脫拉福 使人聯想到製成粉末的歷史——加熱水一攪，你便得到一個可口的，滋養的莎士比亞。) <sup>47</sup>

It is notable that when Zhang did this translation, she was studying at Hong Kong University. The fact that she still read, and contributed to, the Shanghai magazine *The*

<sup>46</sup> "Maltreat through jokes," 169. *With malice toward some*, 151.

<sup>47</sup> "Maltreat through jokes," 171. *With malice toward some*, 65.

*Essence of Western Books*, reveals her close link with her hometown. As well, the formal training she received in translation at the University certainly helped with this work, and in her subsequent translation career. It might be thought that this translation was an assignment in her translation course, but this seems unlikely, in view of Zhang's choice of certain paragraphs for translation, and the way she edited and rearranged them into a complete essay. The editorial liberties she took would be unlikely in a written assignment.

During her tenure in the Hong Kong branch of the U.S.I.A., from 1952 to 1955, Zhang translated a number of Western novels and short stories, including Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," *The Portable Emerson*, edited by Mark Van Doren, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling*.<sup>48</sup> Zhang was not really interested in the works of Emerson and Irving. Zhang revealed to Lin Yiliang's wife, her colleague in the U.S.I.A., "I force myself to translate Emerson, for I have no other options. I would grit my teeth and do it, even if it were a book on dentists." (我逼著自己譯愛墨森，實在是沒辦法。即使是關於牙醫的書，我也會硬著頭皮去做的。) On another occasion, she said to the Lins, "Translating Irving's story was like talking to someone I don't like, but I have

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<sup>48</sup> Lin Yiliang, "Whispered words to Zhang Ailing," 145. Zhang Ailing trans., Ernest Hemingway, *The old man and the sea* (Laoren yu hai 老人與海), Hong Kong: jirishiji chubanshe, 1972. Zhang Ailing trans., *Selected writings of Emerson* (Aimoisen xuanji 愛默森選集), Taipei: Huangguan, 1995. Her translation was based on Mark Van Doren, ed., *The portable Emerson*, New York: The Viking Press, 1946. Her translations of Irving's "The legend of sleepy hollow" and Majorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling* did not survive. See also Lucian Wu ed. & trans., *New Chinese stories: twelve short stories by contemporary Chinese writers*, Taipei: Heritage Press, 1961, 64.

no alternative, there is no way to escape.”(譯華盛頓·歐文的小說，好像同自己不喜歡的人說話，無可奈何地，逃又逃不掉。)<sup>49</sup>

However, it is notable that she greatly appreciated Hemingway, especially for his works' universality. She says, “Katherine Mansfield is outdated . . . But Hemingway is different, despite the fact that he wrote about war.”(蔓殊菲爾 Katherine Mansfield 已過時……海明威就不同，雖然他也形容過第一次世界大戰。)<sup>50</sup> As discussed in a previous chapter, Zhang prefers to write about love between men and women, instead of grand subjects such as war. Her appreciation for Hemingway reveals that what she dislikes is, in fact, the naive optimism of Resistance literature, instead of disliking war literature. Zhang had always been striving after the universal quality in literature.

Zhang's translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* retains well the flavour of the original novel, closely following Hemingway's simple sentence structure and simple diction. Zhang also paid close attention to the translation of Hemingway's color imagery and detailed descriptions. *The Old Man and the Sea* can be considered Zhang's best translation from a Western novel; her translation is also more literary and delicate, as compared to other translated versions.<sup>51</sup>

Emerson's universality also appeals to Zhang, despite the fact that he really does not suit her literary taste. Zhang says in the translator's introduction to *The Portable*

<sup>49</sup> Lin Yiliang, “Whispered words on Zhang Ailing,” 145.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>51</sup> Such as that of Luo Luojia (羅珞珈). Luo Luojia, *The old man and the sea* (Laoren yu hai 老人與海), Taipei: zhiwen chubanshe, 1970.

*Emerson* (Aimosen xuanji 愛默森選集), “Emerson’s work has not lost its effect, even today.”<sup>52</sup> She holds that Emerson is a healthy individualist:

He wanted no followers, because his aim was to bring men not to him but to themselves . . . Each man is great and should think for himself. The reason he distrusted communities was that communities made thought common. If he ever had any ideology, it was a kind of healthy individualism . . . He was optimistic, but he is absolutely not an idealist who did nothing but fantasize.

(他並不希望有信徒，因為他的目的並非領導人們走向他，而是領導人們走向他們自己……每一個人都是偉大的，每一個人都應當自己思想。他不信任團體，因為在團體中，思想是一致的。如果他抱有任何主義的話，那是一種健康的個人主義……他是樂觀的，然而絕對不是一個專事空想的理想主義者。)<sup>53</sup>

Zhang’s interpretation of Emerson also corresponds to Zhang’s own lifestyle, and her concern for self-understanding. Emerson’s emphasis on self-reliance corresponded to Zhang’s own passionate desire for personal independence.

Apart from Western novels, Zhang also translated for the U.S.I.A. Chen Jiying’s *A Story of Reed Village* from Chinese into English, as anti-Communist propaganda. Written in the northern dialect, *A Story of Reed Village* tells of the experience of a villager, Stupid Changshuner (傻常順兒), who is exploited by the Northern landlords, the Japanese, and

<sup>52</sup> *Selected writings of Emerson*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. The first part of Zhang’s opinion appears also in Mark Van Doren’s introduction. However, Zhang’s opinion that Emerson is a healthy individualist seems to be in disagreement with Van Doren’s claim that “His [Emerson’s] optimism could be childish, and at worst it could be dangerous.” *The portable Emerson*, 17.

also by the Communists, during the period from the Boxer Rising to the fall of the Mainland in the Second World War.<sup>54</sup> The novel was first translated into English by Ying Qianli (英千里). However, the U.S.I.A., believing that Ying's translation was too difficult for Americans to understand, asked Zhang to retranslate it. Zhang's translation, titled *Fool in the Reeds*, was published under her English name, Eileen Chang, in 1959, by a publisher sponsored by the U.S.I.A.<sup>55</sup> Instead of translating word for word, Zhang translated the novel by its meaning. She retained the overall structure, paying close attention to the story development. Her style was simple, clear and easily understood. This English version of *A Story of Reed Village* was sent around the world for propaganda purposes, and received great international attention.<sup>56</sup>

#### Translation of Zhang's own works

Zhang is one of the very few modern Chinese writers who are capable of writing in English, and of translating their own Chinese works into English. The works she first wrote in English and subsequently translated into Chinese include *The Rice-Sprout Song* (*The Rice-Sprout Song* 秧歌), "The Stale Mates" ("Incidents of the May Fourth Era: The

<sup>54</sup> Chen Jiying (陳紀滢), *A story of reed village* (Dicun zhuan 荻村傳), Taipei: Chongguang chubanshe, 1951. According to Chen, *A story of reed village* was first published in 1954, four years later than the version I see. Chen Jiying, "The translation of *A story of reed village*: along with a discussion on Zhang Ailing" (Dicun zhuan fanyi shimo jianji Zhang Ailing 荻村傳翻譯始末兼記張愛玲), *Unitas* 3, no. 5 (March 1987): 93. The only reason for the difference in the publication year, if Chen has not remembered it wrongly, is that the earlier version is one illegally published right after the end of the serialization of the novel.

<sup>55</sup> *Fool in the reeds*, Hong Kong: Nihong chubanshe, 1959. The version widely available today is the Meiya version. Eileen Chang trans., *Fool in the reeds*, Taipei: Meiya chubanshe, 1976. However, Chen Jiying mistakes the publication date as 1966. See his "The translation of *A story of reed village*," 94.

<sup>56</sup> Chen Jiying, "The translation of *A story of reed village*," 94.

Union of Luo Wentao and His Three Beauties” 五四遺事：羅文濤三美團圓) and *The Rouge of the North* (*Embittered Woman* 怨女). The works she first wrote in Chinese and subsequently translated into English include *Love in Redland* (*Naked Earth*), “Waiting” (“Little Finger Up”) “Indian Summer: A Xiao’s Autumnal Lament” (“Shame Amah!”) and “The Golden Cangue” (“The Golden Cangue”).

