WOMEN IN ZHANG AILING'S SHORT STORIES:
AN INSIGHT INTO HER VISION OF LIFE
AND PLACE IN CHINESE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

My ultimate goal in writing this thesis is to define the uniqueness of Zhang Ailing's vision of life, based on specific meanings detected in the formal aspects of her fiction, and to assess Zhang's artistry in the context of Chinese literature.

I proceed, first, by analyzing the reciprocal relationship of form and meaning in Zhang Ailing's short stories. The formal aspects of Zhang's works reveal meaningful details about the oppressive situations of her female characters. The way they each respond to their situations differs by their aggressive or submissive characters, and conformist, independent or rebellious thoughts. Their antiromantic attitude characteristically reflects the author's vision of life.

Zhang's thoughts and emotions which constitute this vision of life will be inferred, next, from details related to her female characterization, but also beyond these confines. It is interesting to peel off Zhang's reputation of being a stern, emotionless writer and perceive underneath it her psychological and moral preoccupations, and underlying emotions. Conversely, I will elicit the influence of Zhang's vision of life on her aesthetic expression.

Finally, Zhang's originality and talent can only be assessed accurately in light of the traditional and modern Chinese literary background. Continuities can be established regarding her female topics and characterization; but a stronger feminine consciousness is discovered in Zhang's works. The traditional Chinese lyrical expression is creatively dissimulated behind her symbolic use of environment and impressionistic description of people. Zhang's mastery of the unity of form and content, her vivid style and use of cinematic techniques in literature greatly enhance her artistry.
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INTRODUCTION

The rise of modern Chinese literature was just one aspect of the May Fourth era, a dynamic and enlightening period covering the 1920's and most of 1930's. This era witnessed the beginning of China's modernization in the areas of thought, literature and politics. The modernization of literature was achieved in three ways. First, the vernacular was used in all literary forms instead of the classical literary language (wenyan 文言文). Second, the short-story form was developed and Western fictional techniques were assimilated into Chinese writing. Third, in the space of two decades, Chinese writers were trying to catch up with all the major European literary schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This development was a chronological one, beginning with the romantic themes such as the discovery of the ego, individual emancipation for both males and females, and the advocacy of social justice. It was on the last theme that Chinese writers dwelled the longest. Their traditional Confucian sense of duty towards society quickly turned a romantic revolt against social institutions and injustice into critical realism. Satire and irony replaced subjective emotionalism and idealism as the dominant modes of expression of social criticism. This kind of social realism became exacerbated with the formation of the "anti-feudal, anti-imperialist and anti-Kuomindang" League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers in 1930, presided over by Mao Dun. With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, the mainstream of modern Chinese literature became overtly politicized. The Japanese occupation of China's coastal areas had pushed Chinese patriotic forces, both nationalist and communist, into the interior where the mainstream
literature was mainly concerned with either patriotic and nationalist propaganda, or patriotic and communist propaganda. An unfortunate evolution occurred simultaneously. The preoccupation with ideologies contained in literature had made most Chinese writers overlook artistic standards. Along with Qian Zhongshu, Shen Congwen and Ba Jin, Zhang Ailing was among the few exceptional writers of fiction during the war period who were both disinterested in politics and conscientious in their art.

In his article "Modern Chinese Fiction: An Interpretive Overview", Leo Ou-fan Lee remarked: "In theme, setting, language, and characterization, the evolution of modern Chinese fiction shows a clear shift from the urban-based autobiographical mode of the early 1920's to the rural panoramas of regional literature from the 1930's onwards." The 1937-1945 Japanese occupation of Chinese coastal cities accentuated this rural predominance in the mainstream of modern Chinese literature. Zhang Ailing was also exceptional in that she did not belong to this mainstream. Her fictional works were anchored in the urban reality of either Shanghai, her own residence, or Hong Kong, where her university studies were interrupted by the war.

Specifically, Zhang's fiction and that of Qian Zhongshu, another war-time Shanghai writer, make up what Edward Gunn calls the "antiromantic" trend of modern Chinese literature. Both writers explore the individual psyche in the modern urban context, and expose its disillusioning, fraudulent aspects. This process is antiromantic because it de-idealizes the self, in contrast to the romantic subjective exaltation of it, and the writer's underlying attitude is sceptical and ironic. Needless to say there is a stark contrast

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1Lee, Leo Ou-fan, "Modern Chinese Fiction: An Interpretive Overview", University of Chicago, 1980, unpublished manuscript.

between their disenchanted vision of life and the innocent, bright and invigorating vision offered by the rural mainstream literature.

Zhang is also exceptional in that she is a woman writer. Indeed, very young: she was in her early twenties when she wrote the bulk of her short stories. She chose to relate them mostly through the perspectives of her female characters. A few other women writers of the May Fourth era had done this, however the romantic inclination of their female protagonists is overly subjective and even self-pitying, therefore the reader sees them as unreliable narrators.

In view of these characteristics that make Zhang exceptional, this thesis focuses on Zhang's female characters, the writer's own antiromantic vision and her artistry.

I begin with the premise that a work of fiction communicates itself through its formal aspects, regardless of the author's real intentions. My method of analysis is formal criticism, and I shall apply Norman Friedman's approach, developed in his *Form and Meaning in Fiction.*

In a fictional work, form is how parts are linked together to form a whole and how various means are directed towards end effects. Specific meanings can be interpreted contextually from form, but the general meaning of a work only results from the extrapolation and generalization of these implied specific meanings. Still, meaning is not a one-way function of form, but "[t]he form-meaning relationship ... is reciprocal: meaning may cause certain elements of the work, while form causes the whole and determines our interpretation of everything in it...." The interesting point is that this general meaning of the work is not an abstract thing, but very congruent to life: it discloses the writer's way of regarding life. Thus it is easier for us to perceive this form-

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1Friedman, Norman, *Form and Meaning in Fiction*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia, 1975.
meaning relationship if we acknowledge that a person’s expression reveals his or her way of thinking and emotions — in short, vision of life — but is also naturally conditioned by them. The critic’s work is mainly to elicit this relationship.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses what the formal aspects of Zhang’s short stories reveal about her female characters. It analyzes their situations, thoughts, characters, and psychological states, and the role of female characterization in the achievement of end effects of the stories.

The second chapter proceeds from conclusions drawn in respect of the formal aspects and infers the writer’s vision of life (i.e., thoughts and emotions). This vision of life constitutes the underlying value system according to which Zhang implicitly judges her female characters. Since Zhang’s vision of life inevitably shapes her aesthetic expression, to demonstrate the accuracy of my interpretation of this vision, I shall examine its influence on her choice of artistic means.

The third chapter shows how the meanings of the formal aspects developed in the first chapter and Zhang’s vision of life inferred in the second chapter can be traced back to the traditional and modern Chinese literary heritage. This continuity is unavoidable due to the universality of such topics as the feminine condition, female emancipation and of lyrical expression. However, the purpose of this final chapter is primarily to highlight Zhang’s innovative combination of traditional elements and her creative application of modern techniques in literature.

1My thesis is limited to the study of Zhang’s short stories, although she also wrote several novels.
CHAPTER 1:
Formal Analysis of Female Characters

In this chapter, I apply Norman Friedman's formal approach to analyze female characters in Zhang Ailing's short stories. I attempt to make a sketch of various categories of women, based not only on how the author makes them, and in which situations she puts them, but also on the kind of plots by means of which Zhang chooses to tell the reader the stories of her female characters, and finally on the various end effects at which her stories are aimed. Naturally, the author's rhetorical purpose of depicting such female characters through these technical choices is assumed here.

According to Friedman, the first technical choice made by a writer is the structure of the story,1 namely the causes of the plot or situations, the plot itself or sequence of incidents, the thought2 of the protagonist and the character3 of the protagonist. Since my focus in this thesis is on women in Zhang's stories, in the first part of this chapter I shall examine the fortune4, thought, and character of all the female characters, and not just the female protagonists, who appear in the stories.

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1Friedman, *Form and Meaning*, p. 124.
2"Thought is revealed ... when a person thinks, makes statements, or argues." Ibid, p. 65.
3"Character is revealed when he makes choices and decides upon a course of action." Ibid.
4I will use this term as synonymous to "situation", because it also means the external circumstances in which the characters are placed and corresponds to the notion of "plot of fortune" which will be discussed below.
The next of Friedman's steps in analyzing structure is to determine the form of the plot, that is, which of these three components — fortune, thought, character — is the "principal part" in the structure of the story. Thus, there are plots of fortune, plots of thought or plots of character, or even combinations of these. The interest for me in defining in the second part of this chapter the form of plot of Zhang's stories is mainly to see which aspect or aspects of her female characters the author sheds most light on.

Another major technical choice made by the writer, and through which the reader can perceive his or her rhetorical purpose is the end effect of the story. According to Friedman, there are mainly two kinds of moving power. It depends on whether the writer wants to arouse moral emotions, making the reader "feel towards his characters in their situations...favor or disfavor, sympathy or antipathy, praise or blame" or whether the writer's purpose is to delight the reader with aesthetic emotions, that is to arouse "feelings of expectation, surprise, and fulfillment [through] the unified development, variation and completion of an action". There are also cases where both moral and aesthetic emotions are aroused. Since the end effect is the principle which governs the way the writer makes the story, it seems that conversely, once the end effect is defined, one could infer more details about how various things in the story are made in order to suit the end. It is from this angle that I will view Zhang's female characters in the last part of this chapter.

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1Ibid, pp. 81-82
2Or moving power, or governing principle. Ibid, p. 124.
3Ibid.
Zhang Ailing's stories are reputed to have an unforgettable atmosphere, due to the special situations in which the writer places her female characters. Perhaps a Chinese way of qualifying these situations is to refer to the popular meaning of the "yin" element, as having the characteristics of being dark, inward, or as being an underlying passive force which causes some malaise. This malaise is the suffocation which the reader feels in the place of these women.

On the whole, one can visualize the main situations in which they are imprisoned as three concentric circles, depending on the degree of their powerlessness to react against their external circumstances. The largest circle consists of educational limitations set on their potential development. The next one is the deep feeling of financial insecurity which acts as their sole conscious or unconscious motive in their orientation and organization of their lives. The center circle is the situation of physical or emotional isolation which helplessly confines certain women in Zhang Ailing's stories to a severe degree of alienation.

First, while most stories take place in middle class families, with male characters usually having good, secure jobs and also an education partly completed abroad, most women in Zhang's stories have a low level of education. They are often conscious of this handicap: it shuts to them the door to an independent life.

The young Weilong, in "Aloeswood Ashes--The First Burner", despairs over her only alternative of starting her life anew by getting married, because "graduating from high school, and entering society to look for a job, this is not certain to be the best way
out for a beautiful girl with no special talent like her." Even elder women are confronted with such obstacles to their independence. Mrs. Xun in "Happy Reunion", for instance, would not like to live with her children once her husband has died:

Mrs. Xun, smiling, said with force: "I won't live with them," then she murmured again: "I'm thinking I don't care where, but I will look for a place for myself, no matter where. I'm sure I can look after myself." At the end, her voice became louder, and her tone not natural at all: it became coarse. She avoided saying look for a job. Looking for a job always sounds like looking for some office work. She could only cook. If she cooked for people, it would appear as though she was a maid, and this would make her children lose face.

What makes women in this situation feel worse is that even if their high school education is adequate for them to obtain a low-level secretarial job, they cannot take it in order to earn an independent living and not care about the appearance or the "face" of their middle-class families. Liusu is in such a situation in the story "Love in a Fallen City":

This time back here, the situation is even worse than in the past. She and her family have long broken off all favours or obligations. It is not that she hasn't thought of looking for a small job, just to make a living. Even if it is a little bit hard, that would even be better than staying home and undergoing frustrations. However, getting a low-level occupation will cause damage to her status as a respectable unmarried lady.

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1 Zhang, Ailing, "Zhang Ailing Xiaoshuo Ji [Collected Stories of Zhang Ailing]", Taipei: Huangguan, 1986, p. 333. From now on, quotations from this collection will be referred to by their page number, preceded by CS, at the end of the quotation in parenthesis.

2 Zhang, Ailing, "Wangran ji [Sense of Loss]", Taipei: Huangguan, 1983, p. 95. Later quotations from this collection will be referred to by their page number, followed by SL, at the end of the quotation in parenthesis.
Although it is insipid, it would be a shame to dismiss that status. Especially now that she still has not given up hope with Fan Liuyuan, she cannot bring her own self-worth down, otherwise he could use it as a further pretext to refuse marrying her. Therefore she has to undergo these hard times no matter what happens. (CS, p. 238)

For Yuanmei, in "Happy Reunion", whose husband has gone abroad to study, her educational level is also an obstacle to her well-being:

He has left, leaving her behind alone, not knowing how to behave. Even at her own parents', it is not appropriate for them to treat her either as a person already mature or still as a child. She wants to look for a job and work outside to avoid being idle at home, but the kind of jobs which a high-school graduate can get will not be accepted by her in-laws. It would make them lose face. (SL, p. 89)

Secondly, as a consequence of their lack of education, many of Zhang's female characters are trapped in a situation where the deep feeling of financial insecurity is one of the motives to their major decisions in life. For unmarried young women, such as Weilong, Chuanchang and Lingqing about to graduate, or just graduating from high school, marriage represents both the step out of their unhappy present and the guarantee of a secure material life.

Because of the insecurity engendered in her parents' badly-run family, where money is lacking to buy necessities, but is spent on snacks, taxis, movies, and other luxuries, (CS, p. 435) Chuanchang in "Withering Flower" anticipated her future married life with Yunfan, a doctor, as one of self-fulfillment and prosperity. (CS, p. 478) Similarly, in "Heart Sutra", Lingqing is desperately looking for a partner "of a certain class and a certain age", who will take her out of her unhappy family situation and secure
her life as well. (CS, p. 413) Her fiancé-to-be Haili, who is rejected in the end and replaced by a rich mature banker, said about her:

"... there are too many women like her in society, who succumb to the temptation of money..." (CS, p. 430)

Whether this remark is true for Lingqing or not, it certainly is for Mrs Liang, in "Aloeswood Ashes—The First Burner", whose expressed goal in her youth was respectively to marry a rich old man, who was expected to die soon and leave the young widow a comfortable fortune to enjoy the rest of her life.

Qi qiao in "The Golden Cangue", married to an invalid son of a rich family, is the one who inherits her husband's share of the family heritage after his death. However, she cannot help feeling insecure with her fortune for the rest of her life. This feeling of insecurity makes her sever links abruptly with her brother-in-law, whom she desired in secret, as well as with all other relatives, and then avoid finding a husband for her daughter out of fear that any of them would take advantage of her money.

To raise their standard of living and look for financial shelter is not only the goal of unmarried women, but also of widowed and divorced women whose situation has been aggravated during the 1937-45 Sino-Japanese war times. Dunfeng, in "Lingering Love", makes a point of showing her relatives that her marriage to Mr. Mi as well as her care for him should not be misunderstood as having other motives. She told her aunt: "There is nothing about my situation that you don't know! All I do is totally for the sake of a secured life." (CS, p. 29). Again, later on:

Dunfeng put on her coat and brought Mr. Mi his scarf, saying: "Put it on, it's cold now." While saying it, she smiled at her aunt and cousin-in-law with a seemingly apologetic look in her eyes, as if meaning to say: "Isn't all that for money? If I care for him, it's also for my own benefit — anyway the three of us all understand it, right?" (CS, p. 38)
Liusu, a young divorcée in "Love in a Fallen City", determines to seduce Fan Liuyuan, a rich businessman, into marriage because she needs to get out of her family where her brothers and sisters-in-law, after using up all her money, complain about having to support her during the penury of war times. Even her own mother exerts some pressure to incite her to leave the family.

The third situation, worst of all, is when a female character is locked up in herself, suffering from either physical or mental isolation or both. Such lone women are intensely described, and stand out as Zhang Ailing's typical characters. The strong impact of this situation on their behaviour, in other words, how they appear in light of their situations, will be discussed below as well.

Qiqiao in "The Golden Cangue" is the most representative among them: the description of her situation is carried out most thoroughly, from her youth till her old age, physically as well as mentally. In her youth, until her mother-in-law's death, she had to live together with her husband's large family, and yet she was isolated from them by their contempt of her low-class origin and behaviour. "Because Qiqiao knew that everyone in this house looked down on her, she was especially warm to the newcomer," but "Lanxian [the new daughter-in-law of the family] had seen through Qiqiao and understood her position at the Jiangs'. She kept smiling but hardly answered, Qiqiao felt the slight." (GC, p. 534, or CS, p. 157) Even the maids discriminated against her, speaking behind her back:

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Dragons breed dragons, phoenixes breed phoenixes, as the saying goes. You haven't heard her conversation! Even in front of the unmarried young ladies she says anything she likes. (GC, p. 531, or CS, p. 152)

In addition to this class discrimination, Qiqiao was also bitter about her husband's family's lack of sympathy for her situation:

"That's all right with me, I'm used to it," said Qiqiao. "ever since I stepped inside the Jiang house, just nursing your Second Brother all these years, watching over the sickbed day and night, just for that alone you'd think I'd done some good and nothing wrong, but who's ever grateful to me? Who ever did me half a good turn?"

Jize said smiling, "You're full of grievances the minute you open your mouth." (GC, p. 535-536, or CS, p. 160)

The depth of her emotional isolation is most powerfully suggested through her overt sexual advances to her brother-in-law Jize. If the cold and despising attitude of others in the family towards her hurts her feelings and makes her become bitter and aggressive, her invalid husband's total lack of feelings and vitality causes an even deeper impact on her. Emotional and sexual frustrations enrage and distress her, and also sap her self-confidence:

On her way out she again leaned her back against the door, whispering,

"What I don't get is in what way I'm not as good as the others. What is it about me that's no good?"

"My good sister-in-law, you're all good."

She said with a laugh, "Could it be that staying with a cripple, I smell crippled too, and it will rub off on you?" (GC, p. 537, or CS, p. 162)
Then, with the change of her fortune, when she has gained both physical and financial independence after her husband and mother-in-law's consecutive deaths, a different portrait of Qiqiao emerges. A frightening portrait of a tyrant is revealed, whose actions are so perversely unexpected and calculated to hurt people around her! Her situation, however, remains fundamentally utter isolation. The difference is that it is her conscious choice now. As mentioned above, because of her feeling of insecurity, she wards everyone off, libelling them as coveters of her money. But eventually she is also emotionally isolated from her own children, the ones who live closest to her, because she has jealously destroyed all their chances of happiness. The striking final image is that of an insane woman, lost in her obsessions and decor:

For thirty years now she had worn a golden cangue. She had used its heavy edges to chop down several people; those that did not die were half dead. She knew that her son and daughter hated her to the death, that the relatives on her husband's side hated her, and that her own kinfolk also hated her. She groped for the green jade bracelet on her wrist and slowly pushed it up her bony arm, as thin as firewood, until it reached the armpit. (GC, p. 558, or CS, p. 202)

Insanity caused by a cloistered life can also be recognized in Mrs Mitchell and her eldest daughter Millicent, in "Aloeswood Ashes —The First Burner". Mrs Mitchell's psychological imbalance shows through her obsession with discipline and conformism, whereas Millicent's insanity is even more physically apparent, betrayed by her impulsive and strange demeanor:

Roger jumped up on his feet and greeted her with a smile: "Good morning, Millicent." Millicent stayed put and said: "Oh, you're here!"

She put the electric fan down on the floor, walked swiftly towards him. Coming in front of him, she pressed one hand on her naked throat and
exclaimed in a low voice: "Roger!" Roger felt very uneasy, he pulled back the rattan chair behind him a little bit, and stepping back, asked her: "Millicent, are you sick?" Millicent grasped his shoulder suddenly, and with the other hand holding her face, sobbed: "Roger, please take good care of Susie." Roger smiled faintly, and while saying "Don't worry, I love her; I will certainly take care of her", slightly moved the hand which she put on his shoulder away, and made another step back to the side of the rattan chair. Millicent leaned wearily against the armrest of the chair, and then unsteadily collapsed on it. (CS, pp. 347-348)

Mrs Mitchell remained at the place where she was, at the top of the staircase. Millicent was standing at the bottom. Her reddish brown hair was curling in a mess, her face snow-white, and the rim of her eyes slightly swollen. Her head was lifted up, the sharp chin pointing forward, it looked like she had just had a heated argument with Mrs Mitchell. Roger said "Good evening, Millicent", she did not answer. Her arms were both hanging down rigidly, her fingers stretching and squeezing alternately. Mrs Mitchell rushed down the steps before Susie and Roger; she pulled Millicent and pushed her against the wall, as though fearing she would make a move against Roger." (CS, p. 365)

The Mitchells' psychological abnormality results from the mental isolation which Mrs Mitchell imposes on her whole family, censuring topics of speech, reading materials and social contacts in order to protect her daughters from the evils of the world. Therefore, they grow up in total loss of contact with reality, even biological reality. This is the reason why both Millicent and Susie are hysterically frigid on the first day of their
weddings. More pernicious is the emotional sterility which, in the case of Susie, prevents her from even feeling Roger’s real love.

