

Writing Lives in China: the Case of Yang Jiang

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY

Jesse L. Field

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Paul Rouzer

June, 2012

© Jesse Field 2012

## Acknowledgements

My advisor, Paul Rouzer, introduced me to *Tan yi lu* (On the art of poetry, 1946) and *Guan zhui bian* (Chapters on pipe and awl, 1978) by Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998). I was fascinated, puzzled and intimidated by these strange and difficult texts. When I looked up Qian Zhongshu, I found that his wife Yang Jiang (b. 1911) had penned a memoir called *Women sa* (We three, 2003), about Qian's death and the life he, she and their daughter Qian Yuan (1937-1995) had had together. I read the text and was deeply moved. Moreover, I was struck that Yang Jiang's writing was a kind of contemporary manifestation of classical Chinese poetry. I decided to take a closer look.

Thanks to Ann Waltner, Wang Liping, and my classmates in the 2006-7 graduate seminar in Chinese history for discussions and encouragement to begin this project. My first paper on Yang Jiang received invaluable feedback from participants in the 2007 "Writing Lives in China" workshop at the University of Sheffield, especially Margaretta Jolly and Wu Pei-yi. A grant from the CLA Graduate Research Partnership Program (GRPP) in the summer of that year helped me translate *We Three*.

Parts of this dissertation underwent discussion at meetings of the Association for Asian Studies in 2009 and 2011 and, perhaps even more fruitfully, at the Midwest and Southwest Regional conferences for Asian Studies in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. Thanks to Sherry Mou, Yang Xin, Shannon Canella, Steven Day, Jeffrey Kinkley, Charles Laughlin, and Claire Conceison for their gracious friendship and helpful feedback on work in this period. Charles also organized the 2009 meeting of the Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature (ACCL) in Beijing, where I spoke on Yang Jiang in Chinese and was soundly criticized by Chen Xiaomei. I feel a deep sense of gratitude for that experience, too.

A major boost to this project came in the form of the workshop "Celebrating 100 Years of Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang," hosted at the University of British Columbia and organized by Christopher Rea. My work benefited enormously from the community, structure and support of that Vancouver gathering, which included Chris Rea, Wendy Larson, Theodor Hutters, Alex Huang, John Weinstein, Amy Dooling, Yaohua Shi, Judith Amory, Ronald Egan, Ji Jin, Wang Yugen, Tiziana Lioi, Carlos Rojas, Zhang Enhua, and Wang Yao.

As a direct result of the workshop, my translations of Yang Jiang's works appeared in the winter 2011 issue of *Renditions*. The rigorous and detailed editing of Christopher Rea, Theodore Hutters, Sheldon Ip and other staff members of *Renditions* was truly a revelation. Thanks so much to Chris, Ted and *Renditions* for including me in their pages.

The University of Minnesota department of Asian Languages and Literatures has been a gracious and patient institutional home. With their support, I created the course

“Writing Lives in China” and taught it twice, in 2009 and in 2010. I owe a debt of thanks to the students of this class. Their discussions and writing about Yang Jiang’s *Gan xiao liu ji* (Six Records of a Cadre School, 1981) helped shape the readings in these pages.

In 2011-12, I had the opportunity to teach courses at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, thanks to a UMN Pre-Doctoral Diversity Fellowship awarded by the Graduate School Diversity Office. The support of this office, especially supervision and mentorship from Noro Andriamanalina, was of crucial importance in bringing this project to a close. In Duluth, I found a welcome home in the UMD department of English, and weekly meetings Prof. Krista Twu provided excellent advice for writing, teaching, and pursuing a career in the field of higher education. I shared my office with three classmates, and we formed a little community of dissertation writers who propped each other up, discussed our writing and ideas, and made each other some very impressive gourmet meals. Thanks so much, George Hoagland, Jessica Nammakal, and Eli Meyerhoff!

Over the course of the busy spring of 2012, members of my committee read the draft chapters of this dissertation and provided me with detailed suggestions for improvement. Thanks very much to Paul Rouzer, Ann Waltner, Jason McGrath, and Simona Sawhney for their time and patience.



To Carol Gene Field (1933-2010)

## Abstract

This dissertation is about the writer Yang Jiang 杨绛 (b. 1911). It opens up new intellectual territory by bringing together many forms of Chinese writing to describe the common influence of *xie renwu* or ‘writing the person.’

Though best-known for *Gan xiao liu ji* (Six records of a cadre school), Yang Jiang’s memoir of experiences in a labor camp for intellectuals during China’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Yang Jiang’s career as a whole testifies to the living value of story and portraiture manifested in plays, personal essays, literary criticism, translation, short stories, novels and biographical literature. Moreover, Yang Jiang’s readership runs the gamut from enthusiastic welcome, in 1940s Shanghai, to rejection and silencing in the 1950s and 60s, and rising sharply upward again to iconic status in the 1990s and 2000s. Applying the terms and propositions of the interdisciplinary study of life writing, I identify the unity of Yang Jiang’s writing in its focus on the person, and in particular the constant return to discourses of self, identity, subjectivity and social value entwined around traditional Confucian terms of personhood – especially *qing*, the sublime connection between persons based on feeling.

Critics inside China call Yang Jiang one of the best prose stylists of her time; general readers call her life story inspirational; in 2011, newspaper reports identify in Yang Jiang the moral and aesthetic qualities most recommended for China today. And yet, her work has received scant attention from scholars outside of China. My dissertation begins the project of filling in this lacuna through historical contextualization and close readings centered on her post-Cultural Revolution writing. The aesthetic qualities of Chinese rhetoric, the classical and romantic qualities of Yang Jiang’s prose, and the deeper political and social implications of her writing since the late 1970s are major topics of the chapters.