There are generally fewer discrepancies from the original in works she translated from English into Chinese, than vice-versa. The fact that Zhang’s native language is Chinese certainly contributes to this. Of the works translated from an English original, *The Rice-Sprout Song* remains the best-translated. The style is so fluent that it seems as if the work were originally written in Chinese. *The Rouge of the North* is also well-translated into Chinese as *Embittered Woman*. It is also notable that the English in *The Rouge of the North* is even better than that in *The Rice-Sprout Song*. A possible reason for this is that her American husband, Reyher, may have assisted Zhang with her English style. For “Stale Mates,” the Chinese translation is much more delicate and fluent, as well as more detailed, than the English original.<sup>57</sup> After a close comparison between the English original and the Chinese translation, Lin Yiliang arrived at the conclusion that the Chinese translation can be considered as a “recreation” of the English original. It makes more use of imagery and other stylistic devices, and is written in a more lively and natural style. Zhang, in reply to Lin’s letter, reveals that her simplicity of diction in the English

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<sup>57</sup> “Stale mates: a short story set in the time when love came to China,” *The Reporter* 15: 4 (Sept. 1956): 34-38. “Incidents in the May Fourth era” (Wusi yishi: Luo Wentao sanmei tuanyuan 五四遺事：羅文濤三美團圓), *Sequel* (Xüji 續集), Taipei: Huangguan, 1988, 255-273.

original was to accommodate American readers. She was afraid that too many explanations of the Chinese cultural background in the story would hinder the reader's enjoyment.<sup>58</sup>

Zhang's translation of her works from Chinese into English experienced a long period of uncertainty before the appearance of her English translation of "The Golden Cangue," which is able to stand on its own merits as an original English work of art. Her first attempt, the translation of *Love in Redland* into *Naked Earth*, falls short by being too brief. Many subtle touches in the Chinese original, especially in the use of imagery, are missing.<sup>59</sup> "Little Finger Up" (1961) and "Shame, Amah!" (1962), the English translations of "Waiting" (1944) and "Indian Summer" (1944), also fail to retain the flavour of the original Chinese version.<sup>60</sup> Both translations retain merely the basic plot outlines of their originals, but fail to communicate their deeper meanings and the narrative sophistication which the works possess in Chinese.

"Waiting" tells of several patients who chat with one another, while waiting for the masseur in a clinic. Two of the patients, Mrs. Yu and Mrs. Ho (Mrs. Xi 奚太太 and Mrs. Tong 童太太 in "Waiting"), talk about their husbands, each of whom has taken a

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<sup>58</sup> Lin Yiliang, "Zhang Ailing's 'Incidents in the May Fourth era' and its translation" (Cong Zhang Ailing de wusi yishi shuoqi 從張愛玲的五四遺事說起), *Yesterday and today*, 125-131.

<sup>59</sup> For example, in the Chinese version, more detailed descriptions are given to Liuquan's psychological reaction when he was arrested by the government. The nightmare imagery and theatrical imagery in the original is missing in the English translation. *Love in redland*, 234-236.

<sup>60</sup> "Little finger up," in *New Chinese stories: twelve short stories by contemporary Chinese writers*, trans. and ed. Lucian Wu, 65-83. "Shame, amah!" in *Eight stories by Chinese women*, selected and trans. Nieh Hua-ling, 91-114.

concubine. While Mrs. Xi consoles herself with the belief that her husband will return to her one day, Mrs. Tong totally loses hope in her husband. After the deaths of her parents-in-law, who caused her endless suffering, but whom she finally won over, Mrs. Tong is left with nothing but futility. As indicated by its title, "Waiting," the story carries a sense of resignation. The fact that life is viewed as a process of aimless waiting creates an atmosphere of subdued pathos. However, as indicated by the English title "Little Finger Up," which is a gesture commonly understood as referring to a concubine, Zhang's translation focuses mainly on the fact that both Mrs. Xi's and Mrs. Tong's husbands have concubines. In order to simplify the story, Zhang replaces detailed descriptions with short sentences which directly explain the thoughts and intentions of the characters.<sup>61</sup> Subtle touches in the original are also missing in the translation, such as the fact that, after her parents-in-law die, Mrs. Tong still gets up early in the morning, the only difference being the soreness in her fingers, which was absent when she was younger.<sup>62</sup>

The tendency towards over-simplification is even more serious in Zhang's translation of "Indian Summer," an important story which I discussed earlier in detail. As indicated by the title, "Shame, Amah!," the English translation concentrates on the shame of Ah Nee (A Xiao in "Indian Summer") -- she always gets the phone numbers wrong when she takes messages for her employer, and her son fails an examination. Long descriptive paragraphs and pictorial images, which serve to shatter temporality and create an illusory extension of time, are missing in the translation. Instead of a story revealing

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<sup>61</sup> "Little finger up," 65, 66, 71.

<sup>62</sup> "Waiting," *Romances*, 119.

the depth of compassion of an ordinary maid, the translation becomes a simpler story, showing Ah Nee's lack of reflection.<sup>63</sup>

In 1971, Zhang published the English translation of "The Golden Cangu" with the same title. This translation, fluently and beautifully written, retains well the motifs and imagery of the Chinese original. This work received considerable attention from Western critics. Favorable reviews were published in *Tamkang Review*, one of the authoritative English journals on Chinese literature in Taiwan. Jeannine Bohlmeier, in a study of Zhang's English works, provides a detailed analysis of the use of moon and gold imagery in "The Golden Cangu." She comments that, presented in a way "accessible through the ordinary patterns of Western literary criticism," this story provides the western reader with "a sense of familiarity as he meets the writing of another culture."<sup>64</sup> Shirley J. Paolini and Chen-Shen Yen, in a formal analysis of "The Golden Cangu" as an English creative work, note the story's modern sensibility and Zhang's mastery of colloquial English in writing dialogue. Paolini and Yen also hold that "The Golden Cangu," "with its universal themes and symbols," "bridges the gap between East and West."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> A major difference in the plots of "Indian summer" and "Shame, amah!" is that in "Indian summer," A Xiao has a husband and a son in Shanghai. However, in "Shame, amah!," her husband is working in Australia. She has a substitute husband in Shanghai, who is a tailor. Moreover, her son is an adopted one.

<sup>64</sup> Jeannine Bohlmeier, "Eileen Chang's bridges to China," *Tamkang Review* 5: 1 (April 1974): 111.

<sup>65</sup> Shirley J. Paolini & Chen-Shen Yen, "Moon, madness, and mutilation in Eileen Chang's English Translation of The Golden cangu," *Tamkang review* 19: 1-4 (Autumn 1988-Summer 1989): 545-555.

Zhang's work as a translator demonstrates her sensitivity to language and her mastery of both Chinese and English. She established herself as a figure unprecedented in modern Chinese literature, in view of the vast number of translations she produced, and more significantly, her ability to translate her own works into English or simply write in the second language and translate back into Chinese. There were other modern Chinese writers who studied abroad, knew English well and wrote creatively in English, such as Xu Zhimo (徐志摩) and Lin Yutang. However, seldom did they translate their own works, or pursue careers as professional translators. Even though, as in her career as a novelist, Zhang went through an experimental period as a translator before she was able to produce such high quality works as her translations of *The Old Man and the Sea* and "The Golden Cangue," her persistence and enthusiasm in entering imaginatively into a variety of literary styles showed her professional spirit as a translator.

Of course, in appreciating Zhang's mastery of language and her persistence with translation, one cannot overlook her financial difficulties, and the fact that translation was a major source of income for her, especially after The Grand China Film Company closed down in 1964. In June 1966, she stayed at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, as a writer-in-residence. Meanwhile, she applied to the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant to work on her English translation of the nineteenth-century Chinese novel, *Flowers on the Sea* (Haishang hua 海上花). In April 1967, she became a fellow in Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Reyher died in October of the same year, and thus her eleven year marriage came to an end. At that time, Zhang was forty-seven.

As discussed previously, being cut off from her home country, and failing to establish herself in the United States, Zhang suffered a decline in creativity in her later years. Her short stories written in the fifties, and revised and published later, such as “Lust and Abstinence,” “Flowers and Pistils Floating on the Waves,” and “Happy Reunion,” all employ as their backdrops the Mainland of the forties and fifties. Her novels written in the sixties are also rewritings of earlier works. Her translations into English, in the sixties and seventies, of her own masterpieces produced at her creative peak in the forties, also give a sense that Zhang was “rounding off” her creative career. To employ her phrase in “The Golden Cangue,” her later works were merely “the moon of thirty years ago” (三十年前的月亮).<sup>66</sup>

### Academic Annotations

It is significant that an analysis of the pattern of Zhang’s life shows a great tendency towards reversion. From the mid-sixties onwards, she basically discontinued writing creatively and concentrated on academic research. In 1969, Zhang became a senior researcher at the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley. For two years, she worked on a research project concerning the special terms used by the Chinese Communists.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, she continued with her translation and annotation of *Flowers on the Sea*, and started her research on *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

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<sup>66</sup> “The Golden cangue,” *Romances*, 202. C. T. Hsia ed., *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 191.

<sup>67</sup> Sima Xin, *Zhang Ailing and Reyher*, 179.