The direct cause of their self-cloistering is the deep feeling of insecurity which Mrs Mitchell experiences as a widow in charge of three young daughters, but also as an ordinary British woman exiled in the vast land of China, and then in the complex and promiscuous Hong Kong society.

Dunfeng in "Lingering Love" is another female character who, due to the same motive of insecurity, isolates herself from all her relatives after someone tries to impede her remarriage with a rich elderly man, intending to tell him that Dunfeng's late husband died of syphilis.

"Her relatives are extremely numerous. Now, except for her uncle's family, she sees much less of them all.... Dunfeng does not dare to display wealth in front of them for fear they would come and borrow money; and even when she is unhappy, she does not dare to pour out her grievances to them either for fear they would laugh at her ...
Among these people, there are only her aunt and her cousin to whom she can still speak. Dunfeng feels so desperately stifled at home; otherwise she would not often come to the Yangs either.(CS, p. 19)

Out of boredom and lack of challenge, she fancies that there is a triangular love affair going on between herself, her husband Mr. Mi and Mrs Yang, her cousin's wife — the very person who acted as matchmaker for her. She needs to entertain herself in her solitude and to feel the excitement of being the victorious one. "Although it is not such a big deal, it is still a victory."¹ And the reason why Mrs Yang, though not interested in

¹Ibid, p. 36
her old husband, is implicated in this imaginative affair is "half because Dunfeng does not have any new object of jealousy." (CS, p. 36)

Qiqiao, Mrs Mitchell and Dunfeng are at least partly responsible for their isolation; they choose it in order to protect themselves from evil forces surrounding them. But like the Mitchell daughters, there is another woman who, by having no alternative situation, is a full victim of the physical and mental isolation in which her husband leaves her. It is Yanli, in "Red Rose, White Rose". Zhang Ailing describes the circumstances and development of her insanity in realistic detail.

Very soon after their marriage, Zhenbao loses interest in his young wife, because of her undeveloped body and lack of vitality. Also ashamed of her lack of sociability and tact, he avoids introducing her to people, carries out all activities outside the home, and even prefers to spend his time with prostitutes rather than with Yanli.

She does not have friends. The young woman is so lonely that the radio is the only human voice which keeps her company. (CS, p. 99) This is partly because people are intimidated by her strange attitude. As if out of control, she vents her grievances at length to the first person who speaks to her. She will try hard to keep the guest as long as possible, and "often offers people a sudden wave of warm affection. If the person is a woman, she will hold her hand in her own damp palm, desperately clutching it with the kind of warmth which makes people feel ill at ease." (CS, pp. 98-99) After once overhearing Yanli complaining to their eight-year-old daughter about all kinds of mistreatment she fancies he is suffering from his friends, Zhenbao sends the girl into a boarding school. By this act, he has succeeded in making her isolation a complete one: not only is she physically kept out of all social contacts, but she also suffers emotional isolation, receiving no love from him, and now deprived of her daughter's as well. Thereafter, she begins to show pathological signs:
Yanli has got severe constipation. Everyday, whenever she goes to the bathroom, she sits there for several hours — it is only at this time that she can rightly afford being passive, silent, and not thinking. The rest of the time, she neither speaks, nor thinks as well, but she never totally feels at peace, walking here and there with no real purpose. It is only in this bright bathroom that her mind is at rest, and that she can feel secure. (CS, p. 101)

In fact, one may wonder whose situation is worse off — Yanli's, or that of Liusu and Weilong, the respective heroines of "Love in a Fallen City" and "Aloeswood Ashes — The First Burner". The latter female characters are also locked up in isolation, however theirs is an emotional rather than physical one — they are surrounded by people hostile to them.

For Liusu, daily life back in her family as a divorcée seems like a nightmare: being harassed for petty financial reasons by her brothers-and-sisters-in-law, but mostly facing her mother's lack of sympathy and understanding. "The mother she wished to have was completely different from her real mother." (CS, pp. 208-209) This maternal indifference reminds Liusu of an experience in her childhood when she walked out of a theater with her family, on a heavy rainy day:

She stood on the sidewalk by herself, and stared at people blankly.

People also stared at her, through the dripping windows of their cars, through several invisible layers of glass covers — innumerable strangers. Everyone was locked in their small inner world. Even if she broke her head against the glass, she could not break through it. (CS, pp. 208-209)
Thus Liusu is surrounded by a crowded family, yet terribly isolated emotionally, as though surrounded by complete strangers, and worse still, separated from them by unbreakable barriers of noncommunication.

At her aunt's, Weilong is in a similar situation. Not having Liusu's maturity, and also because of her adolescent sensibility, she suffers more from being totally lost in the hypocritically well-covered hostile environment. Her relations are skilfully controlled by her aunt who also places her trusty maid Yan'er in the position of waiting upon Weilong, and watching her while pretending to be her confidant. Weilong, more or less aware of it, has to be always on guard and is at a loss to obtain sincere advice on important decisions she has to make. The moment most revealing of her distress and loneliness is when she is still agonizing over whether she should return to the warm security of her parents' home in Shanghai, or stay in Hong Kong for George, in case one day he might need her love:

She suddenly decided not to leave — no matter what. 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.(CS, p. 333)

2- Character

In a nutshell, Zhang's female characters are mainly victims of a mediocre, if not bad fortune. This does not mean, however, that they form a monotonous picture of sad victims. By the character with which the writer endowes them, they can be distinguished into two types: the aggressive women and the submissive women.

The aggressive type of female character is the one who is fully aware of the situation which sets limitations on her potential happiness, and struggles to fulfill it.
Therefore, this type of woman has a very definite goal to achieve in her life; what the goal may be depends on what she defines as her happiness. In Zhang Ailing's short stories, there prevails a difference between young aggressive women whose primary concern is to achieve a comfortable degree of financial security in their lives, and old aggressive women who have already achieved the same goal and now, realizing the high cost of that achievement, set out to make up for the love they sacrificed in their youth.

It should be remarked that it is not conversely true that all women who aim to seek financial security or real love are of the aggressive type. In other words, the main characteristic that defines them so is not so much the nature of their goals itself, but their strong determination in controlling their situations so as to achieve these goals. It shows mostly through their decisions and choices.

Thus, among the women described above whose feeling of financial insecurity motivates their main decisions, Weilong, Dunfeng, Liusu, and Qiqiao and Mrs Liang in their youth, belong to the type of aggressive young women. Apart from them, some others manifest their strong will in their keenness to have the upper hand on external circumstances — sometimes at the cost of severe personal sufferings. Jiaorui, in "Red Rose, White Rose", without warning her lover Zhenbao, wanted to complete a happy end to their adulterous relationship by writing to her husband asking for divorce. Then, later on, at Zhenbao's cowardly withdrawal, she braces her courage to sever links with him abruptly, in spite of her passionate love for him. Thus it is all in her hands whether to complete or to destroy their relationship. Yuanmei, Mrs Wu's daughter in "Happy Reunion", disappoints her parents by sacrificing her higher education, choosing to live up to her modernistic belief in "ordinary and realistic life" that could be achieved without academic requirements. (SL, p. 89)

Likewise, Jingjing and Ququ in "Glazed Tiles", are the type of aggressive "modern" daughters who reject parental control over their lives. Although Jingjing in the
end consents to marry Qikui whom her father chooses for her, from her wedding day on, she takes control of the situation and deliberately prevents her father from enjoying any advantage from her marriage to Qikui, or get any benefit from her father-in-law who is his employer. (CS, p. 388) Her younger sister Ququ also warns her father with deep insults not to interfere with her relationship with a vulgar young man and criticize her shocking behaviour. (CS, pp. 390-391)

As these women grow older, the kind of control they exert on their environment becomes their deadly weapon. Mrs. Mitchell's control of her daughters, for example, has been mentioned above. It is the means she uses to satisfy her aggressive desire to keep her daughters all to herself, by jealously preserving their childlike innocence and purity.

Qiqiao's famous situation has been discussed above. Yet how her major actions in the later part of her life shows her as an aggressive old woman is still to be emphasized here. The portrait of her as a tyrant is the evidence of her overwhelming control over her family. The usual yearnings of the subconscious to vent sexual or emotional frustrations in Qiqiao's case becomes a conscious cruel streak, and that demonstrates the degree of her aggressiveness. She indulges herself in the pleasure of destroying her own daughter's and her daughter-in-law's happiness, her jealousy with happy young women being aggressively turned into revenge for herself.

Mrs. Liang is almost exactly the same character as Qiqiao, and in the same situation. Not only does she have the same verbal aggressity, but she is also a clever old woman who keeps her young niece Weilong under her total control. She uses Weilong to attract young males to satisfy her frustrations. Jealous of the young woman's potential happiness, she traps her into unhappy wedlock and, even then, sows the seed for future destruction, suggesting to the indecisive husband-to-be:

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1See p. 11.
"Naturally in seven or eight years, Weilong's income will expectedly decrease by far. Then when she cannot earn the living for the family anymore, you can divorce her. In the British legal system, divorce is rather difficult, the only legitimate reason is adultery. However isn't it easy to catch your partner committing adultery?" (CS, p. 336)

The submissive type of woman is the passive victim of her fortune. There are a score of such characters of any age in Zhang's short stories. As daughters in the family, they do all that their parents or elder members dictate to them, and try to live up to their expectations:

For ten years Yanli has been at school, conscientiously looking up new words in the dictionary, memorizing tables, copying down everything from the blackboard.(CS, p. 92)

Cuiyuan was frustrated at school, but also at home. The Wus were a modern family, a model one with a religious foundation. Her family greatly encouraged her to study, to climb upward, step by step, climb to the top — as a young woman in her twenties who could teach at university, she had set the new record for female occupation. However the head of the family had gradually lost interest in her, and would rather have seen her studying not so hard in the beginning, and taking some time to look for a rich son-in-law for him.

She was a good daughter, and a good student. Her family were all good people. They washed themselves everyday, read the newspaper, and when they listened to the radio, they never listened to folk songs and vulgar Peking opera tunes. Instead, they would only listen to
Beethoven's and Wagner's symphonies, even if they did not understand. (CS, p. 490)

Having a weak character, these women have no courage to assert themselves and it is only in dreams that they escape from family control, or rebel against it. Thus, in "Blockade", during the real blockade set by the Japanese, which also symbolizes a psychological atemporal blockade, Cuiyuan was tempted to acquiesce with the suggestion made by Zongzhen, still one stranger among others in the train, to become his concubine—this, just to spite her family:

Zongzhen said: "You already have somebody maybe. In fact, even if you consented, your family wouldn't let you do it, would they?...would they?"

Cuiyuan pursed her lips tightly. Her family—those virtuously pure people—she hated them! She has had enough of their hoaxing. They wanted her to find a rich son-in-law for them: Zongzhen did not have money, but a wife—it would be fine to spite them. Make them angry!

They deserved it! (CS, p. 497)

For her life is equal to frustration, because her anger and her desire for revenge are all contained within herself. Had she not been a submissive character, she would not have been angry with her parents' disappointment, thus complying with their new expectations after all. Instead, she would be proud of her own career achievements.

Chuanchang in "Withering Flower" is an extreme example of a submissive daughter, to the point of becoming the martyr in her family. Because of their parents' irresponsibility, the children have to fight according to the law of the jungle for their rights and survival. Chuanchang is incapable of doing so, being by nature "naive, slow-speaking and a little bit stubborn." (CS, p. 465) But it becomes more serious when she lets her parents compromise her future by quarrelling and misbehaving during the Mid-
Autumn dinner to which Yunfan, her fiancé-to-be, is invited. She does not attempt to control the situation but simply waits passively and in agony for the final results to come:

She tried a few times to explore his feelings, and felt that he was not particularly happy, but definitely not unhappy either. It was obvious that he could tolerate everything about her family. Knowing that, she felt secure. (CS, p. 475)

Even when it comes to physical discomfort caused by her father while she is bed-ridden with severe pneumonia, she does not dare to voice any protest:

Even Mr. Zheng, who had not often come to his daughter's room for fear of contagion, came up today. He puffed out a thick cloud of cigar smoke to create a protective curtain around him. Chuanchang pretended on purpose not to mind it, and diverted the conversation to Yu Meizeng's appearance instead. (CS, p. 480)

As wives, these submissive women suffer even more and there seems to be no end to their frustrations, because the more they concede, the more their husbands take advantage of them.

There are different degrees of unhappiness caused indirectly by the wife's lack of character and ability to take up an assertive role in the family. First of all, a wife giving her husband total freedom to run the budget of the family as he likes makes it easy for him to entertain other women outside, be unfaithful, and eventually abandon her. Zhenbao, in "Red Rose, White Rose", is an example: since Yanli from the outset does not oppose his preference for spending money to entertain guests outside, (CS, p. 100) he has no qualms about spending time and money with prostitutes, using business obligations as the pretext. (CS, p. 93) Then gradually, he even brings prostitutes into the house when he comes to pick up money. (CS, p. 106)
In the later years of their lives, quite a few unassertive women are at a loss as to what to do but powerlessly witness the dissolution of their marriage: Mrs. Xi's husband goes to the interior, takes another lover and thereafter fails to support her; (CS, p. 114) Mrs. Wu stays in Shanghai while her husband is living in Hong Kong, having a son with his secretary there; (SL, p. 82) and Mrs. Xu does not even attempt to prevent her husband from living with their daughter's girlfriend. (CS, p. 440)

However the consequences of their submissiveness do not only impinge on their own happiness, but sometimes also have a deep negative impact on their children's destiny. This happens when submissiveness as a wife becomes total surrender of responsibility as a parent, mostly when the father is already unconcerned about the children's well-being.

Such is the recollection Chuanqing was able to conjure up of his late mother, Peng Biluo, from various facts of her life, gathered from people's gossip. Being a submissive and obedient daughter in a good family, she had to renounce her real love and marry the person her family chose for her. But after marriage, she was just letting herself slowly die of unhappiness, without even trying to stay alive for her son:

She was not a caged bird. Caged birds can still fly out when the cage is open. She was a bird embroidered on a screen. (CS, p. 263)

She was dead, everything was finished for her, but what about Chuanqing? Why does he have to endure this suffering? When Biluo was married into the Nie family, at least it was her own conscious sacrifice. But Chuanqing had absolutely no choice about being born into the Nie family...... These twenty-years' life with his father have transformed him into a mentally disabled person. Even if he was given freedom, he would not be able to escape anymore. (CS, p. 263-264)
Mrs. Xu in "Heart Sutra" is ignored, not only as a self-effacing wife, but also as a powerless mother. Her presence in the house is unnoticed to visitors, and her place by her husband taken up by her daughter. For seven or eight years, she watches powerlessly the development of an incestuous relationship between her husband and her daughter. Even though it is trying to her, she makes no attempt to alter the situation. It ended up being an emotional disaster for her daughter Xiaohan who is partly right in blaming her mother:

"Mum, why didn't you discipline me earlier? What have you been doing?" (CS, p. 439)

"You didn't control things earlier! You ... you pretended not to know!" (CS, p. 440)

Mrs. Zheng, Chuanchang's mother in "Withering Flower", also has to bear part of the responsibility in the kind of undisciplined jungle her family has become: although she hates her husband's way of life — "she hates him for being irresponsible, for wanting so many children, for being unhygienic" (CS, p. 464) — she herself does not try to have any control over his behaviour or the family, and instead "takes advantage of the disorder to embezzle some money for her private funds." (CS, p. 464)

3- Thought

Such distinction in the character, between aggressive and submissive women, is partly due to one aspect of their thought, namely the opinion they have about their own position in their families and in society. In Zhang's short stories, it may vary from one extreme to another, creating three main attitudes for female characters: conformism to traditional role models, independence of thought regardless of the traditional context in
which they live, and rebellion against traditional ideas by advocacy of excessive modernism.

Characters with a submissive character described above are generally those who believe that they have the duty, as daughters or wives in the families, or as women in society, to comply with rules and expectations set by their role models. Therefore, they try to conform to their role models, even at the cost of great suffering, instead of attempting to control or change the situation. Thus such daughters as Cuiyuan and Chuanchang entertain the idea of filial piety to their parents as efforts to meet their expectations, or to live according to the way of life they have set for their families, and to show utmost respect to them mostly in front of other people, even when they are unreasonable or wrong. As wives, they feel that they have the duty to carry out the housework diligently and also not to make their husbands lose face because of them. Mrs. Xu in "Heart Sutra" who has not been invited to share the joy of her daughter's birthday party celebrated in her own house, still feels the duty to clean up: "Mrs. Xu opened the door and entered, glancing at her husband and daughter sitting together with a faint smile. Then, by her own, she went to rearrange the sofa cushions, clean off the trace of water on the piano, and gather all the cigarette ash into one tray." (CS, pp. 416-417)

In "Happy Reunion", when she was abroad to accompany her husband, Mrs. Wu used to be blamed whenever there was some problem in the activities organized by him for other Chinese students in Europe because of her expected role as a wife and helper. Yet she felt that she should joyfully endure frustration and blame: "She remained silent, and when she smiled, her smile was still very sweet." (SL, p. 92)

What is admirable is that in their seeming submission and weakness, they have a very strong ability to control themselves or to make sacrifices. In the same story, besides, Mrs. Wu's cousin, Mrs. Xun, had a very hard time with her mother-in-law who
mistreated and took advantage of her in several ways, but "Mrs. Xun had her method to deal with her mother-in-law, she never retorted, no matter what." (SL, p. 94) Mrs Tong, in "Waiting", is a good example of a strong-willed woman whose surrender is motivated by her powerful control of herself in order to change her thought: she had been controlling her self-indulging debauche husband very tightly, and yet since a buddhist monk advised her, for the sake of reincarnation, to behave as a good wife, she gave him such freedom that he even brought prostitutes home. (CS, p. 121)

Apart from definite ideas about their roles as daughters and wives in the family, some women also feel forced by society's opinion to renounce individual inclinations and conform to social mores. In "Jasmine Tea", after Yan Ziye's proposal to Peng Biluo was rejected by her grandmother because of their difference in social positions, Yan Ziye suggested to Biluo to escape from her family and follow him abroad. However Biluo, in the end, stayed and docilely married another man as arranged by her family: "she had no alternative... She must protect her family's reputation, and she must consider Yan Ziye's future." (CS, p. 263) In her case, had she been a stronger character, she would still be bound by her sense of responsibility not to compromise either her family's or Yan Ziye's reputation.

Another type of female character is characterized by their independent thinking: to them, what matters first is their own interest, rather than their family's expectations or society's opinions. In some cases, it may be called selfishness: however an independent mind is required to assert individual selfish interest over what is considered important by all other people around oneself. Jiaorui's aim in "Red Rose, White Rose", in her youth, is to fully enjoy herself; she does not have to struggle inside herself with any sense of obligation to give it up, nor is she ashamed to speak freely about it to Zhenbao, a friend of her husband. She considers it her full right to live as she likes: "The reason my family
sent me to study in England was just for me to have a good choice of whom to marry. However I was still young when I first got there, and hadn't the least desire to get married. Rather, I used it as a pretext to go out and enjoy myself." (CS, p. 75)

Liusu, a divorcée in her late twenties in the story "Love in a Fallen City", one day decides to seize the opportunity of being indirectly introduced to Liuyuan, and rebuild her life: 
"... she decided to use her future as stakes to gamble with. If she lost, her reputation would be gone.... If she won, she would obtain Fan Liuyuan, the prey that everyone was coveting." (CS, p. 219) To fully evaluate her independent thinking, one should be aware of the moral pressures which her family exerts on her:

In the first place if a woman is duped by a man, she must be punished. Worse, if she herself sets a trap for men, she is considered a licentious woman. Now if she intends to set a trap for men but fails, and is duped by them instead, that is twice as licentious. Killing her would soil the knife. In the Bai family, ordinarily a fault as small as a sesame seed is enough to make everyone explode with fury.(CS, p. 238)

Another woman, Mrs. Liang in "Aloeswood Ashes — The First Burner" strongly asserts her independence by severing links with her brother who was concerned about the reputation of the family, and opposed to her intention of being the concubine for a rich old man for the sake of materialistic gains.(CS, p. 290)

Some other young female characters also rebel against their families, not for the same reasons, but for ideas which they entertain as modernism, or at least as awareness of the new epoch. Thus through her decision to marry her classmate's brother soon after high school, Yuanmei in "Happy Reunion" shows her parents that she is going to live up to her modernist ideas about romantic love, new standards of choice and freedom of marriage. The same ideal of romantic love binds Miss Fan and Miss Zhou in "Stale
Mates" to their already-married lovers for quite a few years. They readily sacrifice their youth and disobey their families for it. (SL, p. 210)

To a further extent, the advocacy of freedom of love and marriage can turn into aggressive rejection of parental authority, as in the case of the two sisters Jingjing and Ququ in "Glazed Tiles". They both reject the pose of filial daughters and make a point of demonstrating to their father, by their actions and nasty words, that they are carrying out their own ideas — not his expectations. However, all they can do is denounce his contradictions and act against his precalculated benefit (CS, pp. 388, 390, 391): it is pure rebellion. Apart from this acute awareness of being used by their father, they have no ideals of their own to reach.