Throughout, I focus on gender and class, arguing that Yang Jiang deploys traditional

exemplary life writing (the image of the “good wife and model mother,” for example) to build up a discourse of personhood that contains a renewed version of traditional Chinese cultural values.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	i
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter One: Yang Jiang and Literary Affect.....	1
Chapter Two: The Literary Criticism of Yang Jiang.....	41
Chapter Three: “Reflections in Reverse,” Yang Jiang’s Short Fiction, 1979-1981 .....	79
Chapter Four: Six Records of a Cadre School.....	111
Chapter Five: <i>Baptism</i> and the return of Enlightenment-Confucian Structure of Feeling .....	147
Chapter Six: “About to Drink the Tea”: Yang Jiang’s Essays, 1981-1991 .....	178
Chapter Seven: “All Alone, I Think Back on We Three”: Yang Jiang’s New Intimate Public .....	208
Conclusion.....	240
Appendix I: “On Qian Zhongshu and <i>Fortress Besieged</i> ” .....	244
Appendix II: <i>We Three</i> , Parts I and II .....	288
Appendix III: Arriving at the Margins of Life: Answering My Own Questions: Excerpt .....	336
Bibliography .....	344

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Idealized intimacy between peasants and intellectuals undermined in <i>Six...</i>	123
Figure 2: A properly managed household, here illustrating opportunities for <i>shen jiao</i> 身教 (“teaching of the self”), from the <i>Jiating quanbao shu</i> (Household encyclopedia).....	192
Figure 3: Interior of the Qian Zhongshu Historic Home, a museum operated by the Wuxi Municipal Government.....	213
Figure 4: "I saw Mister Zou standing beside the street hawker quickly eating <i>shajiaomai</i> ." "I start school at Qimeng," illustration by Gao Mang.....	217
Figure 5: Yang Jiang on the website of the <i>People's Daily</i> .....	229
Figure 6: Cover slip of the Taiwan edition of <i>Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past</i> .....	233
Figure 7: Zhang Xiaogang, <i>Bloodlines: Big Family</i> , 2003 series .....	237
Figure 8: Cover photo used for <i>We Three</i> (ca. 1946).....	238

## Chapter One: Yang Jiang and Literary Affect

### Personality and Prose Style: The Case of Yang Jiang

Yang Jiang (b. 1911) is likely the only Republican-era writer to restart her career in the twenty-first century. “As an intellectual of the old school (*lao pai zhishifenzi*),” reads the back cover of the Taiwanese edition of her 2003 memoir, “her words are imbued with inner reserve and decorum (*jiezhi*); between the lines there is an air of intimacy and sorrow that leaves the reader visibly moved.”<sup>1</sup> The connection between “inner reserve” and “intimacy,” and the expression of “sorrow” with “temperance,” calls to mind traditional Chinese poetics, with its moral connection between poetry and personality. The habit of pronouncing moral authority upon Yang Jiang by the evidence of her prose was already established by 1980 when, reviewing the collection of short fiction Yang Jiang had written and published following the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), critic Tian Huilian wrote that the collection’s “overall style demonstrated a tone that was gentle, even and refined. This is precisely what it means to say that the writing (*wen*) is like the person (*ren*).”<sup>2</sup> The literariness of Yang Jiang’s work is bound up in its representation of the personal.

This dissertation examines the literary and the personal in the criticism, fiction, memoir and essays of Yang Jiang. Throughout, I refer to a sense of *the personal* as proposed by Wang Lingzhen: “a material site where diverse historical forces – political,

<sup>1</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, *Women sa* 我们仨 [We Three] (Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Tian Huilian, “Jiu Zhongguo dushi yijiao de sumiao: Yang Jiang Dao ying ji man ping 旧中国都市一角的素描-杨绛《倒影集》满评 [Perspective sketches of old Chinese cities: A critical essay on Yang Jiang’s *Reflections in Reverse*],” in *Yanjiu ziliao ji*, ed. Tian Huilian 田蕙兰, Ma Guangsu 马光裕, and Chen Keyu 陈轲玉 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 658.

social, intersubjective, emotional, and bodily – interact with each other, in China’s century-long struggle for modernity.”<sup>3</sup> As I will explain below, the personal as a psychological and philosophical construct is not my focus as much as the literary representation of the personal, a diverse *textual* site that I will call “literary affect.” Still, the personal is an important feminist concept that brings notions of the body and feelings into contact with considerations of superstructure. The representations of large-scale political, economic and intellectual change are dominant discourses of history, while the representation of personal experience, the progress of feelings, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships form a minor, often feminine, and often subversive discourse. Yang Jiang’s work is a case of minor discourse negotiating a path sometimes against, and sometimes in step with, the dominant codes of Chinese modernity. The 2003 Taiwan jacket cover term “old school intellectual” hints at the exceptional length of Yang Jiang’s path, from an era of nationalism and individualism, through the years of communism and socialism, the postsocialist reform era, and continuing into a Chinese literary market fully adapted to the logic of consumerism.

To describe the main literary quality linking Yang Jiang’s varied criticism and practice, I re-define the term “literary affect” as the representation of the personal, and centered especially on the feeling body. Literary affect is my term for what Yang Jiang called “surface” (*biaomian*) in her critical appraisal of Jane Austen’s fiction: “She writes the surface of the character, but surface conveys interiority – a very complex interiority, and conveyed in minute detail.”<sup>4</sup> The technique of Yang Jiang’s literary

---

<sup>3</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters: Women’s Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Yang Jiang, “You shenme hao? Du Ausiding de ‘Aoman yu

practice was always similarly focused on character – especially female protagonists and the autobiographical subject. The *surface* of the character is the body, beginning with the facial features, extending to arms, legs and torso, then gestures and dynamics of these, and finally action. Yang Jiang believed that control over this dimension of writing could reveal the complexity of personhood beneath the surface, beginning with emotional states and extending to changing concepts of self and of relationships, to offer in the end a glimpse of the inner workings of human judgment, the development and deformation of moral capacity – what Yang Jiang often calls “human nature” (*renxing*). Focusing on literary affect reveals something of the relationship among Yang Jiang’s large cast of characters, her character-based critical approach to narrative, and her autobiographical practice – that is, the very active way she negotiates her life and identity in history.<sup>5</sup> Detailed description of the person as a feeling body becomes, in Yang Jiang’s long career, a technique for expressing “the personal” that draws on traditional Chinese poetry and narrative as well as early modern Western forms, especially fiction and drama from Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a modern Chinese woman writer, Yang Jiang’s interest in literary affect has been a major tool for her to negotiate a sense of self, to construct a view of history, and to embed gendered selves into history. This figuration of personality in literature manifests a humanist, unabashedly traditionalist signification of the forces of the personal within the context of sweeping changes to China’s culture, politics and society.