### Nightmare in the Red Chamber

Zhang's research on *Dream of the Red Chamber, Nightmare in the Red Chamber* (Honglouloumeng yan 紅樓夢魘), can be considered as a return to the source of her creative writings. Zhang says in the preface to *Nightmare in the Red Chamber*, "These two books (*Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase*), especially *Dream of the Red Chamber*, are the source of everything to me" (這兩部書是我一切的泉源，尤其紅樓夢。) <sup>68</sup> *Dream of the Red Chamber* did not merely serve as a fertile resource for her creative writings, but also as a spiritual catharsis. Zhang says, "At times when things do not go in the way I wish, no matter whether in important or trivial matters, it no longer bothers me. I merely study *Dream of the Red Chamber* in detail for a short while." (偶遇拂逆，事無大小，只要『詳』一會紅樓夢就好了。) <sup>69</sup>

Zhang pursued her research with great enthusiasm. To her, the study of *Dream of the Red Chamber* was like figuring the way out of a labyrinth, solving a jigsaw puzzle or reading a detective story. Zhang says, "I read most of the recent studies on *Dream of the Red Chamber* without sitting down, I just don't have time to sit down." (近人的考據都是站著看——來不及坐下。) <sup>70</sup> It is note-worthy that Zhang lived in solitude after

<sup>68</sup> *Nightmare in the red chamber* (Honglouloumeng yan 紅樓夢魘), Taipei: Huangguan, 1977, 11. For a comparison between "The golden cangue" and *Dream of the red chamber*, see Lü Qixiang (呂啓祥), "The golden cangue' and *Dream of the red chamber*" (Jinsuo ji yu honglouloumeng 金鎖記與紅樓夢), in *The World of Zhang Ailing*, ed. Zheng Shusen, 149-170.

<sup>69</sup> *Nightmare in the red chamber.*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 & 11.

her husband died, and rarely corresponded with even her closest relatives. However, to her, the characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber* are more than close friends. When she first saw books on *Dream of the Red Chamber* after she fled to Hong Kong from the Mainland, she was overwhelmed with surprise: “Having no idea for years where these good friends had been, I dropped all idea of hearing from them. But then I heard from them again.” (這些熟人多年不知下落，早已死了心，又有了消息。)<sup>71</sup>

Zhang’s approach in her study is basically that of the eighteenth-century tradition of textual research (kaozheng 考證). She comments, “in fact, without textual research, all criticism is like useless words, without solid support.” (事實是除了考據，都是空口說白話。)<sup>72</sup> As a great admirer of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, she re-read the novel every few years. Her familiarity with the work becomes an asset in her research, since unfamiliar expressions from a different version would immediately stand out for her, without her paying close attention to them. Zhang remarks, “my only qualification for doing this research is my familiarity with *Dream of the Red Chamber*.” (我唯一的資格是實在熟讀紅樓夢)<sup>73</sup>

Zhang’s study involves at least four kinds of interrelated endeavors: to clarify texts and editions; to delineate textual transformations; to reconstruct the original texts of various versions of *Red Mansion*; and, finally, to seek out the psychological development that Cao Xueqing (曹雪芹) went through, in the process of revising his text. According

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 7 & 19.

to Zhang, one of the major features of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the long duration that its revisions involved. Cao continued his revisions even after earlier versions had been circulated among his literary circle. Instead of copying the whole text from the beginning, he merely replaced the pages on which he made changes. As a result, different chapters or parts in the same version may be written at different times, and one cannot assume that the contents of earlier versions were written at an earlier time than later versions.<sup>74</sup> Zhang's project is an ambitious one, which involves the breaking down of various versions, re-arranging the chapters according to the time they were written, reconstructing the earliest version of each chapter, and tracing Cao's process of revision throughout decades.

Although there were ample precedents for the methodology of textual research, Zhang must be credited for her method of close reading and her sensitivity to the use of diction. By carefully noting the differences between the first eighty chapters and the last forty, for example in the description of clothing and the use of common sayings, Zhang provides ample support for the argument that the last forty chapters of *Dream of the Red Chamber* were added by Gao E (高鹗). Her study serves as a useful reference point for further research on *Dream of the Red Chamber*. For instance, Li Wai-yee's detailed study of *Dream of the Red Chamber* quotes Zhang extensively regarding the issue of the dating of various versions.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>75</sup> Li Wai-yee, *Enchantment and disenchantment: love and illusion in Chinese literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 164, 178, 189, 216, 241 & 255.

As a writer herself, perhaps Zhang was even more interested in Cao's creative psychology than in the dating of his novel. To Zhang, *Dream of the Red Chamber* serves as a cross-section of Cao's talent: his revision of *Dream of the Red Chamber* over such a long time span as two decades provides important clues for understanding his psychological development through the years.<sup>76</sup> She notes two important changes in Cao's revisions: the tendency towards sophistication, and the tendency to revert from a more modern to a more traditional sensibility. For instance, Zhang suggests that the lowering of the characters' age in the process of revision reveals Cao's increasing awareness of the practical impossibility of a young man to be living with his adolescent female cousins in the same garden. In the earlier manuscripts, the characters are in their late teens, but they become younger and younger in the later versions, in order to make the situation seem more plausible. She also holds that the climactic scene of the emotional interaction between the male and female protagonists, Jia Baoyu (賈寶玉) and Lin Daiyu (林黛玉), presented with great sophistication, was written at a later stage.<sup>77</sup>

However, to Zhang, this development towards psychological sophistication seems to be offset by Cao's reversion from a more modern sensibility to a more traditional one. According to the earlier manuscript version that Zhang reconstructs, the fall of the Jias is due to the flaws in Baoyu's character: overwhelmed by his emotional problems, he fails to make any contribution to his family. Hence, the novel is a tragedy that concentrates on the problems of growing up. Zhang also points out that the episode of the Jias being

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<sup>76</sup> *Nightmare in the red chamber*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 94 & 372.

penalized by the emperor and having their property confiscated was added only after the fifth revision of the work. She speculates that the reason for this alteration is that the tragic ending in the earlier version was too ahead of its time, and a protagonist with such a weak character failed to arouse Cao's readers' sympathy. It was more acceptable to the public to explain the fall of the Jias by their offending the emperor.<sup>78</sup>

It is significant that Zhang's interpretation of Cao's revisions echoes her own experience. Cao's reversion from a modern sensibility to a traditional one, according to Zhang, involves a degree of compromise. As discussed previously, Zhang herself also experienced great frustration in accommodating her readers' tastes and standards, especially in her novel-writing. As well, Zhang's interpretation of Cao's use, in later versions, of the Ning Mansion (寧國府) as a major cause of the emperor's punishment of the Jias, also echoes Zhang's dismay concerning political oppression. She speculates that Cao's design is to avoid associations between the Rong Mansion (榮國府) and his own family, which also experienced a fall after offending the emperor. Such an association might have led to his literary persecution.<sup>79</sup>

Zhang's research on *Dream of the Red Chamber* lasted for more than ten years. In 1977, she published her research result as *Nightmare in the Red Chamber*. Zhang says in her "Preface," "I consider [my research] as a long-distance exploration. Interested readers can travel with me from the very beginning." (視作長途探險，讀者有興致的話可

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 254, 255 & 420.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 249 & 254.

以從頭起同走一遭。)<sup>80</sup> However, Zhang's company proves to be extremely difficult to keep. Not only is the topic too specific and its content too complicated, but Zhang's presentation essentially lacks the clarity of a formal academic thesis. While its use of words is extremely condensed, its content is highly repetitive. Instead of a research paper, the work reads more like a collection of traditional Chinese-style reading-notes. As well, there are even times in which her arguments digress into unrelated topics, such as her encounter with another scholar working on Chinese studies.<sup>81</sup>

Zhang well understands her limitations and repeatedly apologizes for her lack of theoretical training.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the style of *Nightmare in the Red Chamber* is quite similar to her familiar essays and her cultural criticism and film reviews published in the *Twentieth Century*. The major difference is that, in a research work like *Nightmare in the Red Chamber*, Zhang found herself faced with greater restrictions, and was allowed much less space for her whimsicality. Compared to *Nightmare in the Red Chamber*, her next academic publication, the translation and annotation of *Flowers on the Sea*, makes perhaps a greater contribution to the Chinese literary heritage.

### Flowers on the Sea

Zhang's translation and annotation of *Flowers on the Sea* has the historical significance of preserving a little-known but important novel. *Flowers on the Sea*, written

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 353-354.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 7 & 12.

by Han Bangqing (韓邦慶), was first published in 1892. It is the first realistic novel exclusively devoted to an examination of courtesan life, and the first novel in which all the dialogue is written in the Wu dialect. The first important critique of this work appeared in Lu Xun's *Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (1924). Lu Xun comments, "*Flowers on the Sea* gives a realistic picture of brothels . . . similar novels [which] expose the evil of prostitution . . . exaggerate and introduce shocking or sensational incidents. None of them has the subtlety and natural style of *Flowers on the Sea*." (海上花列傳 . . . 記載如實上海此類小說 . . . 大都巧為羅織，故作已甚之詳，冀震聳世間耳目，終未有如海上花列傳平淡而近自然者)<sup>83</sup> Hu Shi also regarded this work highly, and wrote a lengthy introduction for the Yadong (亞東) edition, published in 1926. However, the novel was not well received by the public, and it soon went out of print again in the thirties.