In fact, this is one trait of another different aspect, which characterizes the thought of most of Zhang Ailing's female characters: antiromanticism.

Edward Gunn uses the term "antiromanticism" to characterize one trend of writers of the times — one of whom was Zhang Ailing. He describes it as follows:

No idealized conceptions appear in their works, not of heroic characters, revolution or love. Instead there are disillusionment, the exposure of fraud, and compromise with reality.

The term "antiromanticism" can in turn be used to qualify an attitude to life, or an aspect of thought distinctive of Zhang's female characters, which make them unforgettable in many readers' mind. I shall discuss the author's own attitude to life and vision in the next chapters, but here I will develop only the three traits which characterize the female characters' antiromanticism as identified in a precise manner by Gunn: disillusionment, fraud and compromise with reality.

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1 See p. 20.
2 Gunn, Unwelcome Muse, p. 198.
Zhang's stories generally either start out with disillusioned characters or end up with characters disillusioned by what happens in the course of the story. What are they disillusioned with? First of all, with love. In "Lingering Love", the widowed Dunfeng can be considered lucky because the man she remarries loves her and also is rather wealthy. But she is too disillusioned to return his love: for her, love is essentially sexual attraction, which she does not feel for her husband. As for her care for him in daily life, according to her, it is not a sign of love, but of selfishness: he has to live a few more years for her to acquire some financial security. (CS, pp. 29-30) Liusu in "Love in a Fallen City" has the same attitude. In addition to her very unromantic abstraction that platonic love would eventually end up with "marriage, moving to a new house, purchasing furniture, hiring servants", (CS, p. 228) she has such a deep distrust of men that it inhibits her from feeling Liuyuan's love, let alone giving him signs of love. (CS, pp. 223, 225, 234, 235)

In some cases, such a cynical and blasé attitude does not need an adversary to show itself. Life itself is an omnipresent adversary to the unfortunate Liqing, in "Happy Matrimony", who still has not found a partner. At the wedding reception of her cousin:

She stood there, leaning against a columnade — she likes to be like that. Her pale and tired face is a form of challenge, seeming to say: "I am a misanthrope, that's why I hate you — do you hate me?" (CS, p. 52)

Secondly, marriage also causes disillusion because of two widespread abuses: on the one hand, many women consider it as the quickest means to achieve financial goals; on the other hand, some parents use their daughters' marriage to make connections and advance their own career.¹

¹As described above, in Fortune.
Thirdly, a number of women who are disillusioned in marriage have attempted to pursue their own ideals; however, they too end up being disillusioned. Such is the case of Ah Xiao in "Indian Summer: Ah Xiao's Autumnal Lament" who may not have much belief in the institution of marriage in the beginning, but now has a pinch in her heart while listening to a young colleague speaking about the preparations for her wedding: "Her bragging made Ah Xiao feel uneasy; Ah Xiao and her husband had not had a flower and candle-lit ceremony, and all through these years, she had been thinking they should not have lived together without going through that excitement." (CS, p. 135) Likewise, Yuanmei, challenging her parents out of romantic idealism, chooses to both ignore financial concerns and quit higher studies to marry a very ordinary peer. But soon after her marriage, this idealism shatters against reality. Finally, the disillusioned young couple has to surrender to financial difficulties. Yuanmei has to let her husband seize the opportunity to go abroad alone, being unable to afford accompanying him, but "the most upsetting thing is that had she not been married, she could have accompanied him — her father would have been happy to support her going abroad to study. Now all she can do is to witness her younger siblings going abroad, one after the other, without even daring to be jealous. (SL, p. 89)

As for Jiazhi in "Lust, Abstinence", another young female student in Hong Kong, she is caught up with revolutionary patriotic idealism — "the general Hong Kong people's indifference towards the national plight arouses one's indignation." (SL, p. 24) However, right after the failure of her first revolutionary mission, she is somewhat disillusioned, feeling that she has been taken advantage of: "I am a fool. After all, I am a fool." (SL, p. 27) Then, later on again, while carrying out the last steps of her second mission, maybe as an unconscious result of this disillusion, she begins to have a lot of doubts and finally lets her sentimentality win over her revolutionary commitment: thinking that the man loves her, she lets him escape out of pity. (SL, p. 38)
Fraud is the second trait which characterizes antiromantic female characters. Many women in Zhang's stories practise it, by being dishonest to other people in order to attain their goals. These are most often the desires for wealth or financial security. Are not indeed the cases of Dunfeng, Qiqiao, Mrs. Liang, Liusu, Lingqing and Weilong examples of fraudulent marriages? They are cheating their husbands because they do not primarily marry because of love. And Ququ in "Glazed Tiles" cheats her father by pretending to advocate total disinterest in money for the sake of genuine love, and yet cleverly forcing him to take total care of hers and her husband's material life — otherwise her younger sisters' future would be compromised by her bad influence if she stayed at home.(CS, p. 393)

An extension of fraud is to be dishonest even to oneself. Zhang's female characters are special in that they excel in using their imagination to delude themselves. Whether strong or weak, mature or immature, they are very insightful and clear-minded in viewing external situations or judging other people's behaviour. Therefore, their self-delusion is a conscious distortion of reality and should not be confused with the romantics' idealism. In contrast to romantic characters who, generally over-evaluating their individual energies and abilities, set themselves too high ideals to reach, antiromantic women in Zhang's stories realize their own limits, and look for pretexts to either justify them or make up for them. This is true both for submissive as well as aggressive characters. The former are those who can perceive very accurately how the situation is unfavourable to them, however, because they are too weak to react against it, they deceive themselves with some excuse for non-action. Conversely, the latter are strong-willed women who want absolutely to do something which they know is not right, therefore they need to convince themselves of some imaginative cause of action.
In "Waiting", Mrs. Xi whose husband has been in the interior of China for a long time suspects that he already has another lover there. However, instead of clarifying the situation and asserting her rights, not only does she take for granted the fact that all men are unfaithful to their wives after six-months' separation, she still tries to cover up for him with the following interpretation of the situation:

The superiors gave them order to find a concubine .... Because of the Sino-Japanese war, Chinese population had greatly declined. Therefore they encouraged childbirth now, and the leaders gave permission to people whose wives had not been living together with them for two years to remarry. Now they didn't call them concubines anymore, but second spouses. All of that was because the leaders were afraid that civil servants who did not have anyone to take care of them would not pay proper attention to their work....(CS, p. 114)

In the story "Red Rose, White Rose", Yanli is a wife totally subdued by her husband. Because she does not have the strength to alter the situation, she resorts to self-deception to lessen her sufferings: "Yanli did not have any girlfriend herself, because if she did not compare herself with other people, she would not feel that her position in the family is that bad."(CS, p. 94) The same occurs when she tries to cover up her husband's debauchery as long as she can. It is not only to save face for the family, but at the same time she does not want to let other people and even herself realize how weak she is not to react to his exaggerations, nor that his debauchery is perhaps partly her fault for not knowing how to love him:

Zhenbao often drank now, and publicly frequented prostitutes — unlike formerly when he still had some reserve. When he came home heavily drunken, or if he did not come home, Yanli always had her own explanations, saying that he had recently been added too many
unavoidable obligations of eating out for business contacts. She never wanted to recognize that this had something to do with her. She obstinately explained so to herself, and when, later on, his debauchery was so obvious that it could not be hidden from people, she also explained it to them — smilingly and loyally covered up for him.(CS, p. 106)

Another passive woman is Mrs. Xu in "Heart Sutra" who is more or less aware of the incestuous relationship between her husband and her daughter. Although she suffers greatly because of her husband's gradual loss of interest in and love for her, Mrs. Xu claims that if she had strongly clashed with her husband, like "driving nails into iron", Xiaohan would not have had such a happy family life.(CS, p. 428) However, this is just her pretext to withdraw from action, even a defensive one. A determined woman would find a clever and peaceful way of interrupting such an incestuous development, for example, by sending the daughter on long summer holidays at relatives in other provinces, or even trying to spend as much time with her at home as possible.

In the same story, unlike her mother, Xiaohan is a determined young woman. The fact that whenever she speaks of her mother either to friends(CS, p. 406) or to her father,(CS, p. 407) she tries to make them believe that Mrs. Xu is already old, both in mentality and appearance, shows an unconscious attempt at self-deceit. She knows that it is difficult for her to solve the contradiction of considering her father as a peer — possibly her boyfriend — and her mother as an elderly parent while they are approximately of the same age. Therefore, she resorts to this imaginative age gap in order to make room for herself by her father's side. Self-delusion here is an aggressive tactic for her, in contrast to her mother's case.

In "The Golden Cangue", once she gains control of her hard-earned money after her husband's and mother-in-law's deaths, Qiqiao's self-delusion becomes an obsession
which helps her to protect it. She convinces herself that everyone covets her money, and that they approach her family only with the intention of cheating her or her children. Her tactic is to use the same method to eradicate any possible relationship. Her first adversary is Jize, her brother-in-law, who comes to flirt her and maybe trick her as well: Qiqiao, after some moments of rejoicing that they can finally be together, wakes herself up with the suspicion that he is coming to trick away her money. Then she causes an insulting scene in front of the servants, sending him off for good. (CS, p. 423) The second victim is her nephew whom she impatiently evicts out of her house, after giving him shelter for a while, using the pretext that he tried to seduce her thirteen-year old daughter so that he can take her money one day. In fact, the shrewd Qiqiao must have seen through this "none too bright" (GC, p. 545, or CS, p. 178) young countryman and known that he had no such plans. But she still spies over the children's relationship for the right occasion to convince herself of the idea. (GC, p. 545, or CS, p. 178-179) The third victim is her own daughter Chang'an who gradually becomes a spinster: Qiqiao at the beginning refuses to marry Chang'an into families of lesser wealth and lower position because "she always suspects that those people covet her money"; (CS, p. 183) and yet, later on, she even breaks Chang'an's engagement with a man of better fortune, Tong Shifang for the same reason. (CS, p. 195) To the reader, as to Qiqiao herself, it is clear that her jealousy of Chang'an's happiness is the main motive of refusal. That she slanders Shifang to disguise her jealousy in front of other people is obvious; however, it is more subtle to detect that it is not just a slander thrown at people's face, but also a conviction she tries to delude herself with. She had rather believe that Shifang chooses to marry Chang'an for financial expectations than for her own worth — in which case Chang'an would be more fortunate than her mother who was married only to take care of the invalid son of the Jiang family. Either consciously or unconsciously, the object of jealousy, Chang'an
herself, is replaced by Shifang in the comparison between mother's and daughter's cases which Qiqiao mentions. (CS, p. 195)

B—Form of Plot

The analysis should be focused on the protagonist of a story to determine the form of its plots. Since my interest here is only in the analysis of female characters in Zhang's stories, I will only discuss in this part plots which have female protagonists.

According to Friedman, a story has a plot of fortune if the success or failure of the protagonist "depends ultimately on external circumstances, rather than upon his [or her] will or knowledge;"¹ it is a plot of thought if the main issue "depends ultimately upon his [or her] insight or discovery,"² and a plot of character if it "depends upon [the protagonist's ability] to make the decision called for, and if this depends ultimately upon himself [or herself] rather than upon circumstances or knowledge."³

Firstly, based on these definitions, it can be observed that very few of Zhang's stories are plots of fortune, rather, most are plots of thought, or of character, or combinations of thought and character. Her female protagonists, therefore, are usually shown not as outcomes of their situations, but as individuals who think and act differently.

There are several female characters whose behaviour is conditioned by their situations as analyzed above.⁴ However, only "Withering Flower" can be considered a

¹Friedman, *Form and Meaning*, p. 81.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
⁴See section Fortune above.
plot of fortune, because apart from Chuanchang, the ultimate outcome for other female protagonists does not depend solely on external circumstances. Chuanchang's dreams are to continue pursuing university studies and to enjoy her youthful years before getting married right away like her elder sisters. However, she is totally under her family's control and is prevented from fulfilling both dreams. First, her father considers females' university degrees as "the most presumptuous luxuries",(CS, p. 466) and secondly, looking for a son-in-law is a romantic enterprise for her mother who tries in some way to make up for the lack of romantic love in her married life.\(^1\) Thus she is a real victim of external forces, being unable to carry out her will and having no other alternatives. The worst comes when the vision of her bright future as the wife of a doctor helplessly shatters in front of her eyes as pneumonia devastates her health.

Secondly, it can be remarked that Zhang chooses the form of her plots as a function of her themes.\(^2\) That is to say most plots of thought develop the theme of retrospection, while plots of character deal with the theme of alienation.

The three stories "Indian Summer : Ah Xiao's Autumnal Lament", "Flower and Pistils in the Floating Waves" and "Happy Reunion" are plots of thought with respectively Ah Xiao, Luozhen and Yuanmei as female protagonists. They do not center on dynamic action, rather, on these women's active flow of thoughts during a determined episode. The three of them are exposed to the reader in the light of their honest retrospection; at the same time, through retrospection, they themselves come to see other people in a truer light. Thus, in the first story, Ah Xiao's insight and rich sensibilities contrast with the boredom she is subject to in her twenty-four-hours' episode of a maid's life. She recognizes to herself that she is not very fortunate: her marital life lacks the

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\(^1\)Ibid, p. 467.

\(^2\)The reason why I discuss themes here is that female characters cannot be examined in isolation, but must be considered also as means used by the author to effect larger themes.
original luster of an official wedding; her husband does not live together with her because of his job, and she has to work hard to support herself and her small son because he does not earn enough money either. However, in spite of these disappointing shadows on her life, she is still proud of her husband's knowledge and of his affection for her. Also she is all the prouder of being herself an independent breadwinner, as she comes more and more to discover her master to be a corrupt male taking advantage of his foreign status and handsome appearance to flirt with rich Chinese ladies and live on their expenses. Yet, here again, her contempt for his corruption does not prevent her from showing her loyalty to him when the occasion arises: when, on his absence, one of his girlfriends Miss Li suggests to buy new bed linen for him to replace the present old ones, Ah Xiao vehemently refuses for her master, trying to save his pride "with a kind of motherly protection."(CS, p. 143)

In "Flower and Pistils in the Floating Waves", the same complexity of thoughts and feelings is found in Luozhen during the episode of her boat journey from Hong Kong to Japan. This is a sort of convalescence episode for her, during which she reflects on her past life back in China, then more recently as a refugee in Hong Kong. In Luozen's case, the beneficial effect does not really come from "the fact of boarding a boat, and being separated from the past by oceans which sometimes helps people to forget it" (SL, p. 75), as she thinks. Instead, it is through retrospection and honest reconciliation with herself that she can recover from several emotional disturbances in her recent past. First, it relieves her from frustrations with herself for being such a mediocre person — "People of our generations are the most mediocre, we disdain old things and yet we don't know new ones" (SL, p. 65) —, and for being unable to find a husband, when she recognizes all the limitations of her situation. Being an orphan from an early age, she could not afford higher education and has to work as a low-level secretary; then, being a secretary, she was not lucky to have a male director who might marry her as in her colleague's
The second burden is lifted off her conscience during this journey when she realizes that her immature behaviour was the indirect cause of her sister's best friend Fanny's death, and regrets it. During the first night when they met with each other again in Hong Kong, the excited Luozen could not help herself and told Fanny that her husband was unfaithful to her and preferred to stay in China, although she had implicitly consented not to betray his secret. The recognition of her own fault helps Luozen to stop being so upset with the hateful attitude of Fanny's family towards her after Fanny's death. Therefore, "she likes this vacuum period of life", (SL, p. 77) because she has time for retrospection and reconciliation with herself, which makes her feel good afterwards.

Yuanmei, in "Happy Reunion", is bored with this idle period of her life when her husband is abroad studying, while she stays home with nothing to do. During the episode of this story, she entertains herself by listening to the idle talk of her mother and her mother's cousin, Mrs. Xun. She links facts of their past which she knows of to their present attitude, and to subconscious motives of their behaviour which she has noticed: as a result, she discovers more about each of them, but also about the kind of lesbian congeniality between her mother and Mrs. Xun. What is more important here is the fact that Yuanmei, being in their company, also sees herself in retrospect through their eyes, that is with a more mature attitude: she can guess how much they disapprove of her marriage to her young immature husband who cannot support her. (SL, pp. 93,97) However she can also perceive that her mother still considers her immature. (SL, p. 103) In brief, this can be called a disillusionment plot, as the protagonist, after realizing several disadvantages caused by the practice of her modernist ideas, loses faith and comes to look at herself with self-pity, or the pity she can feel from her mother.

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1Friedman, *Form and Meaning*, p. 91.
In the three plots of character "Lust, Abstinence", "Love in a Fallen City" and "The Golden Cangue", the theme of alienation shows in the protagonists' struggle to make some major decision. The reason why they have to struggle is that they are torn between one way of thinking which is their own predilection, and another one which either is imposed on them by external forces, or used to be their own, but has become more and more alien to them now.

Thus for Jiazhi in "Lust, Abstinence", the revolutionary cause is an alien force to her. She has always carried out her mission more because of her personal interest in the art of acting (SL, pp. 24,29) than out of devotion to the revolutionary cause or group. That is why she has scruples about her purity, which makes her feel uneasy with Mr. Yi's sexual advances and which subconsciously obsesses her with sex. But it is when the moment comes to trap Mr. Yi into the assassination plot that the surge of her conscience makes her realize how the revolutionary cause is even more alien to her than the feeling that she may have loved him or he may have loved her, however illusory it is. In the end, it is the latter that tips her decision in favour of his release: no matter how ironical it is, at least it shows her victory to be won in a struggle between herself and something alien to her character.

Such a victory is not so obvious in the case of Liusu, in "Love in a Fallen City". The failure of her first marriage which resulted in a divorce, and the feeling of insecurity caused by her empirical distrust in people — starting with her own family — have alienated her from genuine spontaneous emotions. The inhibiting impact of this alienation is perceived by Liuyuan, the man she tries to trap into marriage, who challenges her with the question: "You don't love me, what can you do about it, can you control that fact?" (CS, p. 235). It only needs, indeed, "an instantaneous flash of thorough understanding" (CS, p. 249) — during which she recognizes that money, properties and everything else are just alien forces and that only the breath of life and Liuyuan are her most reliable
supports— for her dreams of marriage to come true. (CS, p. 249). Ironically, this "flash of thorough understanding" does not result from Liusu's success in coming to terms with her emotional problem, but it was brought about by the war.

There is no doubt in "The Golden Cangue", that the two heroines Qiqiao and Chang'an are both defeated by alien forces. The forces confronted by Qiqiao are very similar to those of Liusu: her capacity for genuine love is smothered by her feeling of financial insecurity which has developed to the point of obsession. But in the later part of her life, she is subject to an additional alien force: her subconscious frustrations. Ever since her teenage, Qiqiao has distrusted men's flirting and refused them any chance of further development because she wants to pursue her dreams of wealth. Then even when they have come true, obsession with material wealth still alienates her, even more severely: her wealth has become a "golden cangue" (GC, p. 558, or CS, p. 202) which imprisons her in emotional sterility. Not only is she no longer a normal woman with normal receptivity of love from the other sex, but she cannot even experience maternal love. She is indeed so alien to her role as a mother that she lets her actions be dictated by a sound subconscious urge of revenge for her sexual frustrations on her own daughter.