---

pianjian” 有什么好?读奥斯丁的《傲慢与偏见》 [What is there in her? On Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 339-40.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 2.



In this introduction, I present the literary, historical and theoretical issues concerning Yang Jiang's contribution to modern Chinese literature, beginning with a formulation of "literary affect." To do this, I synthesize recent work involving the personal, affect, and Chinese literature by Wang Lingzhen, Haiyan Lee and Wu Pei-yi. I then show how the affective dimension to Yang Jiang's life story is a key feature of her cultural iconicity in the post-1992 Chinese literary market. Finally, I outline the central arguments of the chapters to follow.

### **The Personal and Contemporary Chinese Women's Autobiographical Practice**

As Wang Lingzhen has persuasively shown, feminist literary criticism has made the greatest strides towards a recovery of "the personal" as a multiply-determined object of study with specific political and social content.<sup>6</sup> Wang's *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth Century China* theorizes "the personal" as a site for "subjective perspectives, emotional struggles, intersubjective relationships, and psychic and bodily activities."<sup>7</sup> The plaintive poetry of Qiu Jin (1875-1907), writing on mother-daughter relations in Xie Bingying (1906-2000), the category "privacy literature" (*yinsi wenxue*), which emerged under censure in the 1980s but gained market share in the 1990s, and Wang Anyi's (b. 1954) textured, emotive responses to China's entry into capitalism all share a deep investment in the "personal." The personal in its literary manifestation is, for Wang, always an instance of autobiography, which is to be understood as a practice with determinable intention, and not just textual.<sup>8</sup> An important consequence of this proposition is that any women's writing that deals in the personal is

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2, 10.

deemed *zizhuanxing wenxue*, or autobiographical literature.<sup>9</sup> What then, of arguments (Yang Jiang has more than one) against reading fiction as autobiographical practice? Why has the “the personal” dimension of literary works so often been associated with the delineation of an implied authorial self, and what possibility is there to isolate the rhetorical features of “the personal” without recourse to self writing? In what follows, I will first review Wang Lingzhen’s theorization in some detail, especially as a feminist response to deconstructive notions of the discursive self with an important turn towards affect theory. Then, I will consider how Wang’s theorization of the personal could be extended in two dimensions: in its specification within “Chinese history at large,” and in the identification of “literary affect” as a rhetorical repertoire. I argue that the case of Yang Jiang demonstrates the necessity of considering pre-modern patterns of poetry, narrative and biography to understand the cultural and political stakes of “the personal” in twentieth century Chinese literature.

### **Learning from Feminist Approaches: From Self-Writing to Literary Affect**

The tension between efforts to theorize and witness selfhood and the realities of literary practice motivates the critical consciousness behind much of feminist and literary theory. One of the first anthologists of women’s autobiography, Mary G. Mason, discovered that women’s autobiographical writing historically tended to express a self shaped by relations with others, in contrast to the singular, individualist selves that occurred in male-authored texts.<sup>10</sup> The study of women’s autobiography thus took on psychological, philosophical, and political stakes as the representation of selves distinct from, and often devalued by, dominant discourses.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

The political and social advocacy that undergirded this branch of criticism was complicated with the uptake poststructuralist formulations of the self as a discursive object. Paul De Man famously pointed out the “illusion of reference” that seemed to him to screen autobiography scholarship from the fundamental fictiveness underlying all autobiography.<sup>11</sup> In Wang Lingzhen’s readings, for example, an as-yet undefined set of rhetorical features she calls “the personal” is the cue to look for traces of the author in the text, to identify “autobiographical practice.” But the relationship between “the personal” as the literary image of the writing self and the author is not ever really determinable, because the author will always declare the written subjects a self-representation and also maintain, quite rightly, that the writing self is much more than the written self, or else the written self is much more than the writing self. This latter gesture, which de Man calls “de-facement,” always accompanies the cues to autobiographical reading; the combination is the “moment” that autobiography happens. Predicated as it is on the self-image, the moment is, for de Man, “specular”:

The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of the self. The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge – it does not – but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.<sup>12</sup>

Attempts to write of the self – or even, really, to think of the self, in the strong form of the proposition found here – inevitably rely on tropes like metaphor, metonym, and (as I will describe below) prosopopeia, which can never more than partially represent the

---

<sup>11</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): 920, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2906560>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 922.

self. No representation of emotion, experience or relationships – is ever completely an image of the authorial self without bits and pieces of others figured in.

This major result of American deconstruction at first seemed to stymie efforts to link the rhetoric of the personal with the real, lived lives of women writers. Feminist thought responded by evaluating the ethos – especially principles of gender – in “tropical structure.” Essays by enthusiastic critics like Domna Stanton proposed visions of female subjectivity as the fundamental alterity to the symbolic order, a tropic system of nonpresence.<sup>13</sup> Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck and others have worked to modify this discursive definition of female selfhood into a lens for viewing the “tension” between selfhood and textuality, which Wang Lingzhen re-envisioned as an interaction with “dominant cultural codes and discourses.”<sup>14</sup>

[T]he formation of self-identity often requires a double movement: subordination to and appropriation/transgression of dominant cultural codes and discourses. Each reinscription or enacting of the codes rests on a complex process of materialization that involves emotional, bodily, and even unconscious negotiations. Furthermore, the unconscious forces, the body, affects/emotions, and the effects produced by interactions of historical forces also constitute their own excesses, which can neither be fully detected nor wholly included in discourses.<sup>15</sup>

This is a turn away from the linguistic, back towards the body as the physical site of “excesses” that help to determine, but are incompletely expressed by, language. But almost paradoxically, this new focus on the “complex process of materialization” directs Wang back to the text, in the search for representations, tropical as they are, of “desire, feelings, and psychological meanings.”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-15.