Zhang first read *Flowers on the Sea* at around the age of thirteen.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to Hu Shi, she revealed that she had long been wishing to translate the work into English.<sup>85</sup> Zhang says in "Written after the Mandarin translation of *Flowers on the Sea*" (Guoyuban haishang hua yihou ji 國語版海上花譯後記),

For twenty years until I left China, I re-read *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Plum in the Golden Vase* every few years. However, I never found another copy of

<sup>83</sup> *Complete anthology of Lu Xun* (Lu Xun quanji 魯迅全集), vol 9, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973, 416 & 419. Translation by Yang Hsien-yi & Gladys Yang, *A brief history of Chinese fiction*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959, 349 & 354.

<sup>84</sup> *Flowers on the sea* (Haishang hua 海上花), Taipei: Huangguan, 1983, 597.

<sup>85</sup> "Remembering Hu Shizhi," 169.

*Flowers on the Sea*, except the Yadong edition we had at home, which I bought after reading Hu Shi's introduction to the novel in *The Anthology of Hu Shi*. I still remembered the novel clearly, even though I had no chance to re-read it during all those years.

(此後二十年，直到出國，每隔幾年再看一遍『紅樓夢』『金瓶梅』，只有『海上花』就我們家從前那一部亞東本，看了『胡適文存』上的『海上花』序去買來的，別處從來沒有。那麼些年沒看見，也還記得很清楚)<sup>86</sup>

Zhang's translation and annotation of *Flowers on the Sea* lasted for nearly twenty years. She started the project in the mid-sixties, with the translation of the novel into English, and subsequently into Mandarin. In 1982, she published the first two chapters of her English translation, titled "Sing-song Girls of Shanghai," in an authoritative journal *Renditions*.<sup>87</sup> According to her friend, Lin Yiliang, Zhang had already finished the English translation by the time she published the first two chapters.<sup>88</sup> However, her English translation was never published as a complete work. Her Mandarin translation, *Flowers on the Sea* (Haishang hua 海上花), published in 1983 in Taiwan, received attention merely as a translation by Zhang, a celebrated writer. Zhang's name is printed on the cover in a size much larger than the original author's.

<sup>86</sup> *Flowers on the sea*, 598.

<sup>87</sup> "Sing-song girls of Shanghai," in Liu Ts'un-yan ed., *Chinese middlebrow fiction*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1984, 95-110.

<sup>88</sup> Lin Yiliang, "The English translation of *Flowers on the sea*" (Haishang hua de yingyi ban 海上花英譯本), in Chen Zishan ed., *Whispered words on Zhang Ailing*, 52.

In her "Translator's Note" to the English translation and "Written after the Mandarin translation of *Flowers on the Sea*," Zhang repeatedly expresses her concern for the work's reception. To her, the unpopularity of the novel cannot be solely explained by its use of the Wu dialect; its quotidian realism also disappointed readers who were in search of the sentimental or the sensational.<sup>89</sup> Stephen Cheng, in a detailed analysis of the narrative methods of *Flowers on the Sea*, also points out that, in contrast to the traditional garrulous narrator of Chinese vernacular fiction, here the narrator is unobtrusive. In adopting the purely "dramatic mode,"<sup>90</sup> Han Bangqing forgoes his privilege of commenting or giving a summary of events. The novel involves more than a hundred characters, but Han declines even to supply the ages, appearances and professions of the characters on their first entrances. What knowledge we have of them must be gleaned from their everyday dialogue. According to Cheng, this narrative mode fails to sustain a panoramic survey of the Shanghai pleasure quarters. He concludes, "in criticizing him for the narrowness of his method, one can only admire the innovative spirit which led him to it, and the vigor with which, having invented the method, he applied it. His novel is an extraordinary accomplishment within its self-imposed artistic limitations."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "Sing-song girls of Shanghai," 95-96. *Flowers on the sea*, 608.

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Cheng borrows Percy Lubbock's term in *The craft of fiction*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1954. The idea of "dramatic mode," which Zhang regards highly, comes from James Joyce's *A portrait of the artist as a young man* (first published 1914), and is a primary modernist narrative method. Joyce's term is "dramatic form:" "The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life . . . The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination." James Joyce, *A portrait of the artist as a young man*, London: Penguin, 1992, 233.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Cheng, "Sing-song girls of Shanghai and its narrative methods," in *Chinese middlebrow fiction*, ed. Liu Ts'un-yan, 131, 135-136.

Zhang shares Stephen Cheng's sympathetic understanding for Han's abortive endeavor, without sharing all of his criticisms. Hoping that *Sing-song Girls* can reach a larger audience, Zhang annotated her English and Mandarin translation in detail. Her annotations cover explanations of allusions, proper names, jargon and professional rules in the Shanghai brothels, and late Qing fashions.<sup>92</sup> As well, Zhang's annotations serve as a kind of literary analysis, which guides the reader to subtleties in the novel. Han Bangqing is very proud of his techniques of "implicit narration" (chuancha 穿插) and "intermittent revelation" (cangshan 藏閃). Han says in the preface to *Flowers on the Sea*, "its [the novel's] techniques of implicit narration and intermittent revelation are unprecedented in fiction. Before one incident is over, another has already begun . . . Something occurs out the blue, mystifying the reader, who hurriedly reads on, only to find that the next section moves on to another incident altogether."<sup>93</sup> However, these techniques, which demand close attention from the reader, turn out to be a barrier against understanding the work. It remains necessary for Zhang to point out to the reader what exactly is happening. She says in her translator's note to her English translation,

I had long been familiar with the book, but until I translated it had never realized that on their first night together Green Phoenix Huang came to Rich Lo from another man's bed, which should be no surprise in a whorehouse, but was still a

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<sup>92</sup> For a detailed analysis of Zhang's annotation of *Flowers on the sea*, see Shi Qiangkang (施強康), "The readers do not desert *Flowers on the sea*: a critical review of Zhang Ailing's annotation of *Flowers on the sea*" (Kanguan buqi haishang hua: ping Zhang Ailing zhuyi haishang hua 看官不棄海上花：評張愛玲註譯海上花), *Dushu* Nov. 1988: 64-72.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted from Stephen Cheng, "Sing-song girls and its narrative methods," 112-113.

shock because of the domestic atmosphere of these sing-song houses, and especially after all her posturings. In this and a few other instances of extreme subtlety, my footnotes are more like commentary, at the risk of being intrusive.<sup>94</sup>

Zhang's annotation of *Flowers on the Sea* has the great significance of continuing the traditional Chinese method of literary criticism by "evaluation and punctuation" (pingdian 評點).<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that after the May Fourth literary movement, criticism based on Western theories represented the major trend in literary analysis. Despite the fact that the position of traditional Chinese novels was raised, due to the May Fourth literati's advocacy of vernacular literature, the traditional style of evaluating classical novels gradually disappeared. Zhang's work is extremely valuable, when viewed in this light. By annotating *Flowers on the Sea* in a simple vernacular diction, Zhang preserves a disappearing tradition and adds new life to it.

As noted by Yu Bin, Zhang's "Written after the Mandarin Translation of *Flowers on the Sea*" also bears a similarity to the kind of traditional Chinese novel criticism which comes in the form of prefaces or essays in annotated editions of individual novels.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> "Sing-song girls of Shanghai," 96.

<sup>95</sup> Traditional Chinese literary criticism is in general referred to as "evaluation and punctuation" (pingdian 評點). "The bulk of traditional Chinese fiction criticism takes the form of annotated editions of individual works. Aside from prefaces and essays of a more general nature which appear before the text, the commentaries themselves consist of annotations appended as closely as possible to those sections of the text to which they refer. This type of criticism is referred to in the titles of the commentary editions by a variety of terms, usually consisting of combinations of the following words: *pi* 批 (to add a remark to a document), *ping* 評 (to evaluate), *yue* 閱 (to read or peruse), and *dian* 點 (to add punctuation dots); but it is customary to refer to this general activity, whether applied in fiction criticism or in commentaries written for dramatic, poetic, or classical works, as *pingdian* 評點." David L. Rolston, "Sources of traditional Chinese fiction criticism," in *How to read the Chinese novel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Yu Bin, *A biography of Zhang Ailing*, 320.