Chang'an's alienation is not less severe. Her mother's control of her constitutes the alienating force which comes out as the winner in the two major struggles in her life. Each time, without fail, it breaks her fragile self down to a lower level. The first time is when she chooses to quit school, knowing very well that she is much happier there than at home. Her motives are dictated by her alienation: her mother's threat of making a scene at her school for a lost bedsheets scares her to the point of making her lose sight of her real priorities. "She felt this sacrifice was a beautiful desolate gesture", (GC, p. 547, or CS, p. 181) thus exchanging her real happiness and chance of spontaneous development for the illusive significance of a defeatist surrender to her mother's will. The second surrender is the same "beautiful, desolate gesture" (GC, p. 556, or CS, p. 201) of
putting an end to her happiness and possible marriage herself rather than letting her mother use her awe-inspiring tricks to destroy it in the future. Alienation, at this point, has crippled her: she has no strength to look for other alternatives, although she knows that she will definitely regret this gesture.

C- End Effect

1- Moral Emotions

Moral emotions, as defined at the beginning of this chapter, are rare in Zhang Ailing's stories. There are only two roles in which her female characters can arouse moral emotions.

First, as victims of their parents' mistreatment. Chuanchang in "Withering Flower" and Chang'an in "The Golden Cangue" are the only ones who wholly deserve the reader's sympathy as victims of their parents' mistreatment: they are not held responsible for the consecutive misfortunes in their lives. Chuanchang's case has been discussed above. As for Chang'an, she is under absolute financial dependence on her mother, and not only does she have no ability to earn a living in order to lead an independent life, but she is also unable to obtain external help, being in the same isolation suffered by her mother and which her mother also imposes on her. Therefore, she cannot really be held responsible for her alienation discussed above.

As shown through the analysis of all the above sections, other women in Zhang's short stories are more or less responsible for their lives by their thought and character.

1See above p. 6.
2See section Character above, pp.23-24.
3See section Fortune above, pp. 10-11.
Take, for example, the case of Danzhu, in "Jasmine Tea". From the course of the action, it appears as though the good-hearted teenager is an innocent victim of the violent male classmate Chuanqing, whose psychological problems she tries to help solve. However, the motive of such benevolence is shown in the end: the attempt to achieve his confidence in her is in fact a vain challenge to herself. Already very successful among her classmates, (CS, p. 254) mostly male ones (CS, p. 264) her vanity still suffers from Chuanqing's resistance and rejection of her overt advances. Therefore, she tries to pursue his conquest until her vanity is satisfied:

His selfishness, his impoliteness, his unreasonable behaviour, she forgave him all that because he loved her. Even such an eccentric character loved her — her vanity was satisfied now. Danzhu was a good-hearted young woman, but she was a woman after all. (CS, p. 277)

Danzhu's approach to Chuanqing may be praiseworthy if we consider her patient and genuine efforts to help him. Nevertheless, that she is a victim of his violence is partly her own responsibility for persisting beyond reasonable limits — e.g. following him in the woods at night — to carry out her vain enterprise of conquering him. This may be for her a good lesson against vanity.

The second role in which female characters can arouse moral emotions is that of a mother whose maternal love inspires admiration, or sympathy, or who can equally inspire awe and blame. Mrs. Xu in "Heart Sutra" is the mother who inspires both admiration and the title of the story. No matter whether the explanation she gives for her non-reaction to the incestuous relationship between Mr. Xu and Xiaohan is true or is just a pretext to cover her weakness, she is still a good mother to Xiaohan from beginning to end. She does not take revenge by mistreating her daughter or causing unhappiness to her
adolescent years; and later on, when she has the certainty of such incestuous relationship from her daughter herself, she can still forgive her and help her to begin a new life.

Chuanchang's mother Mrs. Zheng, in "Withering Flower", definitely does not inspire admiration. By her devoted care for Chuanchang during her illness for several years until her death, she just deserves enough sympathy to redeem her in the end from the worst blame for parental irresponsibility and also for her selfishness— shown through her attempts to captivate her daughter's partner Yunfan's attention all to herself during the Mid-Autumn dinner. (CS, pp. 471-472)

Qiqiao in "The Golden Cangue" is the mother who not only is to be blamed, but she also inspires awful reactions for her immoral behaviour towards her daughter Chang'an and her son's wife and concubine. She marks her daughter with painful physical deformation — by binding her feet at a too late stage, and then unbinding them again after a few years— and psychological alienation.2 Also out of jealousy and in order to vent her sexual frustrations, she in turn inflicts humiliating frustrations on her daughter-in-law and her son's concubine, causing them to eventually commit suicide.

2- Aesthetic Emotions

Aesthetic emotions, compared to moral emotions, are "abstract [and] general."3 As stated at the end of my introduction to this chapter, my interest here is not to discuss aesthetic emotions in themselves, but to consider female characterization as one means

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1See above, pp. 22-23.
2As discussed on p. 41.
3Friedman, Form and Meaning, p. 71.
towards the end of creating certain "feelings of expectation, surprise and fulfillment"\(^1\) through the stories, and discuss its suitability.

Three kinds of aesthetic emotions prevail in Zhang's short stories. First, the reader is surprised when women with an attitude of life which is generally considered negative in the end obtain what they want, instead of being punished as expected. Such are the cases of such selfish characters as: Dunfeng who jealously wants the total attention of her husband and yet does not return him any love; Jiaorui who satisfies her vanity by making men suffer for her; Qiqiao and Mrs. Liang who both are solely concerned with themselves to the detriment of their dependents; and Mrs. Mitchell who selfishly captivates her grown-up daughters to herself instead of letting them have a normal independent married life. It is indeed surprising that they have all achieved their goals instead of being punished for their selfish, and sometimes wicked, calculations. However, looking back, one realizes the consistency of their success, which these women have prepared for with much clear-mindedness\(^2\) and aimed at with strong determination.\(^3\)

The second kind of surprise is when a female character makes some major decision which is unexpectedly inconsistent with her usual way of thinking. Although both Yanli and Cuiyuan usually conform docilely to their "good" upbringing, Yanli commits adultery and Cuiyuan almost enters into an adulterous relationship. Such outcomes are not appropriate to their thought and character, but they are congruent with psychological reality. It is commonly known that when a person can no longer bear some huge pressure, he/she will strongly react in the opposite direction in order to subconsciously regain some balance.

\(^1\)Such is the definition of aesthetic emotions, see footnote 4, on p. 6.
\(^2\)See above pp. 27-28, as regards women with independent thinking.
\(^3\)See above pp. 18-21, concerning the aggressive type of women.
In "Stale Mates," Miss Fan's radical change of attitude after her long-expected marriage is also a surprise to the reader: she has quit the elegant and romantic pose of a modernist lover to become a lazy and negligent wife. However, looking back, we can detect some clues from the narrator: first, through the description of all that these so-called young modern people do as very theatrical poses, instead of real convictions; and secondly, through the following passage:

Miss Fan was also struggling. Her adversaries were the erosion of age, and men's natural attraction to the new and dislike of the old lovers. Besides, hers was a solitary struggle. Because it was of course a secret one; even if she succeeded, she should still keep everyone ignorant of it and not reveal any clues of her efforts. Therefore she still maintained the same pretty appearance. Her hairstyle and clothing have gone through intensive research, they are the compromise between [present] fashions and memories of the past. (SL, p. 142)

After all, hers is not a genuine modernist attitude, but a cleverly disguised tactic of causing Luo to divorce twice in order to marry her, the type of modern woman he likes.

The third kind of aesthetic emotions is when the reader is surprised by some unexpected tragic event which happens to some seemingly innocent female character. Yet, there is at least one clue or one reason accounting for their misfortune. In "Withering Flower", had the story not been a flashback, beginning with the narration of Chuanchang's parents refurbishing her tomb, the reader would be unpleasantly surprised by her terminal pneumonia. In "Jasmine Tea", Danzhu's persistence in becoming
Chuanqing's close friend despite his continual rejection\(^1\) can be seen as a sign of provocation and foretells some furious reaction from his part. In "Youth", the reader may be surprised by the deterioration of Cynthia's situation from a self-confident and active secretary to an unemployed person who is embarrassed by her worsened financial situation and finally to a bed-ridden patient whose physical appearance has greatly deteriorated. However, this may be just an unavoidable evolution which Ruliang refuses to admit, wanting to cherish the illusion that his foreign girlfriend is a perfect woman. It is only at the moments when flashes of reality force him to see Cynthia as what she really is that the reader can guess about her poverty and distress, the future causes of her misfortunes: she has to work at two different places, both in the day time and at night; (CS, p. 449) her negligent attitude; (CS, pp. 452, 454) her unhappy appearance, even when making preparations for the wedding; (CS, p. 458) the fact that her husband will move into her mother's and stepfather's home to live with her; (Ibid) her getting married for the sake of it; (Ibid) and her joblessness.\(^{(CS, p. 460)}\)

Through the examples quoted above, one can conclude that by her female characters' thought, character or situations Zhang has matched them well to her intended aesthetic emotions.

In this chapter, various facets of woman are shown through the structure of Zhang's stories — namely the situations in which these women are put, their thought and character, which are all causes of the plot. Besides, I have also demonstrated that the depiction of female characters is subject to the development of certain themes, enlightened through the form of the plots. And finally, I have analyzed how Zhang uses female

\(^1\)As discussed above, p. 43.
characterization as a means to achieve some moral or aesthetic emotions — end effects of her stories.

According to Friedman, all these discoveries are "meanings" embodied in the stories: "underlying values" which one can discover, once grasping the tacit system of values inherent to the socio-cultural background of the stories. The next interesting step is to discover the broader meaning that emerges from the synthetization of these various meanings as a sketch of the writers's own vision of life.

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1Friedman, Form and meaning, pp. 190-191.
CHAPTER 2:
Zhang Ailing's Vision of Life

Certain implied images 1 of Zhang the writer stand out in the previous chapter through the analysis of the structures of her short stories, the forms of their plots and their end effects, all of which are artistic devices which the writer uses rhetorically to assist in developing her female characters. Inferring from these various images, this chapter attempts to elaborate a sketch of Zhang the "real" author as an individual, as opposed to the "implied" author. This requires an examination of her thoughts, including psychological and moral preoccupations, and her emotions, including her natural disposition and feelings, which all make up her vision of life. What is interesting in this process is that it evolves from a concrete spectrum of distinct meanings which can be detected in the formal aspects of Zhang's works, into a more general and abstract meaning about the writer herself. This bridges the gap between the realm of fiction and real life.

Finally in this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate how Zhang's vision of life finds expression in her style, plots and other features of her aesthetic expression more generally, beyond the confines of her female characters.

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1– Zhang’s Thought

As noted previously,¹ one of the main characteristics in Zhang’s fiction is that there are more plots of thought and character than plots of fortune. This may indicate that as an individual, Zhang is rather an inward person who is more interested in probing into the psychological depths of human life than in its external manifestations. This finds support in the two fundamental psychological assumptions underlying her stories.

First, one could infer from her plots that subconscious frustrations, either emotional or sexual, can be more devastating on women's lives than on men's. They are the origin of the powerful jealousy that alienates such characters as Qiqiao, Mrs. Liang and Mrs. Mitchell, and makes them behave as monsters even with their relatives. As for some other weaker female characters,² their subconscious frustrations cannot emerge through their passivity. Thus, instead of being vented at the expense of other people, these frustrations conversely threaten their own sanity. Such are the pathological cases of women deserted by their husbands, like Yanli who would sit in the bathroom for hours on end to enjoy the unique peace of mind found only there,(CS, p. 101) Mrs. Xi who attempts to convince everyone of her thesis that men are forced into unfaithfulness because of the demographic need caused by the war.(CS, p. 120)

Zhang seems to believe that men have a totally different pattern of reaction to their subconscious frustrations. The easiest way for them to find relief if they are emotionally or sexually frustrated in the home is either to entertain prostitutes outside or to have one or several concubines. In her stories, this is regarded by the contemporary society as a legitimate solution. Zhenbao, for example, regularly sees prostitutes at hotels together with his friends to make up for the lack of warmth in his newly-built family.(CS, pp. 93,

¹At the beginning of the paragraph on Form of the Plot, p. 36.
²See Chapter 1, pp. 21, 22, 23.
Mr. Mi, with the approval of all families and friends, takes on Dunfeng as a concubine to seek comfort against his ill-tempered wife. (CS, p. 17) It is through the difference in the destinies of Changbai and Chang'an, in "The Golden Cangue", that Zhang's assumption shows most clearly. They both grow up in a repressive atmosphere dominated by their tyrannical mother. Yet, while Changbai can vent his frustrations by gambling, dating actresses and frequenting brothels as soon as he comes of age, (CS, p. 183) his sister Chang'an remains the victim of all the alienating frustrations her mother inflicts on her, as long as she is unmarried.

Zhang's belief that men always fare better than women when subject to subconscious frustrations due to contemporary societal norms is an implicit expression of some feminist concerns which will be further discussed in my next chapter.

The second assumption revealing Zhang's deep insight into life is her tendency to unveil the relentless feeling of dissatisfaction which she believes most people experience beneath the content appearance they show others. Thus she assumes that life is never fulfilling, even if one's goals have been basically achieved. On the one hand, this is related to the writer's own "antiromantic" attitude which leads her to create such antiromantic female characters as the ones analyzed in my previous chapter. This attitude, according to Gunn, is her "innate scepticism."¹ Indeed, it is because Zhang herself distrusts absolute emotions, abhors excessiveness in any way of thinking and rejects "idealized conceptions,"² that she wants to show through her characters that such "beautiful" things as love, marriage, revolution, and even one's own ideals may be quite disillusioning in the end.³ Through her sharp sceptical eye, she sees that the

²See footnote 2, on p. 29.
³See pp. 29-31.
subconscious reason of those who live in self-deceit\(^1\) is that they are dissatisfied with their present lives or with themselves.

On the other hand, this tendency to see only dissatisfaction lying beneath the surface of daily life betrays Zhang's pessimistic vision. The opinion is unanimous among critics of Zhang's fiction that the writer is a pessimist. Tang Wenbiao criticized Zhang for having an erroneous pessimistic view of her contemporary Chinese society based solely on the life of decadent rich families, a minority.\(^2\) Chen Bingliang\(^3\) and Shui Jing\(^4\) identify Zhang's pessimism in her view of marriage. However, I believe that it could be even more persuasively demonstrated through the writer's basic psychological attitude. She seems to have the systematic reaction of looking for the gloomy and unsatisfactory side of things, even when some positive results have been achieved. This is most evident when her characters have achieved their goals and yet there is still some bitterness in the back of their minds. The best example is found in "Love in a Fallen City" when the heroine Liusu twice shows her pessimism right in the midst of her accomplishments. First, although Liusu's immediate goal is to find a way of living independently away from her own family, her first reaction once her lover Liuyuan has rented an apartment and hired a servant for her is to start worrying about the boredom and loneliness that await her life there.(CS, p. 242) Second, at the conclusion of the story, she still feels "somewhat depressed" at the idea that the good ending of her story is due only to the irony of fate.(CS, p. 251)

\(^{1}\text{See pp 32-36.}\)
\(^{3}\text{Chen Bingliang, }\textit{Zhang Ailing duanpian xiaoshuo lunji}\ [\text{Collected Discussions of Zhang Ailing's Short Stories}], 2nd ed., \text{Taipei : Yuanjing, 1985, p. 33.}\)
\(^{4}\text{Shui Jing, }\textit{Zhang Ailing de xiaoshuo yishu}\ [\text{The Art of Zhang Ailing's Fiction}], \text{Taipei : Dadi, 1973, p. 55.}\)
It is noteworthy that it is her psychological assumption that life cannot be fulfilling which incites Zhang to peel off individuals' contented appearances in order to reveal their inner misery. This is indeed the stuff which makes great modern tragedies, as C. T. Hsia rightly observes: "For [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."¹

Apart from these psychological dimensions of her thoughts, their moral aspect also deserves ample discussion. It gives rise to great controversy among critics as well as readers. The question is whether Zhang professes any moral opinions or criticism in her short stories. In other words, on what moral standpoint does Zhang place herself vis-à-vis human behaviour?

Many readers of Zhang's fiction keep a frightful memory of Zhang's world of fiction as an unruly and utterly depressing one where the characters freely evolve and develop towards the point of amorality. Others retain the uneasy impression of the writer's excessive cynicism towards her characters.

The same difference of opinion exists among critics. Some accuse Zhang for the lack of moral standards in her stories. Thus, her contemporary, Xun Yu, in an article written in 1944, criticizes Zhang not only for overdisplaying a dispirited and defeatist attitude in her works, but also for the moral ambiguity which results from her inappropriate mixture of dark atmosphere, light style and sarcastic tone.² Tang Wenbiao, a few decades later, repeats the same criticism: "Not only do we have to point out that

²Xun Yu, "Lun Zhang Ailingde xiaoshuo" [Discussing Zhang Ailing's Stories], in *Wanxiang* [Multiple Phenomena], 3, No. 11 (May 1911).
there is too little moral criticism from the part of the writer...",¹ but also that her fictional world is an amoral one, for "it fosters defeatism, decadent philosophy and describes a stagnant world.²

This kind of criticism is misplaced because it is based on the premise that literature should promote moral virtues, or simply the traditional didactic concept of "wenyi zai dao" (文以载道) according to which art is the vehicle of moral virtues. Yet it is applied to Zhang's fiction which clearly does not aim at didacticism at all. As Gunn put it: "her concern is neither to gather comforting visions of an old society nor to extol visions of a new one."³ In other words, Xun Yu and Tan are the kind of critics who discuss not what writers do write, but what they should write. Their criticism of Zhang's amorality is merely the projection of their own ideas on inappropriate grounds, thus fallacious and quite irrelevant to her works. Even if we grant that art should promote moral virtues, Xun Yu's and Tang's criticism of moral ambiguity in Zhang's short stories is unfounded. It shows that they have misread her works in two respects.

First, one of the most skilful techniques in Zhang's art is the suggestiveness of her style. For instance, she does not want to abuse the authority of the storyteller to make open moral judgements on her characters. Neither does she want to advocate artificial moral ideals which are inappropriately abstracted from their realistic and human weaknesses. However, one can detect the writer's implied moral opinions through her various techniques. Most of Zhang's female protagonists are shown not as mere reflections of their situations, but as persons who think and act individually. This is equivalent to saying that the writer makes them totally responsible for their moral choices.

¹Tang, Research, p. 63.
²Ibid, p. 64.
³Gunn, Unwelcome Muse, p. 231.
This is also true for male protagonists who are given absolute rights by the contemporary society to run their lives as they like. Therefore, there should be no ambiguity in interpreting Zhang's ironic tone directed against some of her characters' moral choices. As illustrated in the examples below, it most often shows her disapproval.

In "Happy Matrimony", Zhang writes "the young husband and wife are both mature. When they purchase things for their household they choose to buy the less necessary ones first, and wait till the end, when the money has run out, for the most important ones." (CS, p. 47) They can afford doing so because they know that his parents will feel a pinch in their hearts and provide them with those indispensable commodities eventually. Here, Zhang's use of the word "mature" is ironic and subtly appeals to the reader's common sense to agree with her on the calculated desire of the young couple to take advantage of their parents.

In "Red Rose, White Rose", after his humiliating experience with a Parisian prostitute, "Zhenbao, ever since that day, is determined to create a 'right' world which he can take everywhere with him. In that pocket world, he will be the absolute master."(CS, p. 61) This ironic sentence sets the whole story, from this point on, into the ironic mode of narration, and the author very skilfully invites the reader to watch out for and laugh at Zhenbao's self-righteousness and hypocritical values throughout the story.

In "Aloeswood Ashes — The First Burner", the reader cannot miss Zhang's ironic treatment of Mrs. Liang's lecture to Weilong:

The most important thing to a woman is reputation. But the reputation I'm speaking about is not similar to that of the Taoists. Nowadays people with a modern mind are not too particular about chastity

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1Except for Chuanqing, a victim of his parents' mistreatment in "Jasmine Tea".
anymore. Young ladies who have social obligations outside can't prevent gossip about them. But the more numerous this kind of gossip, the more exciting, and your reputation will become higher, which will be helpful to your future (CS, p. 329)

Mrs. Liang's comparison of licentious notoriety to the Taoist universal philosophical concept which she likely does not understand herself is a ridiculous distortion which incites the reader to question her system of values. Likewise, her logical deduction between a woman's notoriety and her chances to succeed in life indicates to a commonsensical reader that her moral world must be a topsy-turvy one.