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

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

Wang's interest throughout is in the real psychological basis for identity and in the psychological effects of "historical and social forces." To see personal writing, autobiographical or not, as a unique re-combination and transformation of dominant cultural codes and discourses is to uncover how dominant ideology tends to interpellate the subject partly by erasing individual psychological effects.

The problem of mapping psychological effects to textual representation is so difficult that it should come as no surprise that Wang's framework for doing so in the end seems incomplete. I will now briefly review her use of new propositions from affect theory (the turn from the linguistic introduced above) to understand post-1977 Chinese women's autobiographical writing as one part of the psychological signification in response to the emerging logic of consumerism and the lingering effects – personal, social, and historical – of shame.<sup>17</sup> My goal is to understand Yang Jiang's work, especially her fiction, memoirs and essays post-1977, within this theorization and contextualization of the historical and social forces of postsocialist China. To accomplish this, I believe it is necessary to extend Wang's framework, both in its conception of affect and literature, and also in its treatment of the relevant historical contexts. As she herself puts it in her introduction:

The dramatic shifts in the role of the family in modern China make it necessary to situate individual psychological development in a broader social and historical context. The traditional, patriarchal, extended Chinese family was severely attacked during the May Fourth cultural movement as the very origin of social oppression and national backwardness; yet the influence of its moral values and gender codes, such as filial piety, female virtue, and maternal sacrifice has proved

---

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 4, "A Chinese Gender Morality Tale: Politics, Personal Voice, and Public Space in the Early Post-Mao Era" and Chapter 5, "Consumption, Shame, and the Imaginary in Contemporary Autobiographical Practice" *ibid.*, 140-200.

to be long-lasting, not only persisting in rural areas but also repeatedly returning in both official and local movements in the Republic era and after.<sup>18</sup>

One way to look at Yang Jiang's career is as a document of individual psychological development in which the family, filial piety, and female virtue and other "moral values and gender codes" are major motifs signifying yet another "return" to value systems of the Republic era and even earlier – it is in this respect that Wang's theory, which I outline below, must be extended. As I argue in my chapter seven, this is especially true in *We Three* (2003), which re-worked Confucian moral and aesthetic values to portray an affecting, idealized intellectual nuclear family. The historical significance of *We Three* is constituted in its deployment of "moral values and gender codes," the theorization of which calls, as I argue below, for a consideration of the rhetorical forms of "the personal" in Chinese writing, as well as the fraught association between the personal and the historical in Chinese writing.

### **Personal Matters**

Insofar as Wang Lingzhen takes a systematic approach to the tropological structure of Chinese women's autobiographies, she follows a principle that the text exists in *metonymic* relationship to life, as an outgrowth of it.<sup>19</sup> She cites Wang Anyi's experimental autobiographical text *Jishi yu xugou* (Fact and Fiction) as an articulation of this relationship:

Our fictional construction is based upon real relations. Our experiences of any real relationship are like seeds, which, cultivated by our imagination, are going to sprout and blossom, and finally bear fruit on paper.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 11, quoting and translating Wang Anyi 王安忆, *Jishi yu xugou* 记实与虚构 [Actual Reports and Fictional Construction] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 394.

Stephen Owen similarly argued that the governing logic of traditional Chinese literature of remembrance – and indeed, the primary “mode of knowing” in traditional Chinese literature, is metonymic where Western literature is metaphorical.<sup>21</sup> The potential generality of the trope of metonym to Chinese literature must arrest any attempts to associate it with autobiography; Yang Jiang once famously disputed autobiographical readings of her husband’s novel *Wei cheng* (Fortress Besieged, 1947) by likening literary production to flames, while experience is like fuel.<sup>22</sup> The part-to-whole vision yields the result that de Man warned about: all texts are autobiographical in some sense, but not without qualification. The set of cues that leads us to the autobiographical moment could not be subsumed under the metonymic for de Man, who called for us to consider the task of the rhetorical features: to craft the self-image of the author, always in its physical, bodily dimension centered on the facial expressions. This gesture is itself a trope with a name:

Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope’s name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*). Prosopopoeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one’s name, as in the Milton poem, is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration.<sup>23</sup>

De Man’s readings of Milton and Wordsworth find personification in the very setting, as in the bright sun of *The Prelude*.<sup>24</sup> Compare de Man’s master figure of personification with Wang Lingzhen’s task in seeking “the personal”:

---

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, “Ji Qian Zhongshu yu Wei cheng 记钱钟书与《围城》 [On Qian Zhongshu and Fortress Besieged],” in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 134.

<sup>23</sup> Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 926.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 925-6.

Reclaiming the personal in the study of women's lives and autobiographical practice ultimately means examining the complex and varying effects produced by interactions of multiple historical forces in a specific material location, the human subject. Although the personal cannot be viewed as solely the property of a "unique" single individual, it is always a matter for "particular" negotiation between an individual position (already constructed and constructing) and diverse historical forces. With a particularly formed history and mobile state of being, the personal sometimes conforms to, sometimes conflicts with, and sometimes subverts dominant ideologies, and occasionally it initiates new social and political spaces. The autobiographical/personal mode of writing practiced by Chinese women in the modern era provides us with a rich opportunity to retheorize the personal that engages with and subverts the dominant ideology of their time, articulating alternative structures for diverse and gendered experiences.<sup>25</sup>