These kinds of commentaries, such as Jin Shengtian's (金聖嘆) "How to Read *The Fifth Book of Genius*" (Du diwu caizi shu fa 讀第五才子書法), are usually more general than the annotations in the main text, hence providing the reader with an overall survey of the work.<sup>97</sup> In "Written after the Mandarin Translation is *Flowers on the Sea*," Zhang makes two significant endeavors: to trace the development of traditional Chinese novels and to reevaluate *Flowers on the Sea*, by comparing it to canonical works.

Zhang investigates the development of traditional Chinese novels from a unique viewpoint. To her, *Dream of the Red Chamber* takes on from *The Plum in the Golden Vase* its natural, realist style and its concern for simple, everyday life. One of the major features of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is its anti-romantic nature. According to Zhang, the eighty chapters in the original version of *Dream of the Red Chamber* provide readers with "a fine texture of real everyday life" (細密真切的生活質地) but portray no major events which are sensational or sentimental.<sup>98</sup> It is only in the last forty chapters, added by Gao E, that the novel becomes a plot-centered one. *Dream of the Red Chamber* represents the peak of the traditional Chinese novel, but the peak soon turns into a cliff, because there were no successors to this masterpiece, in either its level of artistic achievement or in its concern for realistic details in everyday life. *Flowers on the Sea* appeared a hundred years after *Dream of the Red Chamber*. By that time, readers' tastes had been rigidly molded by the later version of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Twisting

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<sup>97</sup> John C. Y. Wang trans., David L. Rolston annot., "How to read *The Fifth book of genius*," in *How to read the Chinese novel*, 131-145.

<sup>98</sup> *Flowers in the sea*, 606.

plots and realistic details are now two major features readers look for in a novel. *Flowers on the Sea*, a realist novel without twisting plots, could not but fail to suit such readers' tastes. This is the reason why Zhang says, "After *Flowers on the Sea* silently appeared and disappeared twice, it seems as if something had died." (『海上花』兩次悄悄的自生自滅之後，有點什麼東西死了。)<sup>99</sup>

In a manner similar to Jin Shengtian, who raised the status of *The Water Margin* by comparing it to canonical texts, Zhang starts her re-evaluation of *Flowers on the Sea* by comparing it with other important traditional novels.<sup>100</sup> She says,

*The Water Margin* is cut short, *The Plum in the Golden Vase* is banned, *Dream of the Red Chamber* was not finished, *Flowers on the Sea* is not known. Apart from that, only *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West* and *The Scholars* are left. In these three books, there are already two on history, myth and legend. There is a lack in what Graham Greene terms "the echo of ordinary life." It seems that [our tradition of the novel] is too poor.

(『水滸傳』被腰斬，『金瓶梅』是禁書，『紅樓夢』沒寫完，『海上花』沒人知道。此外就只有『三國演義』『西遊記』『儒林外史』時完整普及的。三本倒有兩本是歷史神話傳說，缺少格雷亭·葛林 (Greene) 所謂『通常的人生的迴聲』。似乎是太貧乏了點。)<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 607-608.

<sup>100</sup> "Introduction: Jin Shengtian and his "Du diwu caizi shu fa (How to read *The fifth book of genius*," in *How to read the Chinese novel*, 129. Jin's case differs from Zhang's in that he compares *The water margin* to non-fictional classics, while Zhang compares *Flowers on the Sea* to important traditional novels.

<sup>101</sup> *Flowers on the Sea*, 592-593.

To Zhang, the significance of *Flowers on the Sea* lies exactly in its “echo of ordinary life,” none of the customers or sing-song girls in the novel can be considered as heroes or heroines. This concern for everyday life and common people echoes the attitude Zhang expressed in her earlier informal essays.<sup>102</sup> Lu Xun and Hu Shi, despite their high regard for the novel, acclaim merely its technical merits, such as its realistic descriptions and its natural style. This is understandable because, as a novel about the lives of courtesans, *Flowers on the Sea* obviously clashes with the May Fourth ideology of saving the country or emancipating the individual. As a result, Lu Xun interprets *Flowers on the Sea* as a novel which exposes the iniquities of brothels, and Hu Shi advocates it as a first-class vernacular novel written in the Wu dialect. Zhang, however, makes a groundbreaking claim that *Flowers on the Sea* succeeds *Dream of the Red Chamber* as an extraordinary novel about love.

It is surely a unique viewpoint to regard a novel about prostitution as a work about love, one which would again fly in the face of many Western feminists. Zhang says, “*Flowers on the Sea* is the first novel devoted to the subject matter of brothels; its theme, in fact, is the forbidden fruit in the orchard. [The forbidden fruit, i.e., prostitution] filled a crucial need for the people of a hundred years ago.” (『海上花』第一個專寫妓院，主題其實是禁果的果園，填寫了百年前人生的一個重要的空白。)<sup>103</sup> Zhang explains that in the traditional Chinese society, freedom of love was not allowed. True

<sup>102</sup> Zhang’s interest in reading social documentaries and biographies also reveals her concern for real, ordinary life. See “On reading” and “Postscript to ‘On reading,’” *Zhang’s outlook*, 181-229.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

love could only develop after marriages arranged by families, between adolescent cousins, or, quite paradoxically, in the pleasure quarters. In the late Qing, the sing-song girls in Shanghai had the right to decide whether or not to serve a customer. As a result, the relation between the sing-song girls and their customers was very similar to courtship. Due to the convention of early marriage in traditional Chinese society, the basic human need for love is usually even more urgent than the physical desire for sex. It was not unusual for a customer to remain faithful to a specific sing-song girl.<sup>104</sup>

What Zhang appreciates in *Flowers on the Sea* is its subtle description of this twisted manifestation of love. Zhang's evaluation of *Flowers on the Sea* shows a sympathetic concern for prostitution, which recalls her understanding attitude towards cohabitation in *Interlocking Rings*. As well, Zhang's concern for human nature and basic human needs is very similar to that of Shen Congwen (沈從文), who also portrays the relationship between prostitutes and their customers as that of friends or even lovers. Shen's humanist and sympathetic attitude in "The Sailor Baizi" (Baizi 柏子) and "The One who was a Man for the First Time" (Diyici zuo nanren de nage ren 第一次作男人的那個人) serve as good examples.<sup>105</sup>

In contrast to Lu Xun, who researched the traditional Chinese novel before proceeding to his creative career, Zhang did exactly the opposite. Lu Xun experienced a

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 595-596.

<sup>105</sup> Shen Congwen (沈從文), "The sailor Baizi" (Baizi 柏子), in *An anthology of Shen Congwen* (Shen Congwen wenji 沈從文文集), vol. 2, Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian fengdian & Huacheng chubanshe, 1982, 96-117. "The one who was a man for the first time" (Diyici zuo nanren de nage ren 第一次作男人的那個人), *ibid.*, 104-117.

long period of depression after his return to China from Japan, and repeatedly expressed his “lonely feeling” of going unheeded in his cry to save the country.<sup>106</sup> As a result, he could not but numb his soul by retreating into scholarly research. Zhang, in contrast, led the life of a Taoist recluse in the United States, after previously attaining literary prominence on the Mainland, but in Zhang’s case her scholarly research was no retreat and loneliness was not something she feared.

For Zhang, the beginning of wisdom lies in understanding human vulnerability and the futility of life. Her realization that everybody shares the same heavy burden of life leads to her sympathetic understanding and compassion, which she brings to her scholarly endeavours as well. While her stories and novels show her readers “life is like that” and “there are even things like that;” her academic research in later years enabled her to return to her source; at the same time she made scholarly contributions by clarifying texts and editions of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and by translating the artistic novel *Flowers on the Sea* from the Wu dialect into English and, subsequently, Mandarin, thereby perserving an important work for the Chinese literary heritage. Her principal mode of literary

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<sup>106</sup> For instance, in *A call to arms* (Nahan 吶喊), Lu Xun says, “Only later did I feel the futility of it all . . . I felt that if a man’s proposals met with approval, it should encourage him; but if they met with opposition, it should make him fight back. But the real tragedy for him was to lift up his voice among the living and meet with no response, neither approval nor opposition, just as if he were left helpless in a boundless desert. So I began to feel lonely.” (我感到未嘗經驗的無聊……凡有一人的主張，得了贊和，是促其前進的，得了反對，是促其奮鬥的，獨有叫喊於生人中，而生人並無反應，既非贊同，也無反對，如置身毫無邊際的荒原，無可措手的了，這是怎樣的悲哀呵，我於是以我所感到者為寂寞。) Preface to *A call to arms*, *Complete anthology of Lu Xun*, vol. 1, 1973, 272. Translation by Leo Lee, *Voices from the iron house*, 25.

expression in her later years became her scholarly research, and few female writers in modern China have attempted such research or achieved such original results.