Numerous similar examples can be found in Zhang's short stories. Thus, instead of condemning her for choosing to write about people with such loose morals or for not stating her moral judgements explicitly, one should catch the writer's hints and appreciate her skilful way of expressing her moral opinions. By using irony and appealing to the reader's common sense, Zhang drives home basic moral notions even more persuasively than if she had forced us to take for granted her authoritative and explicit views.

The second respect in which both Xun Yu and Tang Wenbiao misread Zhang's works concerns the very existence of a few implicit moral topics which they failed to recognize. The theme of parental irresponsibility,¹ for example, recurs in several stories, and probably reflects the psychological trauma Zhang herself suffered from her morally decadent father and indifferent mother.²

Some other critics also give evidence of Zhang's moral concerns. Shui Jing analyzes the parallel in the characterization of the honest servant Ah Xiao and her corrupt master, in "Indian Summer : Ah Xiao's Autumnal Lament", as Zhang's rhetorical intention to make the reader ponder about the moral question of marriage and sexual

¹Amply discussed in my previous chapter. See pp. 17, 22, 23, 24, 42, 43, 44.
²See below, p. 62-64.
relationships.¹ Chen Bingliang sees Zhang's view of the limit of human resistance to evil as the underlying meaning to the story "Aloeswood Ashes — The First Burner."² C. T. Hsia aptly sums up Zhang's treatment of morality as follows:

Miss Chang does not profess high-minded ideals, but this does not mean that her moral passion is in any way less intense than that of the professed didacticist. On the contrary, her registration of the inescapable pettiness and sadness of human endeavor is nearly always morally disturbing, precisely because given the human condition, she refrains from overt gestures of indignation or protest.³

2- Zhang's Emotions

Zhang uses irony to express her disapprobation of her characters' moral behaviour, but she retains sympathy for them. This is first illuminated by the structure of her stories. Though Zhang's characters are most often made responsible for their acts in the course of her stories, the fact that the writer situates them in the three concentric circles⁴ — i.e. educational limitations, financial insecurity and physical and emotional isolation — right from the outset rhetorically calls for some lenience or sympathy towards their subsequent deviant behaviour. For instance, Zhang could have omitted the details that Mrs. Mitchell had been leading a sad secluded life as an exiled widow with her three young daughters, or that Weilong's parents are so irresponsible towards her that she has to take her own future in hand and seek help outside of the family. Then, it would have been easier for

¹Shui Jing, The Art, p. 53.
²Chen, Collected Discussions, pp. 91, 95.
³Hsia, A History, p. 414.
⁴Analyzed above, pp. 7-18.
her to lay the entire blame on these characters: the former for selfishness in retaining her daughters for herself and the latter for foolish exchange of her integrity for an easy life. By introducing such details, Zhang’s sympathy for them results in a complex and pervading atmosphere of ambivalence, principally a mixture of blame and sympathy.

Not only the structure of her stories, but the writer’s tone also denotes her sympathy and tolerance for her female characters’ weaknesses. Many critics make this observation. Xun Yu¹ and Chen Bingliang² demonstrate that in the conclusion of "The Golden Cangue", Zhang shows profound sympathy for Qiqiao instead of sanctioning her for all the irrational actions she directed against surrounding people throughout her life. Guo Yuxia, in her article "Women in Zhang Ailing's stories", analyzes the themes of love and marriage among four categories of female characters: the unmarried ones; those about to get married; the married ones; and those who live in common law relationship with their lovers. According to Guo, Zhang seems to have the highest consideration and sympathy for the last category.³ The best proof Guo cites is Zhang’s description of Ah Xiao's dignified and independent way of living her common law family life, as opposed to the low opinion of the contemporary society towards this category of persons. In her collection of essays Gossip, Zhang made a clear statement in this regard: "Respectable ladies hate wanton women, however they would be eager to try that role if they had an opportunity to."⁴ Hu Lancheng in his essay "Women of the Republic" makes a concurring observation: "[Zhang] Ailing is very harsh towards good people and good

¹Xun Yu, "Discussing Zhang's Stories", in Research, pp. 120-121.
²Chen, Collected Discussions, pp. 29-30.
things, yet just a little bit severe towards villains and ordinary things. She is really fair."

Although he made this statement without offering any justification, there is some truth in it.

Zhang herself in an interview with Shui Jing admitted that after finishing "Red Rose, White Rose", she felt sorry for being too severe to Zhenbao and Yanli — Zhenbao being a "conventional" character and Yanli also a conventionally good one. Yet Jiaorui who is the temptress, generally considered as a wanton woman, in the end finds happiness and a real meaning to her life. Likewise, in "Blockade", Zhang ridicules Cuiyuan, a model daughter and successful young professional woman, by showing how eager she is to escape from the circle of "good people" and yet fails in doing so. Again, in "Jasmine Tea", the good-hearted friend Danzhu seems to be too harshly punished by the writer for her feminine vanity.

One may wonder whether there is a contradiction in my analysis since I both emphasize Zhang's sympathy for her female characters and demonstrate her harshness towards her "good" characters. I believe an understanding of this dichotomy is crucial for a full appreciation of Zhang's emotional involvement with her characters. In my opinion, the examples of Zhang's harshness towards her "good" characters do not void the real sympathy that underlies her stories. She tolerates many forms of human weakness but not hypocrisy, a weakness shared by all those "good" characters. Hypocrisy, in her eyes, is a conscious attempt at deceiving other people, and even oneself in some cases. Thus in the three stories mentioned above, Zhang aims at unveiling the hypocrisy of the righteousness which these characters attribute to themselves, as in the case of Zhenbao and Danzhu, or which society is too willing to attribute to them, based only on their

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appearance. C. T. Hsia stated that "Eileen Chang evinces ... an infinite tolerance for foibles and pretenses, a habit of sympathy catholic in its range and untouched by any degree of moral puritanism."\(^1\) I partly disagree with him, since he fails to recognize her intolerance for hypocrisy.

So far, I have dealt with the degree of emotion which Zhang evinces towards her characters. Now I consider Zhang's own emotional disposition which shows through her works.

In his Master's thesis entitled "The Short Stories of Chang Ai-ling : A Literary Analysis", Adkins Curtis makes an interesting categorization of characters in Zhang's fiction into the "realization" characters and the "desolation" characters. "The definitive features [of the latter] are middle age, self-pity, a sense of resignation to a bland existence, a lack of goals in life, and an acceptance of the dismal state of affairs described in the story."\(^2\) It is true that there are a lot of this type of characters in Zhang's fictional world. This indicates Zhang's predilection for melancholy, the reason for which she explains in her article "About My Own Writing":

I don't like heroism; I like tragedy and prefer desolation. Heroism has only strength, no beauty; it seems lacking in humanity. Tragedy is like pairing bright red and bright green: a strong contrast; yet it is far more stimulating than it is revelatory. The reason that desolation has a more lasting aftertaste is that it is like the pairing of onion-green and peach-red: a minor contrast."\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Hsia, A *History*, p. 414.


\(^3\)Zhang, "Ziji de Wenzhang"[About My Own Writings], in *Gossip*, p. 148 (Curtis's translation).
However, that Zhang likes desolation (qiliang) does not mean that she herself bears the emotional characteristic of her "desolation" characters. There is indeed justification for Hsia's remark that "one can discern in [Zhang's] writings only the slightest trace of neurotic self-pity with which young women writers are often afflicted."\(^1\) If it is true that these predominant desolation characters often display self-pity, their definitive features, as identified by Adkins, are so different to Zhang's life experience that their self-pity cannot be interpreted as the writer's own.

Compare, for instance, a situation in "Love in a Fallen City" which is very close to her own circumstance. In her autobiographical essay "The Guileless Words of a Child," Zhang recalls the moments when "after the movies, [she] used to stand by the pavement, like a lost child found by the police, waiting to be recognized and taken home by the private driver of [her] family".\(^2\) This memory may have inspired Zhang in her description of Liusu's distress with her mother's coldness towards her:

...Her mother showed an impassible face, and just had a silent smile. Liusu held her mother's legs in her arms, shaking violently, and cried:

"Mum, Mum!" It vaguely seemed to her she had returned to a time several years past. Once when she was still under ten, she came out of the theater and lost her family in the crowd. She stood alone on the pavement and stared at people. People also stared at her through the rain and the dripping windows of their cars, through multiple layers of invisible glass covers — innumerable strangers. Everyone was closed up in their own small world, and even if she had broken her head she still could not have bumped through, she felt crushed. Suddenly she heard some footsteps at her back, and guessed it was her mother

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\(^1\)Hsia, A History, p. 392.

coming back. She tried her best to recover herself, and kept silent.
The mother she was imploring and her real mother were totally
different.(CS, p. 208)

In the latter passage, although Liusu has the same experience as the young Zhang,
the author does not allow her to indulge in overflowing manifestations of self-pity.
Instead, she cuts short Liusu's laments to the imaginary soothing mother: the heroine's
immediate control of herself at the thought of her mother's arrival reflects the writer's
own self-control and pride. Because Liusu in this moment is projected into one of
Zhang's own life experiences, Zhang does not permit her to have the same degree of self-
pity as the "desolation" characters. On the contrary, one may argue that Chuanqing, a
self-pitying character in "Jasmine Tea" shares a similar family background with Zhang.

While she was still a child, Zhang's parents decided to end their unhappy marriage
by a divorce. Through Zhang's autobiographical essays "Guileless Words of a Child"
and "Whispered Words", it seems that from that moment on, Zhang suffered more or less
from her mother's indifference. The following passage is an example:

Not long after my parents's divorce, my mother prepared to go to
France. I was in a boarding school then. She came to see me; I didn't
show any sign of farewell sorrow. She also seemed to rejoice that
everything had happened so smoothly, with no trouble at all. But I
knew in her heart she must be thinking: "The younger generation is
really heartless." I waited until she had gone out of the school gate.
There I was left in the school yard, separated from the outside by the
tall pine trees and staring at the closed red iron gate, still unmoved.
However, I gradually felt that tears should be shed in this situation,
thus my tears came down. And I stood there in the cold wind, sobbing
and being the spectator of my own cries.¹

Through Zhang's brief mention of her mother, related by Zhou Shoujuan, one can gather
her mother's lack of concern for her: "... after introducing me to her aunt, she pointed at
a beautiful lady in two pictures and said that was her mother who had been living in
Singapore. Since December 8th of the previous year, she hadn't had any news from her.
Recently, there was a verbal message that she had gone to India."² But more depressing
for her was life by the side of her opium-smoking father and his consecutive concubine
and second wife in a decadent and oppressive family atmosphere.³

In "Jasmine Tea", Chuanqing suffers from the same family pressures: as a result of
her unhappy marriage, his mother died prematurely. He is left with no comfort since his
care childhood, as both his father and stepmother smoke opium and mistreat him.
However, it appears that the self-pitying Chuanqing more accurately represents Zhang's
own younger brother rather than herself, not so much because of the gender, but because
of their similar weak personalities.⁴ In contrast to her brother's surrender to the family
environment, Zhang nourished very high ambitions:

On the progressive side, I had boundless ambitions such as planning to
pursue university studies in England after high school graduation.
Then for a while, I wanted to learn how to make animated movies and
introduce to America the Chinese drawing style. I dreamt of being even
more famous than Lin Yutang, of wearing the most special clothes, and

¹Zhang, "Siyu" [Whispered Words], in Gossip, p. 148.
²Shui Jing, The Art, see his quotation of Zhou Shoujuan's forewords to his magazine Zi Luolan [Purple
Wisteria], p. 95.
³Doubtlessly, the psychological trauma Zhang bears from her family situation finds expression in her
recurrent theme of parental irresponsibility, mentioned above on p. 57.
⁴Zhang, "Didi" [My Younger Brother], in Gossip, p. 16.
travelling around the world while having my own house in Shanghai — in brief, of leading an effective life.¹

Clearly, Zhang's ambitions stand in stark contrast to the passivity of her brother, represented by Chuanqing.

From the above developments, one may remark that there is a certain restraint in Zhang's expression of emotions. For instance, it shows through the fact that the writer's sympathy for her characters is subdued and implied rather than overt. It is also indicated by her preference of "desolation" to "tragedy", and by the absence of self-pity in spite of her deplorable family situation. However, it will be best felt in the way Zhang handles love scenes, which will be discussed next.

3- Zhang's Aesthetic Expression

Having inferred a general image of Zhang through the above analysis of her thoughts and emotions, I will prove the consistency of this image with her choice of artistic devices. In other words, I will try to detect the direct influence of her thoughts and emotions on her treatment of the plots and the characters.

First of all, Zhang's sympathy for her female characters is the main factor regulating the control of distance which the writer wants to create between the reader and the protagonist. Since the control of distance is mostly done through the type of narration an author chooses,² in order to make the reader also sympathize with her female protagonists, Zhang often chooses to tell the story of their lives through their own eyes. Thus, even if Qiqiao's irrational behaviour, Weilong's moral weakness, or Luozhen's lack of consideration are deplorable, we still feel compassion for each of them because

¹Ibid, "Whispered Words", p. 149.
²Booth, The Rhetoric, ch. 6, p. 155.
she intends that we go along with them with a keen sense of their isolation and vulnerability. Instead of condemning their mistakes from an objective critical distance, we share the psychological and moral tensions these lone heroines suffer from the internalization of their problems.

Throughout Weilong's story, the reader is the only friend to share the anxieties expressed in her thoughts whenever she faces her moral dilemma:

If for no reason I come and roll in the troubled water, mostly being a girl, I could never rinse myself clean even if I jumped into the Yellow River. (CS, p. 288)

Since it is with eyes wide open that I enter this evil world, if I fell into an evil trap who could I blame? After all, we are relatives; my aunt has to care about face and can't harm me. As long as I act and behave correctly, I'm not afraid she wouldn't return in kind. I don't care about outsiders' gossip, I just want to pursue my studies. The person who really loves me in the future will naturally understand me, and definitely won't believe that trivial gossip. (CS, p. 293)

She suddenly decided not to leave — no matter what. From this instant on, she changed her mind every few minutes — leave! stay! leave! stay! In between these two extremes, she turned feverishly over and over in her bed, as though her mind was on fire. (CS, p. 333)

...Infinite desolation, infinite terror. Her future would also be like that. She could not think about it; the thought of it would bring only terror. She did not have long-term plans. It was only among these trivial objects in front of her eyes that her disturbed shrunken heart could obtain temporary relaxation. (CS, p. 337)
"The Golden Cangue" is the story of the heroine Qiqiao, first as a sufferer, then as one who inflicts sufferings on her descendents. There is a shift of the author's sympathy from Qiqiao to the most immediate victims of her malice, Chang'an and Zhishou. Consequently, the narration is done first through the eyes of Qiqiao:

...Ninth Old Master was formally invited to come and divide the property among the survivors. Today was the focal point of all her imaginings since she had married into the house of Chiang. All these years she had worn the golden cangue but never even got to gnaw at the edge of the gold. It would be different from now on. (GC, p. 540, or CS, pp. 168-169)
The widow and orphans were still taken advantage of. (GC, p. 542, or CS, p. 171)

He was standing in front of her with flat hands closed on her fan and his cheek pressed against it. He was ten years older too, but he was after all the same person. Could he be lying to her? He wanted her money — the money she had sold her life for? The very idea enraged her. Even if she had him wrong there, could he have suffered as much for her as she did for him? Now that she had finally given up all thoughts of love he was here again to tempt her. His eyes — after ten years he was still the same person. Even if he were lying to her, wouldn't it be better to find out a little later? Even if she knew very well it was lies, he was such a good actor, wouldn't it be almost real? (GC, p. 544, or CS, p. 174-175)

She wanted another glimpse of him from the upstairs window. No matter what, she had loved him before. Her love had given her endless
pain. That alone should make him worthy of her continuing regard. (GC, p. 545, or CS, p. 177)

But Qiqiao's rejection of Jize marks the turning point between her longing for love and her revenge. From then on, on the one hand, she is shown as seen from other people's eyes:

Lifting [Ch'ang-an] down, Ch'un-hsi suddenly saw in the mirror of the rosewood wardrobe Ch'i-ch'iao standing in the doorway with her arms akimbo, her hair not yet done. (GC, p. 546, or CS, p. 178)

Shih-fang looked over his shoulder and saw a small old lady standing at the doorway with her back to the light so that he could not see her face distinctly. She wore a blue-gray gown of palace brocade embroidered with a round dragon design, and clasped with both hands a scarlet hot-water bag; two tall amahs stood close beside her... Shih-fang instinctively felt this person was mad. (GC, p. 557, or CS, p. 199)

On the other hand, emotions are expressed through the feelings of Qiqiao's victims in the narration of events:

The way [Ch'i-ch'iao] told it when she returned, although she did not get the money back, she had thoroughly humiliated the principal. Afterward, when Ch'ang-an met any of her schoolmates on the street, she reddened and paled alternately. Earth had no room for her. She could only pretend not to see and walk past them hastily. When friends wrote her, she dared not even open the letters but just sent them back. Thus her school life came to an end.

Sometimes she felt the sacrifice was not worth it and was secretly sorry, but it was too late. She gradually gave up all thought of self-improvement and kept to her place. (GC, p. 548, or CS, pp. 182-183)
Ch'i-ch'iao made Ch'ang-bai cook opium for her for two nights running. Chih-shou lay stiffly in bed with both hands on her ribs curled upward like a dead chicken's claws. She knew her mother-in-law was questioning her husband again, although Heaven knew how he could have anything fresh to say. (GC, p. 550, or CS, p. 186)

Chih-shou suddenly sat up and tore open the bed curtains. This was an insane world, a husband not like a husband, a mother-in-law not like a mother-in-law. Either they were mad or she was. The moon tonight was better than ever, high and full like a white sun in a pitch-black sky, not a cloud within ten thousand li. Blue shadows all over the floor and blue shadows on the canopy overhead. Her feet too were in the deathly still blue shadows. (GC, p. 550, or CS, p. 187)

"Flower and Pistils in the Floating Waves" is one of Zhang's later experiments with the stream-of-consciousness type of narration. By definition and more effectively than any other type, it develops what Booth calls the "sustained inside view."

Here the reader's sympathy is entirely with the heroine Luozhen as the writer greatly reduces the emotional distance between the reader and the heroine. By narrating Luozhen's story through her retrospective view, Zhang wants us to experience Luozhen's confusion, fear, weariness and apathy — in brief, all the emotional disturbances she goes through during her departure from Communist China and her transitory stage in Hong Kong. Then it will become easy for us to interpret Luozhen's revelation to Fanny of her husband's unfaithfulness, merely as her failure in restraining the urge of confiding to a close friend after a hectic and lonely journey from Shanghai to Hong Kong. Otherwise we may think of it as her evil attempt to destroy Fanny's happiness. By the same lenient effect of the

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1Booth, The Rhetoric, pp. 163, 245-249.
"sustained inside view," Fanny's harsh criticism of Luozhen's selfishness comes to us as a surprise, just as to Luozhen herself, when she tells Fanny about her desire to leave Hong Kong for Japan:

That day, she came to tell Fanny she wanted to go to Japan.

"How about your job here?"

"I will have to resign."

"It's hard to find jobs nowadays; the Americans will withdraw soon from Japan."

Luozhen said, smiling: "Right, but it's also hard to obtain the entry visa into Japan. It's a rare chance to have someone applying for me from over there." Maybe it was not the right time to go, the American occupation army was going to withdraw; what could she do without any knowledge of Japanese? However, she only wanted to leave and go as far as possible. This opportunity could not be missed.

Fanny kept silent a while, then said with sudden anger: "How about your sister over there?"