Wang intends to derive the human subject as a "material location," but I argue that to consider literary production as evidence and knowledge of women's lives, Wang is always already invested in the textual location, a location specified most precisely in this passage at the "/" between autobiographical/personal. All of the bits of text that Wang considers as important evidence of autobiographical practice, from Qiu Jin to Wang Anyi, can be subsumed under the heading: varieties of Chinese prosopopeia. The wide range of figures for the writing person, centered for Wang on the emotion, but never trailing far from physical presence, form her main ground to investigate the complex, and never simply an oppositional, relationship between Chinese women's autobiographical practice and the changing logics of the Chinese literary sphere. The written expression of emotion that personifies character is a specific intersection between "the personal" and figures of prosopopeia that constitutes *literary affect*. Despite an overt introductory concern with the personal as a material site, Wang Lingzhen the literary critic attends to literary affect's capacity to express both internal and intersubjective feelings, and tracks what this means for the reading of Chinese

---

<sup>25</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 22.



history. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century writing of Qiu Jin demonstrates internal conflict associated with the transformation of female identity in the last years of Imperial China; mother-daughter intersubjectivity is a positive value for writers at the beginning of the Republican era but often repudiated by the end of it. Of greatest interest in this regard are Wang's last two chapters, which elucidate the re-emergence of the personal writings in the 1980s and 1990s. As before, writing seen as representing emotion directly was overwhelmingly associated with women writers, though it was now most often referred to as "privacy literature."<sup>26</sup> For Yu Luojin, to author breathy accounts of internal struggle, emotional progress, and sexual activity was a subversive gesture in the early 1980s, when an emerging non-state literary sphere initially preserved a Mao-era prohibition against expressions of "subjective experiences," though even at the time, some critics argued that women's experiences were crucial to a conscious move away from the perceived extremes of collectivism in the past. In the 1990s, though, the acceleration of market reforms helped create an atmosphere in which "privacy literature" was associated not with morality, but with profit.

The logic of consumerism that began to take hold in China in the 1990s did more than simply change the value of "privacy;" the function of "privacy" also transformed.<sup>27</sup> Drawing on Colin Campbell's theorization of "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism," Wang argues that the proliferation of "privacy" titles in the 1990s is evidence of a new regime in which emotions are consumed.<sup>28</sup> Campbell's model of arts

---

<sup>26</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 140-1, 167-8; another source for this history is Kong Shuyu, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers And The Commercialization Of Literary Production in Contemporary China*.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 171-2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-9.

and literature under the logic of consumerism applies the term “fantasy,” in the Lacanian sense, to a rational use of text to cultivate emotion.<sup>29</sup> Unlike the child who begins unconscious of self and through the other of the mirror comes to (mis)understand the self as a whole, art as mirror under the logic of consumerism is a rational choice to identify with the object of gaze, and to treat as real the object in the mirror even while knowing that it is false.<sup>30</sup> The mirror, observes Wang, is not coincidentally a major motif in autobiographical novels by Chen Ran and Lin Bai.<sup>31</sup> Staring into a bathroom Chen takes pleasure in a fantasy that she can blur her gender and other aspects of identity; in the exact same action, Lin fantasizes “a self at war” that can tear itself down to start over again. Both women consume themselves, showing the new “consumerist hedonism,” which is “self-(de)centered, emotional, pleasure-seeking, daydreaming, and self-conscious.”<sup>32</sup> So the self and the mirror image, so the self and the past self, now in a relation that is both narcissistic and nostalgic – this for Wang constitutes the new “general function of women’s autobiographical writing in contemporary China.”<sup>33</sup>

How might the longer arc of history inform this narcissism and this nostalgia? According to Campbell, the origins of consumerism in the West are linked to the gradual substitution of the pleasure in consuming physical sensation to the pleasure of consuming *emotional* sensation -- from eating and drinking, say, to having fashionable

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 179-81

<sup>30</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 181-2; Wang quotes from Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Blackwell, 1987), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 182-6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

clothes.<sup>34</sup> In Campbell's theory, the "Sentimentalism" of Rousseau, Arminianism, and other protestant revolts (this ethic defines itself in contradistinction to what Weber's "Protestant ethic") constitute steps in the evolution of the romantic ethic into the ethic at the center of consumerism.<sup>35</sup> Gradually, the longing for sublime value in religious signs gave way to the longing that brings pleasure in self-consumption. Campbell calls this "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism."<sup>36</sup>

Inspired by this account, Wang attempts to explain the affective forces at work in Chinese consumerism. The simplicity of her theory, and its inability to account for an older generation writer working in the new consumerist age, should not detract from its perceptive observations of the evidence of affective forces in some of the best Chinese women writers of the 1980s and 1990s, especially Yu Luojin, Chen Ran, Lin Bai, and Wang Anyi.

First, Wang turns to the shame affect as modeled by the psychologist Silvan Tomkins to help her explain the resistance to "autonomous imaginative hedonism." Shame is a defense mechanism, according to Tomkins, reducing interest and joy, but not negating them completely.<sup>37</sup> In artistic terms, shame drives the imagination to re-create the interest and joy that was lost. Shame can operate parallel to the market forces – both lead to fantasies that assist emotional satisfaction, but when shame drives the artist to re-create their interests and joys with great attention to particularity, it resists

---

<sup>34</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 186; For more on Campbell's work in context, see Gary Cross, "Consumerism," in *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, vol. 5, 5 (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), pp. 77–88.

<sup>35</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 187; Wang quotes from Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 194.

<sup>36</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 187; For a full version to the concept, see Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 77-96.

<sup>37</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 189; also see Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*, vol. II: The Negative Affects (New York: Springer, 1963), 123.

the market forces tending to erase personal difference. Nostalgia has market value, but narcissism is a liability. Wang Anyi's autobiographical writing exemplifies the tension: "Readers of *Years of Sadness* are repeatedly diverted from a purely pleasure-seeking experience to an experience of disquiet caused by pressing questions regarding history, emotional existence, and the formation of gendered self."<sup>38</sup>

To model the shame that Wang Lingzhen finds imbued in fiction by Wang Anyi, Chen Ran, Lin Bai and to be representative of literary fiction in China generally, she identifies the common thread of shame over the disappointment in the mother figure. The repudiation of the mother as a positive value, which Wang documented early on within revolutionary literature, haunts Wang, Chen, Lin and other members of the generation born after the founding of the PRC. All three record impressions of weak, cold, distant or absent mothers.