## Conclusion

### Splendidness and desolation

On September 8, 1995, Zhang Ailing was found dead alone in her apartment in Westwood, Los Angeles, at the age of seventy-four. She died of natural causes (Arteriosclerotic Cardiovascular disease) several days before her building manager discovered her body after becoming alarmed that she had not answered her telephone. According to her will, her body was cremated immediately, and the ashes scattered into the sea on September 30, 1995, which would have been her seventy-fifth birthday if she had lived. About two years before she died, Zhang mailed a last will and testament to her friend, Lin Shitong. The will, in the name Eileen Chang Reyher, runs as follows:

First: in the event of my death I bequeath all my possessions to Stephen C. & Mae Soong (Mr. & Mrs. C. Soong).

Second: I wish to be cremated instantly -- no funeral parlor -- the ashes scattered in any desolate spot, over a fairly wide area if on land.<sup>1</sup>

Her wish to have her ashes scattered in a desolate spot marks the basic note of her life -- desolation. Zhang virtually led the life of a recluse in her last years. She moved to Los Angeles after her contract at the University of California, Berkeley, ended in 1971. For the next twenty-five years, she lived on the royalties of her published works. Her

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<sup>1</sup> Lin Shitong, "Having the chance to know Zhang Ailing" (Youyuan shide Zhang Ailing 有緣識得張愛玲), in *Splendidness and desolation: commemorial anthology of Zhang Ailing* (Huali yu cangliang: Zhang Ailing jinian wenji 華麗與蒼涼：張愛玲紀念文集), Taipei, Huangguan, 53-72. Zhang's will was originally written in English.

financial situation was greatly improved after the re-publication of her Chinese works by the Crown Publishing Company (Huangguan chubanshe 皇冠出版社) in the sixties. She was received with great popularity among the literary youth in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and her artistry won her acclaim as a giant of modern Chinese literature.

However, Zhang's regained popularity, after long years of being ignored and living in financial difficulties, did not bring her overwhelming joy, as had her rise to fame in the forties. She lived in total solitude, with no one to share her life and not much regard for public recognition. Even her aunt, a dear relative of Zhang's, did not learn about Zhang's reputation until the eighties.<sup>2</sup> Zhang once said, "Oh, better to become famous early! If it comes too late, the happiness will not be so intense."<sup>3</sup> After all the ups and downs in her life, fame for Zhang merely became a reminder of the vicissitudes of life, if not a heavy burden.

In the mid-eighties, Zhang's popularity spread to the Mainland. *Romances* and *Romance of Half a Lifetime* were republished and received great attention. Her essays began to gain attention in the nineties, and several collections were published. In 1992, several biographies appeared and an anthology, which does not include her anti-communist works, *The Rice-sprout Song* and *Love in Redland*, was published in a total of five volumes.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, her reputation continued to rise in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In

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<sup>2</sup> Sima Xin, "A few pieces of information on Zhang Ailing: an interview with Zhang Ailing's uncle-in-law (Zhang Ailing er san shi: fang Zhang ailing gufu ji 張愛玲二三事：訪張愛玲姑夫記), *Ming bao monthly* 267 (March 1988), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to *Romance, Romance*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Romance* (Chuanqi 傳奇), Shanghai: Shanghai shudan, 1984, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986. *Romance of half a lifetime* (Bansheng yuan 半生緣), Guangzhou: Huacheng chuan she,

1984 and 1994, her short stories, "Love in a Fallen City," and "Red Rose and White Rose," were made into movies of the same title by Hong Kong directors Ann Hui (Xu Anhua 許鞍華) and Stanley Kwan (Guan Jinpeng 關錦鵬).<sup>5</sup> "Red Dust" (Gungun hong chen 滾滾紅塵), a movie made by the Mainland director Yan Hao (嚴浩) in 1990, is well-known as a story partially based on Zhang's romance with Hu Lancheng.<sup>6</sup>

Since she declined all invitations for interviews and conferences, Zhang began to be regarded as a mysterious figure in literary circles. She even became such a center of attention that reporters and admirers began to track her down in the United States. One fervent fan even moved into her neighbourhood and searched her garbage, so as to learn about her private life. These disturbances caused Zhang tremendous emotional stress, which resulted in her moving every few months.<sup>7</sup>

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1984, Jiangsu: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1986. *Whispered words* (Siyu 私語), Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1990. *Complete anthology of Zhang Ailing's essays*. (Zhang Ailing sanwen quanbian 張愛玲散文全編), Zhejiang: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1992. Yu Qing, *An ingenious blue stocking: Zhang Ailing* (Tiancai qinü Zhang Ailing 天才奇女張愛玲), Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1992. Yu Bin, *A biography of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing zhuan 張愛玲傳), Hunan: Hainan chubanshe, 1993. Jin Hongda & Yu Qing ed., *An Anthology of Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing wenji 張愛玲文集), Anhui: Anhui chubanshe, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *Cinema of two cities: Hong Kong - Shanghai* (Xianggang - Shanghai: dianying shangcheng 香港—上海：電影雙城), Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1994, 122. "Pamphlet of the 19th Hong Kong international film festival" (Di shijiu jie xianggang dianyingjie 第十九屆香港電影節).

<sup>6</sup> The screenplay of "Red Dust" is the last publication of the famous Taiwan female writer, San Mao (三毛), who committed suicide in 1991. San Mao, *Red Dust*, Taipei: Huangguan, 1992. See also Shi Qi (石琪), "Zhang Ailing and movies" (Zhang Ailing he dianying 張愛玲和電影), *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), 12 Sept. 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Ji Ji (季季), "Zhang Ailing's garbage and I" (Wo yu Zhang Ailing de lese 我與張愛玲的垃圾), in *Jishi niandai* (九十年代) Dec. 1995, 90-95. Ma Jiahui (馬家輝) "Fans to be despised" (Xia sanlan fans 下三壘 fans), *Dongfang ribao* (Hong Kong) 29 Oct. 1994. Another reason for Zhang's moving frequently was her fear of insects. See Lin Shitong, "Having the chance to know Zhang Ailing," 21-27.

In 1994, Zhang was awarded the seventeenth annual Special Achievement Award (Zhongshen chengjiu jiang 終身成就獎) from the *China Times Newspaper* (Zhongguo shibao 中國時報) in Taiwan. Zhang expressed her thanks in an essay titled “Remembering *West Wind*: Words of Thanks on Receiving the Seventeenth Annual Special Achievement Awards from the *China Times Newspaper*” (Yi xifeng: di shiqijie shibao wenxuejiang tebie chengjiu jiang dejiang ganyan 憶西風：第十七屆時報文學獎特別成就獎得獎感言), but declined to accept the award in person.<sup>8</sup> As a great contrast to her lonely, silent death, news of her death was widely reported in Taiwan and Hong Kong newspapers. Commemorative essays continued to appear in newspaper columns and literary magazines for nearly half a year.

### The Legacy of Zhang Ailing

Zhang Ailing left a rich legacy for modern Chinese literature. Her works, especially her short stories, were very influential on the younger generation of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Mainland writers, from the sixties onwards. With the republication of her works in the sixties in Taiwan, she became the focus of attention over the following three decades. Her growing popularity in Taiwan can be partly explained by the fact that Taiwan is cut off from the socially critical literature of the May Fourth era, due to the Nationalist Party's fear of literary leftism. Zhang's works were perceived as non-subversive and therefore were deemed acceptable by the KMT government.

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<sup>8</sup> “Remembering *West wind*,” *Zhongguo shibao* (Taiwan) 3 Dec. 1994.

The dominance of the New Criticism school in the field of literary analysis, and an elaboration of the psychological short story with the rise of Western-influenced “modernist” experimentation in the sixties, also contribute to Zhang’s popularity in Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> Zhang’s works, with their suggestive verbal images, psychological sophistication and subtle irony, provided useful material for formal analysis and a model of fiction-writing. Young Taiwan writers, especially the *Modern Literature* (Xiandai wenxue 現代文學) group, that includes Bai Xianyong (白先勇), Ouyang Zi (歐陽子), Shui Jing (水晶) and Nie Hualing (聶華苓), have to varying degrees displayed Zhang’s influence. Bai Xianyong, with his supple, limpid style, strong sense of compassion and deliberate use of irony, is considered by C. T. Hsia to be “the most important Chinese short story writer since Zhang Ailing.”<sup>10</sup> Hsia comments, “thanks to her [Zhang’s] salutary influence, serious young writers of today like Shui Jing and Bai Xianyong . . . are turning out first-rate short stories distinguished by their conscious use of metaphorical dimension.”<sup>11</sup>

Bai Xianyong’s masterpiece *Taipei People* (Taibei ren 臺北人), a collection of fourteen short stories which tell of the the changing lifestyle and ethos of mainlanders

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, the reception of Modernism in Taiwan can hardly be considered a sophisticated one. While Western Modernism grew out of disappointment with civilization and a pervasive sense of historical and cultural crisis, Taiwan Modernists wished to improve literature through the introduction of Western modernistic techniques. Its utilitarian intention and optimistic attitude concerning modernity and progress differ greatly from the fundamental spirit of its Western counterpart. Carole Hoyan, “Modernism in Taiwanese fiction: a comparative study of the works of Wang Wenxing and Bai Xianyong,” *British Columbia Asian review* 7 (Winter 1993-1994), 36-53.