Fanny knew that she had borrowed money from her sister to come out of China. Her sister still sent money over to Hong Kong to her. She had just begun to pay them back; besides, they were in need right now. But she was sure her sister would understand her, and did not expect Fanny to find it unfair for her sister and show her such an aggressive attitude. After all, she was no direct relative to Fanny. (SL, p. 73)

The examples above illustrate how Zhang makes use of the control of distance as an artistic device to express her sympathy for her characters. However, it is noteworthy that narration through the eyes of the heroines alone is not enough to win the reader's
sympathy for them. Zhang understands that the key is also to create characters who would, on the whole, deserve this sympathy despite their particular faults or shortcomings. Generally speaking, sympathy is born either between people in the same boat or as "a feeling of pity... towards one suffering pain or grief or trouble." As regards Zhang's stories, both the writer's and the reader's sympathy is of the latter kind, which yields a certain condescendence. Thus, Zhang's protagonists are people lacking happiness, lacking luck, and perhaps of lower standards of behaviour too, in respect of whom both the "writer" and "reader" can condescend. They are, in fact, either the "desolation" type of characters or as Zhang herself describes them: "... not bad people, only mediocre, unclean and unhappy". She also admits: "Those about whom I write, I can forgive their failings and sometimes even love them for their existence — they are real. However, should I meet them in real daily life, because of my immaturity, I know that mixing with them wouldn't do me any good. Coming into contact with them would just make me argue with them on trivial things in order to set everything clear, and I wouldn't concede at all." In this statement, one can remark how sympathy for the characters may originate from the condescendence one would feel for such persons in real life. In conclusion, Zhang's reduction of the emotional distance between the reader and some of her female protagonists, as well as her choice of mediocre characters, are in line with the sympathy and tolerance she evinces towards them in her stories.

1 See Oxford Dictionary.
2 See above, pp. 60-63.
3 Zhang Ailing, "Wo Kan Suqing" [How I See Suqing], in Yuyun [Lingering Rhyme], Taipei: Huangguan, 1987, p. 84
4 Ibid.
The second impact on Zhang's aesthetic expression is that of her antiromantic attitude to life which shows through her scepticism and her restrained emotional expression. This antiromantic attitude results both in the writer's increase of distance between readers and characters and in her sterile description of love scenes.

First, while the reader is brought closer to the characters by Zhang's will to incite sympathy for them, one can perceive her restraint in this endeavour by the control of distance. She tones down this sympathy by resorting to some imagery and irony which make the reader unconsciously resume an outsider's position.

In "Withering Flower", although Chuanchang wholly deserves the reader's sympathy, in her physical description, Zhang uses some strong metaphors and similes which have a counterbalancing effect:

She was a beacon without light. (CS, p. 463)

Her face looked like a piece of white satin canvassed on a skeleton, and the eyes two big burnt holes in the satin, caused by burning sparks. (CS, p. 477)

She climbed onto Li Amah's back, like a big cold and white spider. (CS, p. 483)

The same distancing effect is achieved, in "Waiting", through the satiric characterization of Mrs. Xi and Mrs. Tong. These two ladies attract our sympathy more than others in the doctor's waiting room, because of their vocal complaints about their husbands' unfaithfulness. However, Zhang restrains this sympathy by giving the reader subtle hints about their irritating aspects which show up after a while in their company, such as Mrs. Xi's repetitive speech and Mrs. Tong's confusion and inconsiderate behaviour. Mrs. Xi twice explained her thesis about men's unfaithfulness as directly

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1See above, pp. 22-23.
caused by the war, first to Ah Fang (CS, p. 114) and again to Mrs. Tong. (CS, p. 120)
Likewise, she stubbornly repeated her advice to Mrs. Tong to seek comfort in Christian
services (CS, p. 120) as it was only welcomed by silence the first time. (CS, p. 119)
Mrs. Tong's behaviour is not as unnerving, but in real life the reader might be put off by
her just as Mrs. Xi is:

Mrs. Xi became more and more impatient with Mrs. Tong's speech. Now and then, she approved with an "uh...uh...", and occasionally nodded. But gradually, she became lazy to even nod, and only batted her eyelashes slightly. Her pouting mouth looked like a bird's beak, and appeared as though she had been retaining a lot of opinions. She thought them over, but felt that she had no chance to express them. In the end, she was determined that Mrs. Tong was just an old muddle-headed person. (CS, p. 121)

Mrs. Tong reached for her grey velvet gown hung on the hook, and while putting it on with a slow gesture, created a gust of wind which wrapped the whole room inside it. The long gown flicked over the shoulder and face of Mrs. Xi who ducked away with abomination. (CS, p. 122)

Even though one may argue that both Mrs. Xi's and Mrs. Tong's present confusion partly results from their conjugal unhappiness, it nevertheless creates some distance between them and the reader.

The second influence of Zhang's antiromantic attitude on her art lies in the handling of love scenes in her stories. For the sake of argument, I will only discuss the cases where both partners have a real interest in or love for each other. First, the love scenes lack romantic expression of love or selfless commitments. Zhang attributes this to the characteristics of the 1940's and 1950's in China: "Our ages, of course, are not the
romantic ones."¹ As though to confirm it, in 1956 she wrote "Stale Mates" in English, whose Chinese title is more enlightening — Wu Si Yishi (Love Stories of the May Fourth style). The story is a satire of the anachronistic and hypocritical pose of the so-called romantic lovers of the May Fourth generation. In my opinion, even though such affectations deserve denouncing, real love scenes should be romantic sometimes, and Zhang just reinforces her antiromantic attitude by failing to recognize a role for romance at all.

Another result of Zhang’s emotional restraint and scepticism is that in her love scenes, the mental often dominates the emotional. Either or both partners are too lucid, self-conscious and sceptical. The example below illustrates this very well:

After the engagement Ch'ang-an furtively went out alone with T'ung Shih-fang several times. The two of them walked side by side in the park in the autumn sun, talking very little, each content with a partial view of the other's clothes and moving feet. The fragrance of her face powder and his tobacco smell served as invisible railings that separated them from the crowd. On the open green lawn where so many people ran and laughed and talked, they alone walked a porch that wound on endlessly in silence. Ch'ang-an did not feel there was anything amiss in silence. She thought this was all there was to social contact between modern men and women. As to T'ung Shih-fang, from painful experience in the past he was dubious anyway of the exchange of thought. He was satisfied that someone was beside him. Formerly he had been disgusted by the character in fiction who would say, when asking a woman to live with him, "Please give me solace." Solace is

purely spiritual but it is used here as a euphemism for sex. But now he knew the line between the spiritual and physical could not be drawn so clearly. Words are no use after all. Holding hands for a long time is a more apt consolation, because not many people talk well and still fewer really have anything to say.

Sometimes it rained in the park. Ch'ang-an would open her umbrella and Shih-fang would hold it for her. Upon the translucent blue silk, myriad raindrops twinkled like a skyful of stars that would follow them about later on a taxi's glistening front window of crushed silver and, as the car ran through red and green lights, a nestful of red stars would fly humming outside the window and a nestful of green stars. (GC, pp. 553-554, or CS, pp. 192-193)

This passage would have been light and romantic, had there been no authorial interpretation of each partner's mental activity. A better example is Qiqiao's scepticism and intense calculations which smother her love for Jize as soon as it is rekindled by his "sweet" confessions of his hidden love for her:

Ch'i-ch'iao bowed her head, basking in glory, in the soft music of his voice and the delicate pleasure of this occasion....

In "Love in a Fallen City", the trivial flirting scenes are numerous, however the crucial scene is where Liusu feels a spark of real love for Liuyuan. Here again, there is so much reasoning by the characters and interpreting by the author that it is more intellectual than emotional:

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1 See third quotation on p. 66 for the continuation of the quotation.
...In this unstable world, nothing was reliable anymore — money, property, everything that would last for ever. The only thing Liusu could rely on was the breath in her throat, but also the person sleeping by her side. Suddenly, she crawled to Liuyuan and hugged him through his quilt. He took his hand out of the quilt and clasped hers. They saw through each other. It was a mere instant of thorough understanding, yet that was enough for them to live harmoniously with each other for eight or ten years.

He was but a selfish man, she was but a selfish woman. In these troubled times, there was no room for individualists, but surely room for an ordinary couple. (CS, p. 249)

The sceptical element underlying Zhang's love scenes is best shown in the story "Red Rose, White Rose", where Jiaorui and Zhenbao constitute the most passionate couple among all of Zhang's characters:

Jiaorui said: "I have really fallen in love with you." In saying this, there was a mocking tone in her voice. (CS, p. 80)

She did not know herself why she had so easily fallen in love with him. She often stared at him, with some softness in her eyes, but also with a slightly mocking look — mocking him and mocking herself at the same time. (CS, p. 81)

When she hugged him again, Jiaorui squeezed him with all her strength; she felt ashamed of herself and said: "Even when I wasn't really in love with you, didn't I do the same? You must surely look down on me as I could do that even without love." She tightened her arms on him again, and asked: "Do you feel that it is slightly different? Is it slightly different?" Zhenbao answered: "Of course, it is
different.", but in reality he could not tell. Jiaorui in the past was also
too good a lover. (CS, p. 81)
Thus, not only Jiaorui but Zhenbao too has a kind of indescribable doubt about the
uncontrollable love they felt for each other. It sinks so deep down in Zhenbao's heart that
even when he should rejoice over Jiaorui's wholehearted declaration of love for him, his
reaction is as follows:

He picked up a brush from the desk, and wrote these characters after a
while: "The congratulations rejoiced my heart." In fact, he could not
really speak of rejoicing, as lots of the rustling pleasures of the flesh
had calmed down suddenly, leaving him with a sort of desolate peace,
almost a kind of satisfaction without love. (CS, p. 81)

In brief, it is doubtless that Zhang's antiromantic and sterile description of love
scenes results from her own antiromantic attitude to life, characterized by the same
scepticism and lack of emotionalism which stifle her characters, even in the supposedly
most lyrical moments of human life.

So far, we have elaborated a characteristic image of Zhang, the feminist, the sceptic,
and the pessimist, as regards her thoughts, and a person full of compassion for weak
human beings, more inclined to desolation than tragedy, and rather restrained in her
emotional expression. Expectedly, certain of these features find expression in her art,
which endowes it with an unforgettable feeling of the writer's vision. We might wonder,
next, whether such a person as Zhang was so exceptional in her times, or if both her art
and her vision of life bear the impact of the literary and cultural heritage she inherits or its
contemporary evolution.
CHAPTER 3:
Zhang Ailing in the Context
of Chinese Literary History

My previous chapters may have left the impression that Zhang Ailing's perception of her contemporary Chinese women's plight is exceptional, or that as a writer, she is endowed with thoughts and emotions uncommon to her colleagues. It should be fair, therefore, that we place her works against the large background of traditional and modern Chinese fiction in order to discover continuities and innovations as regards both their content and artistic qualities.

A- Content

1- Female Perspectives and Themes

One reason a great part of this thesis focuses on female topics is that Zhang's short stories are more peopled with female characters than with male ones. This predominance is not new in the history of Chinese fiction. The Ming vernacular stories Water Margin [Shuihu zhuan] and Jin Ping Mei, and the Qing novels Carnal Prayer Mat [Rou putuan] and Dream of the Red Chamber [Hongloumeng] depicted the lives of a number of women in detail. Of the post-May Fourth writers, C. T. Hsia observes, for example, that "Mao Dun [represents] the more feminine South, romantic, sensuous, melancholic. [He] is..."
distinguished for his gallery of heroines.\textsuperscript{1} But it is mostly the fictional world of female writers of the May Fourth period which is filled with images of these writers "themselves when young [and] themselves as female."\textsuperscript{2} Thus the predominant presence of female characters is the first continuity that can be established with Zhang's works. However, the female images in Zhang's stories are neither her own reflections, nor tainted with emotional discharges of self-pity. She also innovates a systematic presentation of life through her female characters' perspectives. As though to corroborate the female point of view, whenever a story is told through a male point of view, Zhang ironically intends it to be a distorted one. Among her short stories, there are only three of this kind. At the outset of each one, the writer makes sure to convince the reader of the unreliability of the hero's perspective throughout the story by showing that his judgment is basically defective and undermined either by self-deceit or eccentric illusions. The first story where this is shown is "Red Rose, White Rose" in respect to Zhenbao's vision.\textsuperscript{3} The second example, Chuanqing, the hero of "Jasmine Tea" is first given an unfavourable impressionistic description of his physical appearance: "Although he was twenty, he looked older by the tip of his eyebrows and the corner of his mouth. At the same time, his narrow shoulders and long neck made him appear like a sixteen or seventeen year-old boy still on the brink of puberty.... A Mongolian oval face, light eyebrows, slanted eyes, together with the silky pink background of the flowers behind him, all lent him an air of feminine beauty. And yet his nose contradicted the softness of the face, because it was too big." (CS, p. 252) A sketch of his moral character compounds this physical appearance to give the reader a definite knowledge that this male character has a chip on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hsia, \textit{A History}, p. 165.
\item Discussed on p. 55.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
his shoulder, and that he is too weak to face it. Therefore, his vision of the world and of other people will be a fundamentally distorted one: "He glanced at her out of the corner of his eyes. A white and tight woollen waistcoat molds her full chest and tiny waist into a plaster bust.... He never liked to see girls, mostly healthy beautiful ones, for they increased his own self-dissatisfaction."(CS, p. 254) The third example, Ruliang in "Youth", is not pathological as in the previous case, but farcical in the sense that he always looks at life through the glasses of clichés. This would be unimportant if he did not make distorted judgments of people based on idealized clichés. Again, from the beginning of the story, Zhang drives home to the reader his abnormal outlook:

Ruliang was a good patriotic child, but he did not have a very good opinion of Chinese people.(CS, p. 444)

It wasn't that Ruliang opposed drinking. If or when a person suffered from a hard blow, no matter in love or in business, he would tumble his way to a bar, supporting himself against the walls. There, he would climb on a tall stool and order in a loud raspy voice: "Whisky, no soda." Then he would hold his head in one hand and begin to stare blankly; his hair would hang down, and a tuft would come into his eyes. But he would not blink; his eyes would just stare, wide open and blank. That kind of situation would be a matter-of-course and deserve sympathy. Naturally, it wouldn't be good to drink too much, but even then, it would still be a kind of noble vulgarity. Unlike his father, who humbly poured himself warm wine from a tin pot into a tea cup with a broken handle, and drank it while chatting to his mother who was doing the accounts by his side. They would each speak their own mind without listening to each other. When he caught a greedy look from the children, he would sometimes give them two pieces of
peanut candy. As for his mother, a mother naturally would be an uneducated and piteable person who had sacrificed her own happiness under the oppression of the old Confucian ethical code. She was filled with love for her children, but did not understand them. All she could do was prepare his lunch, then see him off to school with tears in her eyes and the breeze in her desolate-looking white hair. One detestable thing: Ruliang's mother's hair was not white, she even liked to pull it out if she happened to find one. When she had something unhappy on her mind, he never saw her cry, instead she would find fault with the children and scold them to tears. In her leisure time, she listened to Shaoxing operas and play mahjong. (CS, p. 445)

Of course, we are clearly intended to see that Ruliang's parents are basically good people with ordinary human weaknesses, and will consider Ruliang's judgment unreliable for the rest of the story. Ruliang subsequently refused reality; I have discussed this in my first chapter, as regards "Aesthetic Emotions". ¹

A more radical yet subtle way of refuting male perspectives is Zhang's effective use of the shift of point of view in two of her short stories, "Indian Summer: Ah Xiao's Autumnal Lament" and "Lust, Abstinence." A common pattern of these stories is employing the heroines' point of view up to the conclusion, then switching to the point of view of the male characters who believe they have defeated these females. In the first story, after knowing Ah Xiao's thoughts for a whole day and acknowledging her qualities, including integrity, generosity and independence, the reader will naturally find her foreign master Mr. Gold's opinion of her ridiculously superficial and his apprehension totally unfounded:

¹See above, p. 47.
Late at night, Gold came home with the woman [his girlfriend]. He went to the kitchen to get some cold water. As soon as the electric light was lit up, he saw Ah Xiao and her little son Baishun lying on the big kitchen counter. Baishun was mumbling something in his dream. Ah Xiao already woke up but pretended to still be sleeping. She was wearing just a sleeveless undershirt and a pair of striped cotton shorts. She was lying on her side facing the wall, her tiny frog-like arms and legs weighing on Baishun... Gold glanced at her. In the daytime, this amah appeared extremely cute and charming, yet lacking daytime clothing, she did not look right at all. He felt comforted because he had never provoked her. It would not be a wise thing to flirt with an inferior, making her forget her code of conduct. Mostly in the present situation, it would be hard to find a good maid, while he could have as many women as he wanted. (CS, p. 148)

In the second story, the reader is well aware, by reading Jiazhi’s thoughts, of her disillusion in revolution, sex and mostly her growing weariness with her present mission in the assassination plot against Mr. Yi. This disillusionment together with her momentary pity on him and her belief that he really loved her impelled Jiazhi at the last minute not to let him be assassinated. The perspective of the story is then shifted to Mr. Yi. After Jiazhi’s death, Mr Yi compliments himself with the thought that Jiazhi had saved him out of genuine love and that he was a lucky man to have such a good female friend in his declining years:

After meditating over it, he could not help being astounded. This sex-trap actually began two years ago in Hong Kong. It had been planned so astutely. Yet at the last moment, the beautiful woman overturned it to let him escape. She did indeed love him; this was the only intimate
female friend that he had in his life. He never expected to have such an encounter after his middle-age. (SL, p. 42)

Before expiring, she must have hated him. However, was not the saying 'no poison, no husband' true? Had he not been such a manly fellow, she would not have loved him. (SL, p. 42)

In these two instances, only the reader, as an outsider to the stories, can catch the author's use of irony in refuting the male perspectives and siding with the female ones.

In brief, although Zhang's focus on female characters is not a novelty in Chinese literary history, her choice of adopting the female point of view systematically in the whole of her short stories infuses a stronger feminine consciousness to her fiction.\(^1\) Besides, Zhang has made a further step from the female writers of the 1920's and 1930's. Those writers were mostly concerned with themselves and the plight of the new "class" of modern intellectual women, while Zhang writes of Chinese women of all ranks in society including maids, housewives with no education, high school graduates, university students and career women.

The second continuity with the world of Chinese fiction lies in Zhang's themes. The antiromantic trend which Gunn detects in the literature of the Japanese occupation period in China evolved from the themes commonly developed by Chinese female writers of the late 1920's and early 1930's. Feuerwerker identifies the theme of disillusion among others — disillusion in the human heart, love, revolutionary experiences and the

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\(^1\)In my opinion, "feminine consciousness" or a "feminist concern" can be detected in any literary work, whether written by male or female writers, when it contains a certain concern for the plight of women, or a certain consciousness of unfavourable situations women in the work suffer because of their gender. This consciousness should arise from the contemporary social reality.
Cultural Revolution of May Fourth.\(^1\) To be sure, these disillusionments have all occurred in Zhang's short stories. "Aloeswood Ashes — The First Burner" ruthlessly shows the heroine Weilong's disillusion and weak heart which cause her to succumb to the temptation of an easy life in preference of a struggling studious one. As analyzed in my first chapter, Dunfeng and Liusu are heroines disillusioned in love, Jiazhi in the revolutionary cause, and Yuanmei in her own ideal of being a woman with modern principles.\(^2\) "Stale Mates" is a farce, laughing at the hero Luo's disillusion in his long sought-after love, Miss Fan. In his eyes, she was the paragon of the genuine May Fourth romantic lover, but after their marriage she became contaminated with the vices which bored housewives developed in their oppressive domestic environment.

However, Zhang has an innovative way of developing this theme of disillusionment. In contrast to the subjectivism and emotionalism of the female writers of the previous decade,\(^3\) the antiromantic writers of the 1940's — according to Gunn, represented by Zhang Ailing, Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang — dealt with the theme with detachment and restrained emotionalism through the disengaged and ironical stance of narrators. This point has been discussed above in respect of the absence of Zhang's self-pity and her control of sympathy and distance, in her aesthetic expression.

2- Images of Women

Several of Zhang's female characters have been treated in detail in literary criticism of her works — Qiqiao, Weilong and Liusu are the most representative ones. The reason they leave an outstanding impression on the reader is due more to the author's successful

\(^{2}\)See pp. 25-26.
characterization rather than to their uniqueness. These characters echo some of their counterparts in one great work of traditional Chinese fiction, *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Zhang's aggressive type of female characters, defined in my first chapter, is the one who evinces a strong will in controlling external circumstances to suit her own goals. Such characters fit into the category called "house managers" by Wong Kam-ming, in his study of the images of women in *Dream*. To cite examples, Zhang's heroines Qiqiao, Jiaorui, Mrs. Liang and her trusty maid Yan'er, just like Fengjie and Tanchun in *Dream*, are resourceful and assertive women who strive for dominance in their immediate environment.