No longer confined by any socially sanctioned values or collectively demanded experiences, women writers in the 1990s were able to articulate their personal affective/defective mode(s) of being, but the affective mode(s) they expressed, for instance shame, drew them even closer to each other for an inescapable, shared experience of the past. The dominant socialist ideology, revolutionary ethic, and gender and family relationships promoted in the Maoist era are revealed to have had an irreversible psychic impact on the childhood of young women like these heroines, contributing to the shame-affective sense of being. Although the daughters in the autobiographical texts attain as adults a certain understanding of the historical situations their mothers faced, they nevertheless cannot stop feeling anxious about their own existences, a mode of being caused by the lack or loss of the love object at an early stage.<sup>39</sup>

Anxiety and shame is here the main impetus to autobiography, and it is identifiable as a main "mode" in much contemporary Chinese women's autobiography. To cope with the past, authors repeatedly renegotiates life and self. Wang notes that in every case, ideal

---

<sup>38</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters*, 192.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

mother figures are important motifs demonstrating the textual re-creation of the self.<sup>40</sup>

We should recognize that in identifying the mother figure in multiple autobiographical works, Wang has delineated a main feature prosopopeia among Cultural Revolution generation of daughters. The longing that drives self-imaging (or self-consumption, to acknowledge Wang's proposition that the logic of consumption inheres deeply in 1990s literary autobiography) is, according to this view, a *personal* one that *exceeds* the limits of expression set up under newly dominant ideology of consumerism.

Wang implies that the excess of personal that evades the logic of consumerism continues to have political implications, even in the 1990s, and presumably, beyond:

To write autobiographically in the 1990s was first of all to realize the potential value of writing as a commodity for public consumption, to consume the self in an imaginative and creative way, and to address lack or loss in the past, not necessarily in order to get over it but to recognize the extent to which it has defined the self. To write autobiographically in the 1990s was also to extend the gendered personal mode of writing into the historical and social causes that shape intimate experiences. Finally, to write in this way was to refuse to let go of one's past without reflection and to resist a kind of total consumption that could destroy all boundaries.<sup>41</sup>

These concluding remarks demonstrate some of the limits and achievements of Wang's attention to women's writing. One crucial proposition is that consumerism shapes not only the motivation to work, but controls the logic of literary affect among younger writers. The characters, and even the setting (Wang attends to the use of mirrors, especially) are all prosopopeias operating under a master principle of "self consumption." A second powerful notion is that to write in the gendered personal mode remains its own kind of resistance to total consumption, and is always, in its choice of sites for autobiographical tropes, or prosopopeia figures, revelative of historical and

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 195-200.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 200.

social forces – in Wang’s case study, the continuing trauma of the Cultural Revolution and its damage to the family.

The first limitation of Wang’s theory is that despite several brilliant individual readings and an identification of the motif of the mother, Wang has not produced a full or even preliminary list of the rhetorical features of the personal. There was no move to confirm her initial gambit, after Wang Anyi, that the literary representations of the personal tend towards a metonymic, rather than metaphoric, mode of knowing, remembering and expressing. The second limitation is that despite Wang’s initial reminder that traditional Chinese moral values like female virtue and filial piety reappear, and her deployment of this fact to explain the initial moralism that censured privacy writing in the early 1980s, there remains much room to consider how a traditional Chinese form of the personal might express itself in the life and work of Yang Jiang, or other culturally conservative history, literature and arts, which have been popular (and profitable) products as much as privacy literature in the reform era and afterwards.

Developing a preliminary list of the rhetorical features of the personal and Chinese goes hand in hand with an overview of dominant discourses in traditional Chinese literature. There is an increasingly robust literature taking up this task, with the major caveat that they do not exchange terms and propositions across historical period – thus much of the important work which has been done on the Ming and Qing arts and literature has not been influential on studies of Republican and PRC China, and vice versa. A rare exception and invaluable resource to this project is the 2007 study *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, by Haiyan Lee.

What follows is a preliminary attempt to take a longer view of the historical forces that shape Chinese discourses of the personal centered on the term *qing*, an ancient term descriptive of affective disposition.

### **The Discourse of *Qing***

As Haiyan Lee puts it, the discourse of *qing* came to assert “radical subjectivity” over the course of the late Ming (16<sup>th</sup> century – 1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1911), and consequently became the undergirdings for 20<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment and revolutionary “structures of feeling” in the Republican era (1911-1949). This key term is of course a translation of Raymond Williams’ own diagnosis of how media produce values out of the human venture: “Williams uses *feeling* loosely to refer to emergent values and meanings and lived experiences. The key point is that feeling is not opposed to thought, but rather embodies thought. In other words, feeling has structures that can be subjected to rational analysis.”<sup>42</sup>

Contemporary moral philosophy has taken up the task, reports Haiyan Lee as she takes up some of their terms for translation. Late imperial and Republican-era “Mandarin ducks and butterflies” novels were meant for the last generation of Chinese readers possessing their own answer to the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s “traditional” or “heroic self,” which defines itself wholly by membership in family and lineage.<sup>43</sup> This generation had also for some time nursed a sense of “modern” or “emotivist” self conforming to Charles Taylor’s concept of “inwardness,” the

---

<sup>42</sup> Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 15.

expression of which is affect.<sup>44</sup> Passages like chapter 23 of *Hongloumeng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), with its vivid description of affective contagion via textual media, suggests that Taylor's "inwardness," used to describe Romantic poetry, is a good term for the Chinese senses of interiority that emerged in Chinese fiction as early as the Ming dynasty.<sup>45</sup> Like ethnographers of the relationship between language, emotion, and self, Haiyan Lee has to step lightly between defining the structure of emotion in target cultures and critique of the structures their own cultures assume.<sup>46</sup> Affect theory works to show that the close association between emotion and identity is an Enlightenment conviction blind to certain features of social structure. Only with this proposition firmly in mind can we spot the crucial transformation of this association in China; the public for late Qing *did not consider personal writing to reveal authorial identity*.<sup>47</sup> Later publics for May Fourth literature, though, would begin to do so. Lee coins the term "Confucian structure of feeling" to specify the mixed-mode approach that held sway in the first type of public.<sup>48</sup> "The enlightenment structure of feeling" names the "emotivist self" that members of the May Fourth Movement translated from their own experiences of Western modernity.<sup>49</sup> Both structures of feeling were active at once in 1920s China. Both were then "largely overcome by a more hegemonic mode," the "revolutionary structure of feeling":