<sup>10</sup> C. T. Hsia, *Twentieth-century Chinese stories*, 218.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

who migrated to Taipei,<sup>12</sup> bears a resemblance to Zhang's *Romances*, a collection of short stories about Hong Kong people. Apart from his debt to Zhang in his style of language and his use of imagery, as noted by Hsia, I would like to emphasize Zhang's influence on Bai in terms of their experimentation with narrative form. All fourteen works in *Taipei People* are written in a dramatic mode, which confines the narrative to the representation of "a slice of life" within a limited time frame, and depends largely on the characters' dialogues for the unfolding of the stories. This narrative mode shows a continuity with Zhang's experiments in works such as "Waiting" and "Happy Reunion."<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the *Modern Literature* group in the sixties, Zhang also exerted great influence on female writers of Taiwan in the seventies, such as San Mao, Xiao Lihong (蕭麗紅), the sisters Zhu Tianwen (朱天文) and Zhu Tianxin (朱天心), Shi Shuqing (施叔青), Su Weizhen (蘇偉貞) Cao Youfang (曹又芳) and Yuan Qiongqiong (袁

<sup>12</sup> Bai Xianyong, *Taipei people* (Taibei ren 臺北人), Taipei: Wenxue chubanshe, 1971. Pai Hsien-yung & Patia Yasin trans., George Kao ed., *Wandering in the garden, waking from a dream: tales of Taipei characters*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. See also Joseph S. M. Lau, "Crowded hours revisited: the evocation of the past in Taipei jen," *Journal of Asian studies* 35 (1975), 31-47.

<sup>13</sup> It is notable that although Bai Xianyong is one of the writers most often compared by critics to Zhang, he, unlike others who proudly profess Zhang's influence, claims that Zhang had little influence on him. He attributes their similarities to the fact that both of them are admirers of *Dream of the Red Chamber* and Zhang Henshui's fiction. His denial may be explained by what Harold Bloom terms as "the anxiety of influence," and is certainly an interesting topic, worth further investigation. Xia Zuli (夏祖麗), "An interview with Bai Xianyong" (Bai Xianyong fangwen ji 白先勇訪問記), *Book reviews and book lists* (Shuping shumu 書評書目) 42 (Oct. 1976), 99. Harold Bloom, *The anxiety of influence: a theory of poetry*, London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

瓊瓊).<sup>14</sup> Most of these writers share Zhang's concerns with the more personal and immediate presentation of themes of love and romance, the relationship between the generations, and the struggles of ordinary people in modern urban society.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons for this "Zhang Ailing Phenomenon" in the seventies and eighties was that Zhang offered these female writers a model for reformulating their feminine experience in literary terms.

Yvonne Chang, in a study of the relationship between the new cohort of women writers and Zhang, claims that Zhang was followed by the younger generation of Taiwan women writers because of her unpretentious, professional respect for ordinary readers and her skillful appropriation of the structure of popular romance within the framework of serious literature. This point is quite significant, in that the above-mentioned Taiwan women writers, with their popular success as writers of stories about love and human relations, often found themselves treated as indistinguishable from hack writers of popular romances. Zhang's frankly expressed wish to earn literary fame by writing for a

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<sup>14</sup> It is notable that one can see Zhang's influence on these women writers merely by looking at the titles of their works. The titles of Zhu Tianwen's *Legend* (Chuanshuo 傳說), Yuan Qiongqiong's *Affinities of this life* (Jinsheng yuan 今生緣) remind one of Zhang's titles, such as "Romances" (Chuanqi 傳奇) and "Romance of half a lifetime" (Bansheng yuan 半生緣). Shi Shuqing's essays collection *Glazed Tiles* (Liuli wa 琉璃瓦) repeats the title of Zhang short story. The female protagonist of Shu's short story "The lament of Susie" (Suxi yuan 憐細怨) also shares the same name, Suxi, as the one in Zhang's "Aloeswood ashes: the second burning."

<sup>15</sup> Two of Yuan Qiongqiong's short stories are translated into English by Michael S. Duke. "The sky's escape" (translation of Taowang de tiankong 逃亡的天空), in Nancy Ing ed., *Winter plum: contemporary Chinese fiction*, Taipei: Chinese Material Centre, 1982, 481-498; and "A place of one's own" (translation of Ziji de tiankong 自己的天空), in Michael S. Duke ed., *Worlds of modern Chinese fiction: short stories and novellas from the People's Republic, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1991, 193-205. One of Shi Shuqing's short stories is translated by Jeanne Larsen. "Reunion" (Xiangjian 相見), *ibid.*, 174-192.

popular readership and her ability to artistically transcend the generic confines of popular romance provided an ideal model for these women writers.<sup>16</sup>

However, Zhang's influence on Taiwan women writers is by no means limited to her lyrical style and her subject matter concerning love and marriage. Shi Shuqing and Zhu Tianwen, two of Zhang's fervent admirers, represent Zhang's legacy in two distinguishing aspects. Shi Shuqing's novels and short stories written under the series "Tales of Hong Kong" (Xianggang de gushi 香港的故事) can be considered a sequel, written thirty years later, to Zhang's *Romances*. While Zhang considered *Romances* as a series of Hong Kong tales written for Shanghai readers, Shu's *One Night Travel: Tales of Hong Kong* (Yiye you 一夜遊: 香港的故事) and *Her Name is Butterfly* (Ta mingjiao hudie 她名叫蝴蝶) are Hong Kong tales Shu writes for her Taiwan readers.<sup>17</sup> The characters in these works show great similarities to those in *Romances*, both in respect to their middle- or upper-class backgrounds and in their tendencies towards self-deception.

Zhu Tienwen's early works demonstrate traces of Zhang's influence in their use of poetic diction and ornamental imagery. Her later, more sophisticated, story, "*Fin-de-siècle Splendor*" (Shijimou di huali 世紀末的華麗), published in a collection of the same title, embodies Zhang's dialectics of clothing and gender. As a story about the life of a model, this work drives home the sense of alienation in a modern society in which it

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<sup>16</sup> Sung-seng Yvonne Chang, "Yuan Qionqiong and the rage for Eileen Zhang among Taiwan's feminine writers," *Modern Chinese literature* 4 (1988): 204-205.

<sup>17</sup> Shi Shuqing, *One night travel: tales of Hong Kong* (Yiye you 一夜遊: 香港的故事), Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian fengdian, 1985. *Her name is butterfly* (Ta mingjiao hudie 她名叫蝴蝶), Taipei: Hongfan wenxue congshu, 1993.

is the human who highlights the clothes, instead of the other way round. The “politics of details,” in the work, to borrow Rey Chow’s term, reminds one of Zhang’s discussions on fashion. David Der-wei Wong, in a study of “*Fin-de-siècle Splendor*,” quotes the following passage from Zhang, to show her influence on the work:

Clothing seems to be too trivial a thing to mention. Liu Pei [of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms] says, “a man’s brothers are his limbs, a man’s wives are his clothing.” But for women, it is rare to see one who puts her husband before her clothing.<sup>18</sup>

The irony in “*Fin-de-siècle Splendor*” lies exactly in the fact that while men may treat women like clothes, they themselves are something even less important than clothes in the eyes of those they have thus devalued. The female protagonist in the story lives ‘on’ clothes, as a model, and lives ‘like’ clothes, as a mistress. However, men do not play a central part in her life, as she is dedicated to her profession and actually lives ‘for’ clothes.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the writer who most inherited the lyrical and poetic aspect of Zhang’s style is the Hong Kong writer, Zhong Xiaoyang.<sup>20</sup> She was constantly compared by critics to Zhang, ever since she published her first novel *Stop the Cart and Ask* (Tingche

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<sup>18</sup> “The change of fashion,” *Gossip*, 73. The Chinese original is 衣服似乎是不足掛齒的小事。劉備說過這樣的話：『兄弟如手足，妻子如衣服。』可是如果能夠做到『丈夫如衣服』的地步，就很不容易。 Translation by David Der-wei Wong, “*Fin-de-siècle splendor: contemporary women writers’ vision of Taiwan*,” *Modern Chinese literature* 6 (1992): 45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Zhong Xiaoyang was born in Guangzhou in 1962 and grew up in Hong Kong.