More numerous in Zhang's stories are women at all ages with conformist thought and submissive character, who also correspond to the conformist characters Baochai and Xiren as analyzed by Wong. The number of this type of characters is great, for they still formed the majority in the late Qing Chinese society as well as that of the 1940's. It is noteworthy that both Cao Xueqin, the author of *Dream*, and Zhang do not have a very high opinion of these conformist women. In *Dream*, Wong remarks, the synchronization of Baoyu's rejection of his fiancée Baochai in his dream and Baochai's happy moment with her needle works shows the author's objection to Baochai's compliance with traditional values. Parallel to this objection by Cao, Zhang's objection can be inferred from her frequent tongue-in-cheek narration which shows through her contempt for such conformity. Ample illustrations are set forth in the excerpts quoted in my first chapter with respect to Yanli, Cuiyuan, Chuanchang and Biluo. Zhang's contempt for a servile

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2 Ibid, pp. 53-58.
3 Ibid, p. 56.
4 See pp. 21-24.
attitude reaches its height in "Waiting", where the contempt not only shows through the narrator's tone, but also through the attitude of other spectators:

Mr. Gao was wearing a short corduroy waistcoat. His concubine hurried to come out before him, took down his gown from the metallic hook, helped him to put it on and did up the buttons one by one for him. After that, she grabbed his walking stick hanging on the clothes hook, used it to unhook his woollen hat and bring it down — she was too small to grab it otherwise. The whole process was extraordinarily skilful. She was an old-style concubine in her thirties. Her narrow long sheer gown with engraved stripes was out of fashion, coming down above her feet. She had a square face; on her cheek bones, there was some slight rouge. Her single-lidded eyes looked up from their base while she was putting the hat on his head for him. Then she hastily lifted a cup of tea from the table, tasted it first, and handed it to him. While he was drinking tea, she reached down in his long gown for the wallet, counted the bills and put them on the table.

Mrs. Pang lifted her head, asking: "So you're leaving, Mr. Gao?"

Mr. Gao and she both nodded; his concubine was extremely polite, saying on the way out: "Good-bye, Mr. Pang! See you tomorrow, Mrs. Pang! See you tomorrow, Miss Pang, Mrs. Bao and Mrs. Xi, see you tomorrow!" All the ladies did not pay any attention to her. (CS, p. 112)

The rhetorical purpose of this scene is a feminist advocacy for women's self-respect: such a conformist and subservient attitude would just earn women contempt, not only from men, but even from their own peers. The evolution from Cao Xueqin's subtle objection to female compliance with traditional values towards Zhang's more aggressive
stance is easily accounted for by the large time span between the two writers. Cao Xueqin wrote Dream around the middle of the eighteenth century and Zhang was a writer of the 1940's. During this time span, many modern ideas from the West had entered China. Among other things, equality between the sexes had become a more widely accepted principle. Therefore, women who still willingly lowered themselves before men were likely to be condemned more aggressively by their own peers.

Zhang's disapproval of female conformist attitudes is reinforced by the sympathy she shows towards wanton women in her stories. This is not exceptional in Chinese literary history either. In his same study of the images of women in Dream, Wong Kam-ming also analyzes the presence of feminine consciousness in the Chinese literature of the past, from its earliest beginning with Shijing, Lisao through to Tang, Ming and Qing vernacular fiction. He reaches the conclusion that there had been not only "vigorous sensitivity to feminine concerns...[but also] a vast reservoir of sympathy .... for women who often defying tradition and convention strive for individual fulfillment in love and marriage."^2

David Wang in his paper "Feminine Consciousness in Modern Chinese Male Fiction" observes that in depicting women's extra-marital affairs, the three stories "Chuntao"(1934) by Xu Dishan, Cold Nights (1947) by Bajin, and "Souvenir"(1946) by Qian Zhongshu "refuse to condemn their adulterous heroines and instead take them as individual socio-psychological cases."^3 Likewise, in Zhang's short stories, there are three female characters who have adulterous relationships. Each of them is a psychological

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1Discussed above, p. 58.
2Wong, Woman and Literature, p. 85.
case which pleads for itself. The reason why Mrs. Yang in "Lingering Love" often flirts with her much younger playmates in the card game is because her husband does not come home after work anymore. In addition, her mother-in-law has the control of the household management. Thus her flirting is a way of regaining some sense of self-worth. Yanli's situation in "Red Rose, White Rose" is similar, but much more aggravating since she is confined to a condition of stricter physical and emotional isolation — even her daughter was taken away from her. Therefore, instead of condemning it, most readers would consider Yanli's adulterous affair with a tailor to be a natural relief, a normal way to deal with the frustrations of alienation. In the same story, Jiaorui is notorious for her loose conduct, but Zhang leaves a better impression of her than of Zhenbao, the partner in her adulterous relationship. Jiaorui is an independent-minded woman who stepped aside from the road her conservative parents set for her in search of the real meaning in her life.\(^1\) Then she moved from one relationship to another until she found real love. In contrast to the still empty-handed Zhenbao who decided to end their relationship fearing that it would compromise his future career, Jiaorui was ready to divorce her wealthy husband and marry him, exchanging her financial security for real love. Zhang also makes Jiaorui's final victory clear when she and Zhenbao meet on a bus later in their lives. Ignoring Zhenbao's sarcastic jealousy, she honestly and calmly recognizes the lessons she has learned since her experience with him:

"It was from my relationship with you that I've learned how to love, conscientiously love... After all, love is a good thing. Although I had suffered from it, I still wanted to love. That's why..."(CS, p. 96)

"When I was still young and pretty, no matter where I went in society, it was always men that I ran into. However afterwards, apart from

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\(^1\)See pp. 27-28.
men, there was always something else...there was still something else..." (CS, p. 96)

Zhang's attitude towards adulterous and wanton women is not only sympathetic like that of her literary predecesors, but also devoid of moral comdemnation. She is even supportive of these women's more or less conscious search for balance, self-worth or love.

3- Situations of Female Characters.

As was observed above, there is a continuity in Zhang's fiction with the Chinese literary tradition as regards the significant presence of female characters therein. More interesting, this continuity extends to their fortune, or situations in the plots. This may challenge the belief of some of Zhang's admirers that her stories are unforgettable for the uniqueness of the situations she creates. Zhang's merit for innovation consists mostly in building up the intensity of atmosphere in her stories by situating female characters in three increasingly tighter concentric circles. The nature of these circles themselves is not a novelty in the context of either traditional or modern Chinese fiction. The first two circles, the educational limitations and the feeling of financial insecurity of Zhang's female characters examined in my first chapter, are linked to the topic of female emancipation. Indeed, this was one of the most popular May Fourth topics. Especially after Hu Shi's translation of Ibsen's play *The Doll's House* in 1918, heated debates arose regarding not only female emancipation itself, but mostly its consequences. According to Elisabeth Eide's article "Optimistic and Disillusioned Noras on the Chinese Literary Scene, 1919-1940", male as well as female writers' views are rather pessimistic in this respect. In light of this historical context, the educational limitations which Zhang's heroines are subject to were the same which had inspired Hu Shi's idea that proper education should
be the foundation for independence. Furthermore, the deep feeling of financial insecurity which rushes some young women into marriage or concubinage — e.g. Weilong to the notorious George, Lingqing to her friend's father, Liusu to the uncommitting Liuyuan — justifies Lu Xun's pessimistic view, in his talk of 1923 entitled "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?", that without money "a Chinese Nora [i.e. emancipated woman] would have only three choices: to starve, to 'go to the bad', or to return home to her husband."2

In addition to educational limitation and financial insecurity, physical and emotional isolation is a very characteristic situation of women in Zhang's stories and the most oppressive. It appears to be the common lot of numerous heroines in the history of Chinese literature. Reflecting on how traditional Chinese fiction related the life and society of those times, C.T. Hsia writes: "When women are denied romantic fulfillment, freedom of movement, or even rudimentary schooling, the fictional world in which they appear becomes oppressive as well. It speaks volumes about traditional Chinese society that since very early times Chinese fiction writers should have wanted to deliver young women from their oppressive environment into a world of fantasy where they are more or less in charge of their own destiny..."3 The key words in this statement are "oppressive environment" which are still largely reflected in Zhang's stories, with its psychological toll of emotional and sexual frustrations. Zhang took care to show that women of a higher social class may not be spared these frustrations. In the wake of her female

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1 Eide, Elisabeth, "Optimistic and Disillusioned Noras on the Chinese Literary Scene, 1919-1940", in Woman and Literature, pp. 199-200.
predecessors of the 1920's and 1930's, Zhang reveals that Cuiyuan, a middle-class intellectual, experiences loneliness and frustration with her self-made professional success which makes her a spinster.\footnote{See pp. 21-22.} This theme has been developed in Ling Shuhua's "The Second Encounter" and Bing Xin's "The West Wind". The heroines of both stories are schoolteachers frustrated by the same humiliating experience. When they encounter some old male acquaintances, they realized that the men had a much more fulfilling life since they never had to sacrifice their emotional happiness for their careers.

However, it is Zhang's depiction of the alienating emotional and sexual frustrations suffered mostly by less educated ordinary women\footnote{See pp. 11-18.} that expresses the strongest feminist concern, echoing that of several traditional fiction writers. It is remarked in Classical Chinese Fiction: a Guide to Its Study and Appreciation that both the authors of Jin Ping Mei and Prayer Mat of Flesh "reveal similar sympathies with the sexually frustrated women."\footnote{Winston Yang, Peter Li, Nathan Mao, eds., Classical Chinese Fiction: a Guide to Its Study and Appreciation, Massachussets: G. K. Hall, 1978, p. 69.} Furthermore, Zhang's belief that men fare better than women when subject to subconscious frustrations\footnote{Developed above, pp. 50-51.} is parallel to the way Li Yu, the author of Prayer Mat, "deals with sexuality as repressed in women and overt in men."\footnote{Yang, Li, Mao, Guide, p. 67.} The latter's feminist concern is confirmed by Hanan in his book The Chinese Vernacular Story as follows: "Many of [Li Yu's] stories contrast the ideal or conventional view with present reality. In his overturning of social stereotypes, particularly those of women, Li Yu may, in addition, have a liberating effect.... [A]n examination of the stereotypes he chose to overturn, as
well as of the facts of his own life, indicates a genuine concern for women."\(^1\) Perhaps the most explicit feminist expression is to be found in a Qing novel, *Flowers in the Mirror* [Jing hua yuan], in one episode of which the author fancied a "Country of Women" where the social roles of men and women are reversed.\(^2\)

There is little doubt that Zhang is familiar with and influenced by these traditional works, considering her well-rounded education. In her essay "Whispered Words", Zhang recalled that before she reached the age of going to school, her father hired a private tutor to teach her and her younger brother classical literature all day long.\(^3\) Also, the narrator in "Aloeswood Ashes — The Second Burner" was surprised that her nineteen-year old Irish classmate was shocked by the sexual education her elder sister had given her the previous day:

> Clementine[the Irish girl] went on saying : "I was really shocked! Don't you feel the same? Once you've got that kind of knowledge, you definitely can't speak of love anymore. All the beautiful illusions have been destroyed! Reality is so filthy!" I tried to say with indifference: "I'm surprised you knew about sex so late!" She was nineteen. I added: "Most Chinese girls know about it very early, there's nothing of a mystery really. Our novels are more straightforward than yours; also, there are more of that kind of books for us to read."

\(^{(CS, p. 341)}\)

Naturally, the Irish girl's puritanism is not a healthy attitude, but that of her Chinese peer is not a balanced one either. One may wonder whether the latter's matter-of-fact and unromantic concept of sexual activities does not originate from an unconsciously

\(^3\)Zhang, *Gossip*, p. 145.
reconfirmed acceptance of the fact, revealed in the traditional works of fiction mentioned above, that sexuality is either repressed and frustrating for the woman, or conversely just as a tool for her to exert power over men and the household.

Part of the rhetorical strength of Zhang's fiction derives from the time in which she wrote. Explicit feminism already appeared in China at the beginning of the century with the progressive Qiu Jin who declared: "Women must get educated and strive for their own independence; they can't just go on asking the men for everything. The young intellectuals are all chanting 'Revolution, Revolution,' but I say the revolution will have to start in our homes, by achieving equal rights for women." It was further fostered by both males and females of the May Fourth generation. Four decades after Qiu Jin however, Zhang implicitly reassessed the status of women who, in her view, remain in situations of lack of education, financial insecurity and, worst of all, in the oppressive and alienating domestic environment, as immovable as revealed in traditional fiction.

Though not in any way intended, Zhang's pressing feminist appeal coincided with that of her contemporary leftist colleague Ding Ling in her essay of March 1942 entitled "Thoughts on March 8" (International Women's Day). As observed by Spence, that was the last time for several decades that Ding Ling would speak a piece of her mind again; but in this essay, she revealed how the modern revolutionary woman was still frustrated by the double standard of the men around them. There in Yan'an where the leftist slogan of equal rights for women was most vocal, it was still very confusing for a woman to decide how to lead her life: she would be considered as either lacking in feminity if she

1 See Spence, *Gate of Heavenly Peace*, p. 89.
wholly devoted herself to the revolutionary cause, or as a "Nora who came home" if she had to give up her party career because of child raising.¹

It is also interesting to note here that Zhang's pessimistic vision and her antiromantic inclination of disclosing the disillusioning aspects of life are partly rooted in the socio-historical reality of her times. That reality was quite disillusioning for women because it had not yet freed them from their traditional fates. Spence summarized Ding Ling's concurring remark: "As for a woman's ultimate fate, said Ding Ling, whether she is 'backward'² or not, the physical laws of life remain unchanged and only the terminology has been altered to show that women live in the modern age."³

On the other hand, it is undeniable that these pessimistic and antiromantic inclinations are part of Zhang's individual disposition.⁴ In spite of the same social reality Zhang and Ding Ling were living in, these inclinations are absent in Ding Ling's fictional works. However, there is a strong affinity between Zhang's and an earlier May Fourth writer Lu Xun's pessimism. Among the many critics who have pointed out Lu Xun's pessimism, Lin Yü-sheng in his study "The Complex Consciousness of Lu Xun" rightly observed: "Sensitive and skeptical by disposition, Lu Xun had come to believe that the nature of his people was so diseased and their tradition so corrupt as to make it questionable whether or not the disease could be cured and the influence of tradition abolished."⁵ This pessimism corresponds to the one Zhang displays in showing how the modern women are still trapped in traditional situations and fates.

¹Spence, Gate of Heavenly Peace, pp. 328-330.
²Communist jargon, meaning "still clinging to traditional values instead of wholeheartedly living for the revolution."
³Spence, Gate of Heavenly Peace, p. 329.
⁴This has been analyzed in detail in my previous chapter, pp. 51-53.
There is no page 94.
B- Artistic Qualities

Jaroslav Prusek remarked that May Fourth writers, except for Lu Xun and Mao Dun, "think too little about their work and so provide literary critics with too few points on which to base their [artistic] analyses."1 The same could never be said of Zhang, whose literary artistry has reached maturity and deserves ample discussion. The mere passage of time does not account for this artistic improvement; rather, it relates to the difference in May Fourth writers' and Zhang's view of the principal role of literature. According to Prusek, most May Fourth writers "stress the perceptive function2 of literature; the writer's work is to give as accurate a picture as possible of a specific reality, of a specific social context."(p. 87) This naturally results in "the excessive underlining of the perceptive, intellectual function of literature, as compared with the aesthetic function."(p. 92) Prusek very rightly attributes this preference to the fact that in literary history, apart from a strong "love of fact, of truth, of reality,"(p. 91) Chinese authors have always had an "exceptionally sober, conscientious and responsible attitude to literary production and gave to the majority of their works a high moral ethos."(p. 92) This is later reconfirmed by Lin Yü-sheng whose theory of the "cultural-intellectualistic approach" characterizing the Chinese way of thinking is a landmark in modern Chinese intellectual history.3 Lin indicates that modern Chinese intellectuals may have succeeded

1Prusek, Jaroslav, The Lyrical and The Epic : Studies of Modern Chinese Literature, Leo Ou-fan Lee, ed., Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1980, p. 87. In the following, other quotations from the same book will be referred to by the page number.
2My own emphasis.
3Indeed, Prusek's selected papers which Leo Lee edits in The Lyrical and The Epic were all written from 1957-1969, while Lin's theory was developed in the 1970's, in both his above mentioned book The Crisis and his article "Radical Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Period and the Future of Chinese Liberalism", in
in modernizing the content of their thought, however their way of thinking is still deep-seated in traditional Confucianism, characterized by the "cultural-intellectualistic approach" which "stresses the intellectual-moral function of the mind and the power and priority of ideas." ¹

In opposition to this intellectual-moral predominance which tips the scales in favour of content over form, Zhang intertwines form and content as two aspects of one whole. Content is the meaning gathered or the effect upon the reader from form. Form is the arrangement which content has to take on to aim at an optimum perception by the reader.² A great deal of control is required on the part of the writer to achieve such a unity of form and content. Zhang's merit does not only lie in the achievement of this control, but also in the vividness instilled in her works by her style. Her control of content and form (i.e. her mastery of unity) is dealt with first below. Then, I consider her vivid style.

1- Mastery of Unity

Through my formal and thematic analyses in the previous chapters, one can already gather a great sense of unity of content and form in Zhang's works. The unity arises from the complementary and appropriate use of form and content. The structure of the plots, their forms and end effects in her stories reveal various meanings that Zhang intends to communicate about the types of female characters and the situations in which they are found. From these specific meanings, a more general meaning can be inferred,

¹Lin, Reflections, p. 42.
²This corresponds to a premise of Friedman's formal critical theory which I apply in this thesis to a large extent.
namely Zhang's pessimistic vision of life and antiromantic disposition as well as her emotions towards her characters and herself. Extraction of these meanings is a process which results from the reader's reception of the writer's message through form. The inverse process is to see how Zhang arranges form to communicate her ideas effectively. This inverse process has been partly shown under the heading "Aesthetic Expression" in the previous chapter: Zhang's antiromantic vision and restrained emotions logically result in a carefully measured control of distance between readers and characters and a rather sterile description of love scenes. Also, in Section A of this chapter, I have analyzed Zhang's reliance on the female point of view, together with her idea of creating increasingly oppressive atmospheres by situating her female characters in three concentric circles. This is indeed an effective way of showing her acute awareness of the way society does not change its unfavourable attitude toward women, even in the cases where they are more reliable than men.

The fact that this thesis is mainly focused on female themes should not leave the wrong impression that Zhang's themes are solely restricted to them. Like the other two antiromantic writers of her times, Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu as well as most May Fourth writers, Zhang is influenced by Western novelists who deal with psychological themes by delving into the characters' psychological states. The psychological themes found in Zhang's stories focus on the depiction of retrospection, alienation and a certain sense of loss and state of daydreaming.

My analysis of the form of plots in the first chapter implicitly shows Zhang's mastery of the control of unity of form and content. The three stories which mainly develop the theme of retrospection are those containing plots of thought, since retrospection is carried out in thoughts. On the other hand, since alienation ordinarily

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1Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, pp. 231-263.
2See pp. 36-39.
arises from a losing struggle between self and alien forces, the stories containing the theme of alienation have a plot of character. Also in the three stories of the collection Sense of Loss, namely "Lust, Abstinence", "Flower Pistils in the Floating Waves" and "Hapy Reunion", the heroines' sense of loss and state of daydreaming are skilfully rendered by the stream-of-consciousness narration without which it would be difficult for the reader to feel these states.

Zhang's control of the unity of form and content in her short stories is also shown in her masterful economy of plot sequences. While keeping the stories short, she simultaneously creates a meaningful effect through the reduction, in description or time length, of interconnected sequences. The first example is in "Red Rose, White Rose". The characterization of the passionate "red rose" Jiaorui extends twenty-six pages (pp. 65-91) and is carried out in a direct mode through Jiaorui's own speech, actions and even just through her provocative attitude towards Zhenbao. By contrast, the writer gives an indirect summary of Yanli's bland appearance and passive personality. This economical introduction of the "white rose" is confined to two pages (pp. 92-92) and leaves a firm impression of her which does not vary until the conclusion. A second similar example is "Love in a Fallen City", with the difference that the economy is realized over a time span instead of characters' description: by contrast to the exciting month Liusu spent in Hong Kong in the company of Liuyuan which is described in detail, the whole autumn during which she returned to her family in Shanghai is summarized in one page (p. 238), yet the impression left on the reader is quite strong. During this time, Liusu felt the pressure from her family: "Just an autumn, and she had aged two years—she really could not help aging!" (CS, p. 238)

^See pp. 40-42.
Zhang also excels in writing transitions between sequences of the plot, using a technique of superposed sensorial experiences or montage akin to that used in cinema. In "The Golden Cangue", ten years of Qiqiao's monotonous life with her crippled husband elapsed like a gust of wind in the following transition paragraph to another stage of her life:

A gust of wind came in the window and blew against the long mirror in the lacquered scrollwork frame until it rattled against the wall. Ch'i-ch'iao 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 ten years older. (GC, p. 540, or CS, p. 168)

This fade out-fade in superposing of the images of Qiqiao's room before and after her husband's death is not only good economy of words but, more important, succeeds in conveying the painful boredom in the young woman's life which anyone living in her situation would be eager to blot out of their memory. In "Jasmine Tea", the transition is done through the double superposition of tactile experiences and images. The young hero Chuanqing made an effort to pull himself out of his usual lethargy and set out to do his homework in the living-room. However the cool touch of the marble table reminded him, successively, of the coolness of the bus window he had rested his forehead on and then the image of his female classmate Danzhu reflected therein. This provides a smooth transition into the next sequence, where Chuanqing is pondering over the former relationship between his mother and Danzhu's father:
He sat down at the side of the rectangular red-wood table which was right in the middle of the living-room, and lay over the marble surface of the table. Its coolness felt like that of the glass window of the bus. There was those azaleas outside, and the image of Yan Danzhu inside the window....Danzhu's father is Yan Ziye. That name, he recalled having seen it in his childhood, when he did not know how to read yet.

On the blank cover page of a worn magazine entitled "Early Tide", he tried hard to read these characters, one by one : "To Biluo, from Yan Ziye". His mother's name was Peng Biluo.(CS, p. 260)

Through this kind of transition, Zhang also reinforces the characterization of Chuanqing as a physically lethargic youngster whose great capacity for daydreaming needs only a slight sensorial association to set him off onto another disjointed train of thought.

One critic, Chen Bingliang, has also mentioned the cinematic technique used in the same passage I quoted above from "The Golden Cangue", but did not discuss the purpose or origin of this technique. In my opinion, Zhang's movie-type superposition of sensorial experiences is not an unplanned element of her style. Rather, she makes a conscious effort to use it for several purposes. In the next section, I shall analyze some other movie-type images which Zhang uses to enhance the vividness of her style. Zhang was once a movie critic for the Shanghai-based English magazine Twentieth Century during the 1937-1945 Sino-Japanese war, then a movie- script writer at the end of the 1940's. This experience may have had some influence on her use of this technique. During this time, the young Zhang matured into a succesful short story writer : most of her works were written in the early 1940's.

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2Consult "Zhang Ailing's Special Issue" in Unitas [Lianhe Wenzue], vol. 29, March 1987, p. 45.
2- Vividness of Style

Zhang's style seems to retain the attention of the reader and critic more than her mastery of unity because it is more striking, concrete and vivid.

Zhang's extensive use of nature and animal imagery as symbols of the atmosphere or mood of a story at crucial moments has been discussed in detail by several critics. Zhang's imagery of the moon, for instance, is given an original and thorough interpretation by Stephen Cheng in his article "Themes and Techniques in Eileen Chang's Stories." This nature symbolism may have found its roots in traditional Chinese literature, where a character's feelings are projected onto the external environment. For example, a depressed character would look out at the sea and find that it looks grey and threatening, while a joyous one would read joy and enthusiasm in the waves of the sea. As a consequence of this projection, some elements in this environment take on a subjective meaning which can only be deciphered by the character him-or-herself. To interpret the meaning of the symbol, as outsiders, readers have to put themselves in the situation of the character and view the symbolic element from the same angle and with the same emotions. In this sense, Zhang's symbolic use of the environment belongs to the Chinese lyrical tradition, which thrives in old poetry and classical [wenyan] prose. The few following examples illustrate well the evocative power of such symbolism. In "Lingering Love", for a few days Dunfeng, Mr. Mi's concubine, has been jealous with his dying wife because Mr. Mi goes to pay her a daily visit. She feels guilty about this jealousy, but keeps on pretending to ignore the silent appeal for understanding from Mr. Mi, and even from his wife. In one sequence, the telephone next door keeps ringing, the

first time with no one to receive the call, and the second time with a nasty reply from the person who answers the call. Dunfeng identifies these telephone calls with the burden on her conscience — Mr. Mi's unanswered appeals. It makes her feel miserable:

Dunfeng remained alone in the room, everything had become quiet. A telephone rang next door at a distance, yet because of the quietness, it sounded as though it was right beside her ear: "Brrrrrring! Brrrrrrring!", again and again. She wondered why no one ever picked it up. The ringing sounded as though it had thousands of unutterable words to say — an anxious, imploring and intense drama. For no reason, Dunfeng was moved by it; she recalled Mr. Mi's disturbances these two days. She could not understand his worry and did not want to understand it. She stood up, crossing her hands, and stared at the wall defensively.

"Brrrrrrrring! Brrrrrrrrring!" The telephone was still ringing, but it sounded more and more desolate. Even the room on her side of the wall seemed to be empty. (CS, p. 30-31)

Suddenly she heard the telephone ring again: "Brrrrrrrring! Brrrrrrrrring!" She listened to it carefully. Unexpectedly, someone went to pick it up — she felt relieved. The loud and coarse voice of a servant said impatiently "Hello?", cutting short the endless imploration from the other end. The rest, said in a confused, loud voice, became unclear. (CS, p. 37)

Liusu in "Love in a Fallen City" projects her mental confusion and sense of loss onto the calligraphy she stares at: "In the dim light, the characters seemed each to float in the air, far from the paper. Liusu felt that she was one of the characters in the calligraphy, floating in the void, unsubstantial." (CS, pp. 210-211) Likewise, in "Aloeswood Ashes" Weilong has just seen her parents off and is now left alone to her own destiny in Hong
Kong. For her, the weather reflects all the desolation, loneliness and crippling fears in her soul: "After Weilong had seen her parents off, the sky became dark.... It was a damp spring evening. The fog on top the mountains in Hong Kong was most famous. Mrs. Liang's white house melted like the glue in this white fog. Only the green window panes which the swinging light beam shone through were visible, faintly green like the ice cubes in mint liqueur. But the ice cubes gradually melted into water — the fog became so thick the light inside the window panes also disappeared."(CS, p. 294)

Also characteristic of Zhang's style is her impressionistic description of people. Zhang sees it as a personal quality: "It often happens to me to view people as flat characters. It is relatively easier to put paper figures inside books. 'To flatten people' does not necessarily mean to look for their shortcomings; it is only to reduce the three-dimensional into a flat surface. Then it would be as though the black shadow of a branch of flowers had been printed against the wall, and all you need to do would be to use the brush and draw that outline. As a story writer, I think my duty is to see through the veins and canals of life [and sketch it out]."2 This very figurative passage means that Zhang's talent is in highlighting the few most striking physical aspects of a person which would render a certain impression of his or her moral character. Mrs. Lü's blunt and wishy-washy personality is shown through her physionomy: "Mrs. Lü wore spectacles. Her straight eyebrows joined up in a reversed "V" when she frowned. She had a round white face. But that roundness looked like a misshaped dumpling that children make, imitating the adults; and the colour was a complex off-white, due to the dirt their hands rubbed into the flour."(CS, p. 45) Mr. Wu's appearance is quite similar, if not worse because it betrays his lack of masculinity: "He was the real portait of an unhealthy Asian husband: a thin and long figure, a concave chest, a big ashy round face which looked like a dirty

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1Ibid, p. 294. My own emphasis on the elements which correspond to Weilong's feelings.
2Zhang, Lingering Rhyme, p. 83.
worn-out silver coin..." (SL, p. 92) Mr Zheng's moral versatility can be inferred from his versatile appearances, and his irresponsibility in life from the fact that none of these appearances is that of a serious person of his age: "Mr. Zheng looked like one of those Shanghai upper-class young men who were shown taking a tonic while smoking a cigarette: a round face, broad eyebrows, the corners of the mouth slightly lifting up. Wearing shorts, he would be transformed into a small boy advertising for infants' medicinal tablets. Add two rows of mustaches, he would immediately become a healthy grandpa. And when the beard had turned grey, he would temporarily be Santa Claus." (CS, p. 463) Tangqing's aggressiveness and bitterness are both rendered in this sketch: "Tangqing was a lively person. She had been lively like that for years yet had not found a marriage partner yet, which made her lose her self-esteem. Her round little soul had cracked, but it had been mended with white clay. The white of her eyes was also white clay; the teeth were also white clay, slightly bulging out, hard, cold and snowy white—without feeling. Yet she still laughed and became even livelier." (CS, p. 463)

Zhang's creation of impressionistic portraits of people, like her symbolic representation of the environment discussed above, is similar to a common trait of traditional lyrical poets. In his analysis of Bo Juyi's poems in *Chinese History and Literature*, Prusek discusses the methodology of lyrical poets which enables them to describe the substance of things incisively:

The basic presumption for such a procedure was the artist's power of accurate observation, an acute perception of traits that may be small, but are characteristic, that would go to the core of the situation which the author wishes to communicate to the reader. This method taught the artist to pick out what was typical in every phenomenon and, by reducing its most essential traits, to express its substance as concisely as possible.... Excessively refined perceptivity gave him the ability to
select from the chaos of phenomena the most significant — that
dominant in the picture to which we referred above — and render it in a

Prusek's analysis can also be applied to Zhang in respect of her "power of accurate observation" of reality. She uses strikingly realistic and vivid similes to enhance the accuracy of her observations. Qiqiao's frustration and anger are so deep she cannot even express them in tears, but "the lower half of her face quiv[ers] as if she held scalding hot candlewax in her mouth"\cite{GC, p. 536, or CS, p. 161} Mrs. Pang in the doctor's waiting-room is tired but still tries to put a smiling polite expression on her face; however, her look is coldly empty: "Mrs. Pang's bright, smiling and big eyes resembled the lights from the upper floor of people's houses which are totally unconcerned with the pedestrians down in the street."\cite{CS, p. 124} The soap foam left to dry on Zhenbao's hand creates "a shrinking sensation, as though there was a mouth, there, sucking his hand lightly."\cite{CS, p. 65} Likewise, the hot sun on the beach is personified as a terribly thirsty person who "gurgles the sea water, gargles and spits it out noisily."\cite{CS, p. 231} The fire on a gas-burner, a trivial thing we look at daily, takes on creative forms under Zhang's pen: "The gas fire looked like a huge blue chrysanthemum with a black center and thin long petals curving into it. Roger gradually lowered the fire. The petals gradually shortened, shortened and almost disappeared. There remained only a circle of regular small blue teeth; then the teeth themselves gradually became invisible. But before totally extinguishing, they suddenly shot out again, extending into two inch-long sharp fangs, just for an instant, and then popping out, came to nothing."\cite{CS, p. 382} Not only does the fire take several forms, but the forms themselves become gradually deadly and
threatening until extinction of the fire. Drawing on this metaphor, Roger then commits suicide with the gas left on.

Among other uses discussed above, Zhang also uses movie techniques such as flashbacks and close-ups to render emotions more realistically and vividly.

Flashbacks occur in two instances. In the first instance, they bring forth to the reader the intensity and depth of the character's present feeling, as the memory of a similar experience looms up from this character's unconsciousness. Thus Qiqiao's intense disgust with her crippled husband is transferred to the reader through the flashback scene where the much younger Qiqiao was buying meat in the market:

> Across the thick row of brass hooks from which pork dangled she saw Ch'ao-lu of the butcher shop. Ch'ao-lu was always after her, calling her Miss Ts'ao, and on rare occasions Little Miss Ch'iao, and she would give the rack of hooks a slap that sent all the empty hooks swinging across to poke him in the eye. Ch'ao-lu plucked a piece of raw fat a foot wide off the hook and threw it down hard on the block, and a warm odor rushed to her face, the smell of sticky dead flesh ... she frowned. On the bed lay her husband, that lifeless body....(GC, p. 540, or CS, p. 168)

Liusu's distress with her mother's coldness towards her is as deep as the helpless sense of solitude which goes back to her childhood:

> It vaguely seemed to her she had returned to a time several years past. Once when she was still under ten, she came out of the theater and lost her family in the crowd. She stood alone on the pavement and stared at

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1 See pp. 98-99.
people. People also stared at her through the rain and the dripping windows of their cars, through multiple layer of invisible glass covers — innumerable strangers. Everyone was closed up in their own small world, and even if she had broken her head she still could not have bumped through, she felt crushed.(CS, p. 208)

In the second instance, flashbacks are used by Zhang to dramatize and shed light on the character's present emotional state by contrasting it to opposite past experiences. Weilong's longing for sincere and warm love during her sickness at her insincere aunt's house brings back to her warm memories of the past:

At her old home, there would not be so many flowers in her room sent over by friends when she was sick. But in her memory, even more beautiful than the flowers, there was a sort of glass ball — her father's paper-weight — which her family put in her feverish hands to cool them down ....The ball was quite heavy. This memory reminded her of all the most real and reliable things in life — the black iron bed which she shared with her younger sister at home; the white and red-striped cotton-padded matress; the yellow poplar-wood dresser....; the calendar with pictures of beautiful women pinned on the wall, and on the shoulder of the woman, her mother's thick pencil-writing of the telephone numbers of the tailor, the hairdresser, the toufu seller, and Weilong's aunts....(CS, p. 332)

The emptiness and hypocrisy of the present, solely represented by the flowers, is implicitly highlighted by the enumeration of insignificant objects of the past which are yet charged with weighty emotional meaning. In the conclusion of "The Golden Cangue", Qiqiao's present sense of failure is brought forth by memories of her waisted youthful freshness:
She groped for the green jade bracelet on her wrist and slowly pushed it up her bony arm, as thin as firewood, until it reached the armpit. She herself could not believe she'd had round arms when she was young. Even after she had been married several years, the bracelet only left room enough for her to tuck in a handkerchief of imported crepe. As a girl of eighteen or nineteen, she would roll up the lavishly laced sleeves of her blue linen blouse, revealing a pair of snow-white wrists, and go to the market. Among those that liked her were Ch'ao-lu of the butcher shop; her brother's sworn brothers, Ting Yü-ken and Chang Shao-ch'üan; and also the son of Tailor Shen.(GC, p. 558, or CS, p. 202)

Close-ups are film images shot from a very close distance and focusing on just one part of the subject. Close-up images in literature constitute the most appropriate way for an antiromantic writer like Zhang to fully express emotions without resorting to flowery emotionalism. This kind of image has the double quality of being succinct and ironic: succinct, because of its powerful expression; and ironic, because paradoxically the closer to the image, the more likely one will observe it as an alien object.

Mrs. Liang's enjoyment of the forbidden fruit — her success in conquering her niece's prospective boyfriend — is skilfully suggested in the close-up examination of her smiling face: "Mrs. Liang, holding the knife to cut the cold ox tongue, was absorbed in smiling at that ox tongue. After a while, she lifted the glass to drink, and again stared at it, smiling. While stretching out for the pepper, she seemed to have recalled some memory and the trace of a smile became deeper."(CS, p. 312) The reflection of Weilong's dejected image into her boyfriend's sunglasses appears movingly real and lasting in the mind of the reader: "Weilong clung to his collar, lifted her head and stared imploringly at his face. She directly searched for his eyes behind the sunglasses, but all
she could see was the reflection of her own shrunken and desolate silhouette. She stared blankly at it for a while, and suddenly bent her head down."(CS, p. 320-321) It is also the last close-up of Qiqiao, dejected and forlorn, that makes her story unforgettable to the reader: "She moved the ruffled little foreign-style pillow under her head and rubbed her face against it. On her other cheek a teardrop stayed until it dried by itself: she was too languid to brush it away."(GC, p. 558, or CS, p. 202)

Thus, the definite advantage of close-ups is that they enable the writer to create emotionally evocative images which leave a fresh and long-lasting effect on the reader.
CONCLUSION

In the deep troubled waters of the 1937-1945 Sino-Japanese war, Zhang Ailing stands out as one of the spokespersons of an "Unwelcome Muse". Zhang's writing was unwelcome by the dignified Chinese patriots who felt that the moral duty of a Chinese intellectual was to offer a comforting vision to a nation in distress due to foreign occupation. But for readers who are more interested in universal values which transcend political and historical circumstances, Zhang's stories offer a valued vision of a palpably real world, with throbbing passions and petty problems which are the substance of daily life. Like a bitter drug well coated in delicious candy, the writer's dark, pessimistic vision of her contemporary Chinese women in the grip of their psychological and social problems is attractively presented to the reader in masterful aesthetic forms.

Zhang's female characterization, achieved through various formal aspects of her stories, is rich and well-rounded. Women in her stories suffer from a lack of independence due to low education and financial insecurity and from physical and emotional isolation. However, instead of forming a monotonous picture of sad victims, they vary greatly as aggressive or submissive characters in response to their oppressive environments and by their independent or conformist thought vis-à-vis traditional values.

Further, the form of the plots in Zhang's stories sheds light on her female characters' psychological states and problems. In particular, plots of thought are built to
develop the retrospection of female protagonists and plots of character, the psychological alienation they are subjected to.

Female characterization also serves as a means toward end effects. The predominance of aesthetic emotions over moral emotions in Zhang's stories indicates the writer's skill in endowing her female characters with realistic thoughts and characters that fulfill the reader's expectations. Stories which arouse moral emotions carry Zhang's message that the role of a mother is a problematic one, because women can either abuse or misuse it and harm their dependents.

The specific meanings perceived in the formal aspects of Zhang's works are not so interesting in themselves as they are in enabling the reader to infer a more general meaning about the writer's vision of life. Zhang's inward, sceptical and pessimistic nature shows through her inclination to develop the dark, dissatisfying side of humanity. Her common sense and clear-mindedness enable her to tackle moral problems in a persuasive, ironic and subtle manner. It is mostly the implied emotions of the writer which create the intensity underlying her vision of life. Zhang's sympathy for her female characters' bad fortunes and weaknesses is interestingly subdued by her antiromantic emotional restraint. But her refusal to give predominance to moral emotions and display self-pity in her stories does not lift the desolate atmosphere which characterizes her works.

In the broader context of Chinese literature, the feminine consciousness which we perceive through the images and situations of Zhang's female characters is not a novelty. But the way she aesthetically expresses both her message and her vision of life in her short stories is fresh and appealing. The oppressive domestic environment in which women are confined is apparent throughout traditional Chinese fiction. The educational and financial obstacles to female emancipation are among popular May Fourth topics. But
the unique way these situations are arranged in Zhang's stories, combined with the
imprint of the author's pessimistic vision, gives a new dimension to the psychological
abyss in which Zhang's female characters are lost.

Even though such darkness may not be to everyone's taste, Zhang's artistry is a
delight to readers of both traditional Chinese or Western literary backgrounds. Her
symbolic use of the environment to reflect characters' feelings and her impressionistic
description of people are recognizable as traits of the Chinese lyrical tradition. But
Zhang's merit consists in going beyond traditional archetypes and creatively applying this
literary tradition to her own modern world. She uses elements never heard of in
traditional literature, like telephones, gas ovens, commercial advertisements and even
Santa Claus.

As a progressive individual, Zhang also explored the wealth of Western fiction-
writing tradition and so acquired the mastery of unity and form. Zhang's calculated
control of distance between the reader and her characters is evidence that she has her own
emotions under control. Her sterile description of love scenes is appropriate to her
antiromantic disposition. The form of her plots is well chosen for the themes they
develop. An original feature in Zhang's expression is her frequent use of cinematic
techniques. Superposition of sensorial experiences, flashbacks and close-ups are
variously employed to skip some plot sequences, make clever transitions, render
emotions more vivid and create fresh images with a long-lasting impact on the reader.

In sum, Zhang is one of the very few women writers endowed with a special vision
of the conditions of women's lives in her times, and of life in a general sense which
transcends the period in which she wrote. This vision is unique and the aesthetic way in
which she renders it in her short stories are of such a high calibre that decades after the
publishing of her short stories, they have inspired several imitators of her style of fiction
throughout Hong Kong and Taiwan. It would be interesting to make a comparative study of Zhang and Zhong Xiaoyang, one of her most successful imitators in Hong Kong.

Imitation is the best form of flattery and strong evidence of Zhang's important contribution to Chinese literature. However, many people cannot help feeling a deep regret that Zhang herself did not continue her prolific fictional output after the productive decade of the 1940's and 1950's. One may wonder whether this mysterious disappearance from the literary scene, like every detail in Zhang's aesthetic expression, has a calculated effect. It does give to her literary career the brilliancy of a short-lived comet.
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