zhan jiewen 停車暫借問). Zhong Xiaoyang's works show a rich texture, created by the use of flamboyant diction and classical poetic images. While the resounding *huqin* in "Two Parts of the *Huqin* Music" (Erduan qin 二段琴) directly reminds one of that in "Love in a Fallen City," the detailed descriptions, sensitive perception and psychological refinement in "Green Sleeves" (Cuixiu 翠袖), "The Passing Years" (Liunian 流年) and "Separation and Reunion" (Li he 離合) also show traces of Zhang's "Red Rose and White Rose," "The Golden Cangue" and "Lingering Love."<sup>21</sup> In a style very similar to that of Zhang, Zhong Xiaoyang says, "For the writers I like, I usually have a unified and sensual impression of them . . . for Zhang Ailing, at times she is a gloomy lane; at times, she is the warm, intimate, aging sunlight with boundless memories. Even if she dies, she will remain like a relative who has passed away." (我對喜歡的作家往往有一個一統的、感性的印象……張愛玲呢，有時是陰沉沉的衞堂，有時是垂老的、有無限記憶的陽光，溫暖而親近，就算死了，也是個死去的親人。)<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Green sleeves" (Cuixiu 翠袖) and "The passing years" (Liunian 流年), "Two parts of the *huqin* music" (Erduan qin 二段琴), *The passing years* (Liunian 流年), Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1992, 1-24, 25-131, 132-229. "Separation and union" (Li he 離合), *A sad song* (Aige 哀歌), Hong Kong: Cosmos Book Ltd., 1991, 1-18. "Green sleeves" is translated into English with the same title by Michael S. Duke, *Worlds of modern Chinese fiction*, 206-220. For a discussion of Zhong Xiaoyang works, see Zhang Huizhuan (張惠娟), "An introduction to Zhong Xiaoyang's works" (Zhong Xiaoyang zuopin qianlun 鍾曉陽作品淺論), *Zhongwai wenxue* (中外文學) 169 (Sept. 1988): 156-168.

<sup>22</sup> "What I see is exactly my own pitiful image" (Kelian shen shi yan zhong ren 可憐身是眼中人), *Spring in the green weeds* (Chun zai lüwu zhong 春在綠蕪中), Hong Kong: Cosmos Book Ltd., 1993, 128. This sentence invites comparison with Zhang's "If ever memory has a smell, it is the scent of camphor, sweet and cosy like remembered happiness, sweet and forlorn like forgotten sorrow." (回憶這東西若是有氣味的話，那就是樟腦的香，甜而穩妥，像記得分明的快樂，甜而悵惘，像忘卻了的憂愁。)"Change of fashion," 65. English version by Zhang, "Chinese life and fashion," 54.

In the late eighties and early nineties, the “Zhang Ailing phenomenon” spread from Taiwan and Hong Kong to the Mainland. It is notable that, unlike the Taiwan and Hong Kong writers, who mainly assimilated Zhang’s artistry, her Mainland followers placed greater emphasis on her insights into complicated human relationships in extended families, and the influences a certain community or society can exert on an individual’s emotional and private life. Su Tong (蘇童) and Xu Lan’s (須蘭) works represent the finest Mainland works which show Zhang’s influence. Xu Lan, who has been called the “little Zhang Ailing,” shows an ability similar to Zhang’s in creating a splendid but desolate atmosphere. Her works, such as “Tales of the Song Dynasty” (Songchao gushi 宋朝故事), “Red Hardwood Clappers” (Hong tanban 紅彈板) and “Leisure Mood” (Xianqing 閑情), possess a unique classical flavor which echoes that in Zhang’s *Romances*.<sup>23</sup>

Su Tong’s short story “Wives and Concubines” (Qi qie chengqun 妻妾成群), which tells of the fourth mistress of a wealthy man in 1930s China, shows the influence of both *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and of works by Zhang.<sup>24</sup> Focusing on the everyday struggles, betrayals and jealousies among the wives and concubines, this work finely explores the dark side of human nature and serves as a critical commentary on the patriarchal social system. Su Tong acknowledges Zhang as a source of inspiration for his

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<sup>23</sup> Xu Lan (須蘭), *A collection of Xu Lan's stories* (Xu Lan xiaoshuo xuan 須蘭小說選), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995, 49-91, 94-183, 223-260.

<sup>24</sup> Su Tong (蘇童), “Wives and concubines” (Qi qie chengqun 妻妾成群), *The family of opium poppy* (yingsu zhi jia 罌粟之家), Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1991, 81-158. Michael S. Duke trans., “Raise the red lantern,” *Raise the red lantern: three novellas*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993, 11-99.

creative writings, and comments that she is far more detached and severe in exposing human weakness than he is himself. "Her achievement," says Su Tong, "provides me with a goal to strive for."<sup>25</sup>

### **An Overall Evaluation**

Zhang is a unique figure in the history of modern Chinese literature. An extraordinarily independent-minded person, for better or worse she refused to fit into any stereotype or ideological mould. The words 'apolitical' and 'individualistic' are two key words in understanding her life and works. Although there were times when she yielded to Communist literary pressure, by adding political protective coloring to her post-1949 novels, she maintained her integrity as a writer through consistently striving to maintain her independent artistry. Zhang's life represents the attempt of a modern Chinese woman to seek self-expression, through a lifestyle and a literary style that were uniquely her own.

Zhang's overall disinterest in examining problems of the social and political system from the point of view of ideology can be regarded as an aspect of her continuity with tradition. The mainstream of traditional or pre-modern Chinese literature is lyric poetry in a subjective mood. Few traditional writers, including novelists, are political in the sense that they attempt any searching critiques of society and the political order. Most

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<sup>25</sup> "Zhang Ailing's pointed exposition of human weakness" (Zhang Ailing wa renxing ruodian bianpi jinli 張愛玲挖人性弱點鞭辟近裏), *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), 23 July, 1993. This essay is a transcription of the radio broadcast program "The golden house" (Huangjin wu 黃金屋). Su Tong was invited as a guest of honor to introduce Zhang's works on the program.

remain focused on problems of self-identity in the context of complex human relationships. *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* serve as the finest representatives of this tradition.

Zhang, through her assimilation of the Chinese lyrical tradition and the Western-influenced modernist vision, produced works which rank among the finest in modern Chinese literature. Despite her disengagement, she was by no means indifferent to the society in which she lived. Her cultural critiques and film reviews show great concern for modern China and provide an insightful social commentary on the Chinese psychology in the face of a changing era. What concerns Zhang is universal human nature, rather than institutionalized systems. Believing that humans are most genuine when in love, Zhang focuses in her short stories and novels on revealing universal human nature through the subject matter of romance. Her works, in their sophisticated description of urban sensuality, develop beyond the New Perceptionist stories, as they outgrow the sentimental love stories of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School in both artistry and vision.

Zhang is a figure who always stands outside the mainstream. She shares with her May Fourth predecessors their experimental spirit for new artistic expressions, but her detached and anti-romantic attitude shows a conscious break with the May Fourth optimistic romanticism of "saving the country" by writing fiction. Focused on the subjective experience of the ordinary individual, Zhang's fiction also sharply contrasts with the wartime resistance literature of her contemporaries, which concentrates on the creation of myths of victory through the description of typical heroic scenes. Along with

her short stories and novels, Zhang's informal essays and academic research also mark themselves off from popular trends. She forged a uniquely lively and imagistic vernacular prose style, against a trend which favored erudite studies of antiquarianism and trivia; she also returned to the traditional approach of textual research in her study of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and translated the relatively unpopular Wu-dialect novel, *Flowers on the Sea*, into Mandarin.

Zhang was well-aware of her marginality. Her essays on her own works reveal her self-consciousness as a writer and her concern with the communicative function of creative writings. While her choice of romance for her subject matter and her focus on universal themes won her a wide readership, ranging from the ordinary mass of readers to learned scholars, she was also thereby made vulnerable to accusations from orthodox and Communist critics that her work lacks social concern and revolutionary zeal. Her uniquely feminine, but not feminist, stance also disappoints critics who would like to make of her a modern feminist.<sup>26</sup> Her explanatory essays, which "answer back" to criticisms and state her personal concerns, can be considered as a further assertion of her creative independence. In this sense, her later reclusive life is no less expressive of her individuality than her earlier defiance against the usual fate of a Chinese woman of her time-- getting married and leading a 'happy' life. Just as her adolescent wish to achieve

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<sup>26</sup> In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that Zhang is feminine writer in her identification with everyday life and her concern with details and for women. She is a non-feminist writer in the sense that her female protagonists never take up a woman warrior's stance against the opposite sex or oppressive situations. In fact, Zhang frequently shows appreciation for their voluntary sacrifices for others (especially their lovers) and for their families.

fame and independence through writing shows her courage, her reclusive life in her later years can be considered an actualization of her independence and an embodiment of her ultimate detachment.

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