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 11-2, 15-6.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 12; see also Sophie Volpp, "Wu Lanzheng's Jiang Heng Qiu," *Journal of Theater Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 113-138, <http://140.112.58.221/journal/sec-8/113-138.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2012); Ann Waltner, "On Not Becoming a Heroine: Lin Daiyu and Cui Ying-ying," *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1989): 113-138.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 12-3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

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



Promoted primarily by intellectuals and writers aligned with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (KMT), the revolutionary structure of feeling negates the radical implications of the enlightenment structure while recuperating elements of the Confucian structure. Its best known literary articulation, “revolution plus romance,” is an attempt to resolve the basic conflict of modernity between the heroic and the everyday as well as to address the paradoxical status of emotion in the modern episteme. Love now “supplements” subjectivity, but it is also sternly called upon to “efface its supplementary role” so that it does not contest the hegemony of the collective project.<sup>50</sup>

“Love” characteristically slips into Lee’s rhetoric as the special focus of her deployment of affect theory, present in all three Chinese structures of feeling. By tracking just a single category of affect in heavy traffic over the cultural space that opened up between Chinese and Western reading publics over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Haiyan Lee is able to show how the Chinese structures of feeling are neither homologous replies to Western ones, nor “the ultimate site of alterity,” but rather “complex processes of hybridization.”[16]

In my own study, a more expansive approach to the varieties of affect, in contexts that span criticism, short fiction, memoir, novel, and prose essay, helps us recover the full complexity of one writing voice, Yang Jiang (1911-2012). What is at stake in the case of Yang Jiang is the fate of values churning through 1920s and 30s China among the Confucian and enlightenment structures of feeling after the revolutionary structure of feeling came to dominate the scene. Yang Jiang is among a small set of 20<sup>th</sup> century writers who began careers in the 1930s, remained in China during the years of revolution and CPP rule under Mao Zedong (1949-1976), and turned to writing again in a new literary sphere undergoing rapid market-based structural changes. Yang Jiang’s long career tracks the dramatic transformations to structures of feeling and reading

---

<sup>50</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 16; Lee quotes from Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory : Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

publics before, during and after the Mao years, and shows us vividly how, since 1976, representations of emotion are directly attached to the interiority of the self *and* traditional social groups *and* the “collective project” of Chineseness *all at once*. This last feature refers first of all to China as a modern nation-state, for it is the association between emotion and national identity that Lee associates particularly with the revolutionary structure of feeling. Exigencies of Yang Jiang's life story (Yang Jiang's husband, Qian Zhongshu, is said to be among the foremost experts on Song dynasty (960-1279) poetry and poetics in the twentieth century, and she herself was an avid reader of Tang (612-907) and Song literature) reminds us, that an even older structure of Chinese feeling once existed, one in which identity, emotion, and language had an even more complex relationship, full of paradoxes set up by the generic distinctions between the poetic and the historic.

As the title of Lee's work indicates, she tracks a single type of affect, love, in narrative and critical writing. Plot structures involving marriage and affairs, and scenes in these plots in which climatic decisions over how to marry and whether and how to have an affair, form the main sequence of her readings of Chinese narrative. Marriage, especially contentment in marriage and reconciliation of marriage choice with parental arrangement, is a theme in Yang Jiang's fiction, as I show in my chapters 3 and 5, and in her autobiographical essays, as I show in chapter 4 and 6. Affairs are a theme in some of her stories, as we see in chapter 3. But love, in either the romantic or the revolutionary senses, is not among the major manifestations of the personal in its emotive, affective, and intersubjective dimensions – Yang Jiang draws on a wider discourse of *qing* that emphasizes female virtue and filial piety. As I show in chapter 4,

her most important contribution to world literature portrays a modulated shame and remonstrative critique – summed up in the ancient expression *yuan er bu nu* (plaintive without complaining) – associated with the large-scale traumas of the Cultural Revolution. Far from either the romantics and revolutionaries in the first half of the twentieth century, or the self-consuming hedonist artists of the last decade of the same century, Yang Jiang makes use of deeply personal tropes quite beyond the scope of “love,” but not, as I hope to show in the chapters that follow, beyond the scope of *qing*. What Yang Jiang’s life and work suggests to many readers is the constraint and placidity that was a virtue among Confucian literati of the distant past, before the cult of Qing. To elucidate this constraint structure of feeling, and to enumerate a few of the rhetorical features of it, I will turn to Wu Pei-yi’s pioneering account of personal writing from early China into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *The Confucian’s Progress*.

### **The Self Constrained**

Wu Pei-yi’s consideration of autobiography emerging out of historiographical and memorial traditions yields a concept of a “the self constrained,” a writing voice that lists only important experiences, never a sense of what Wu calls “personal.” Throughout the book, Wu shows us that by “personal” he means direct representations of emotions, both as an interior matter of the mind and in bodily expression. In other words, Wu views affect as signs of selfhood, and so takes the very mindset that Charles Taylor associates with the Romantic, and which Haiyan Lee thought it so important to deconstruct. Thus, when Wu Pei-yi builds the case for a “golden age” of autobiography in the late Ming that gave way to the advent of the sentimental novel during the early Qing, he is tracing a fluorescence of literary affect in self-writing that couples with the

late Ming and early Qing “cult of *qing*.” The initial state of autobiography in Chinese is relatively free of affect. Examining an example of Song dynasty self-accounting by a hermit named Song Wu, Wu Pei-yi discovers what he believe may be the only eyewitness account of the Mongol fleet’s failed invasion of Japan in 1281:

Assaulted by hail, rainstorms, and a strong gale, the ships could not moor. Most were dashed to pieces by the raging waves. Fortunately my ship survived, but it drifted for some time among Korean coastal islands. I was taken ill: having lost all of the hair on my head, I came home just a bag of bones.<sup>51</sup>

Song wrote his account at the age of eighty, fully realizing that the naval battle was the most intense in his life. And yet, there is so little “sense of his participation,” says Wu Pei-yi, “that a reader would not know until almost the end of the narration that the autobiographer was on one of the ships.”<sup>52</sup> This is not just a matter of Song Wu not perceiving himself as a protagonist in the grand drama of the Mongol invasion, but a representative example of events narrated with less intensity than the modern reader deduces in the writing subject. A more famous example is the autobiography of the captured general Wen Tianxiang (1236-1283), who witnessed the final destruction of the Song Chinese navy at the hands of the Mongols two years earlier, in 1279. In his autobiography, Wen only reports the dates of events, coldly narrating the collapse of the world he knew. In his poetry and poem prefaces, though, Wen reveals the intensity belied by his autobiography; one line runs “a lone loyal minister sitting in a northern ship, I looked southward and wept bitterly.”[11]

Wu Pei-yi calls this phenomenon a “total suppression of the personal,” but strictly speaking, what Wu points out in every case is the representation of a bodily, emotive

---

<sup>51</sup> Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 10.

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

response to events. Or more precisely, Wu points to the lack of such an expression for emotion in writing that cues us to its intention as autobiography. Prosopopeia figures seldom occur alongside overt efforts and self-imagining. Or perhaps better, *alethia*, the plainspoken prose description of social category and narration of event, is a rhetorical structure implying self-image in absence, punctuated by rare, but extremely visceral personification: “having lost all of the hair on my head, I came home just a bag of bones.”

What Wu Pei-yi seeks is an accounting for the varieties of the personal that he *does* find, and an explanation for why representation of affective response is not a major element of Chinese autobiography until 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, after which time annalistic autobiography once again becomes standard. Wu traces one strand of affect in self-written biography, the genre whose originating model is the whimsical “Biography of Mister Five Willows” by the recluse poet Tao Qian (365-427): “He liked to read, but never sought a thorough comprehension; every time he found coincidence of his ideas with those in books, he was so pleased that he would forget food. He was addicted to wine, but being poor he was not always able to obtain it.”<sup>53</sup> The desires, loves, addictions that find articulation here were not original to Tao Qian – in fact, his piece has the quality of a pastiche, says Wu.<sup>54</sup> What is original is the use of affect rhetoric from the biography form (*chuan*) to create a text about a subject with a false name whom readers will understand to be the writer – the effect is to increase the resources available to autobiography. In the hands of Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), Li Zhi (1527-1602), and many others from the 17<sup>th</sup> century forward, the self-written biography

---

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

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

became a genre unto itself, the turn-to method for emotive self narration. By two kinds of side route, one rooted in hermeticism and one in poetry, a discourse of affect entered into a zone that Wu has laid out for “autobiography,” and for this reason is associated directly with “self” as a pre-critical concept.<sup>55</sup>

Such examples set up a counter-current to the thesis that Chinese autobiographical writing exhibits a “constrained self.” This countercurrent is no more or less than an inventory of affective responses in literature: love and, as well as shame, struggle, and contentment – all, incidently, also tied to loss and love. Intense, physical shame erupts in the self-account of Sima Qian, though not in future self-accounts by dynastic historians; historiography prefers affective vacuum.<sup>56</sup> Desire for hermetic self-cultivation drives a Chinese answer to *bildung* in the form of spiritual autobiography that dates from post-Han Daoists like Wang Chong (27-100) and Ge Hong (283-343) through the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> A distinctive and memorable form of contentment seems first to have occurred in a memorial essay by Li Qingzhao (1084-1151).<sup>58</sup> The essay forms the postface to a catalog of the vast collection of books, paintings and antiques she and her husband, Zhao Mingcheng (1081-1129), had amassed in their home in the Song capital before the Jurchen invasion of 1126. “After he came home we would sit next to each other perusing and admiring the texts while slowly munching fruit,” writes Li in nostalgic memory for days before the capital, her husband and their collection had all been lost. Li’s preface marks the first instance of the everyday in a classical Chinese autobiography, argues Wu Pei-yi. Combining the language of the song

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 45-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 65-7.

lyric (*ci*), of which Li was one of the top two or three masters of the Song dynasty, with a reserved self-confidence that carried forward a tradition of frugality and prudence – in other words, what the reading publics of the time thought of as virtues appropriate to her gender – Li Qingzhao produced a distinctive addition to the inventory of Chinese affect that could be associated with self accounting. Biography and poetry alike provided resources to compare the history of the self with historical predecessors, to recombine language as tropes, especially literary allusion, to fit individual circumstance, and the solemn duty to convey the distinctiveness of experience, the uniqueness of personality as a mix of positive and negative qualities.

After the fall of the Ming dynasty (1644), Wu argues, the kind of autobiographical innovations surveyed above ceased. The new Qing dynasty (1644-1911) celebrated annalistic self-accounts, but,

If autobiographies are, or should be, in the representative words of a recent critic, “private, meditative, nostalgic, and seemingly informal, preoccupied more often than not with the personal life, and imbued with sentiment and a kind of wistfulness,” then hardly anything I have examined that was written in China between 1680 and 1900, with only one exception, would pass the test. But what an exception!<sup>59</sup>

The exception, Wu continues, is *Fu sheng liu ji* (Six Records of a Floating Life), the memoir of a common secretary, Shen Fu, and his wife Chen Yun. *Fu sheng*, “floating life,” is the controlling figure for a companionate marriage that detached from the orthodox social category of patrilineal clan, and responded to the resulting adversity by mining deeply into emotive selfhood via poetry, drama, gardening, and interior design. Chen Yun’s death marks the beginning of the last major reversal of the floating

---

<sup>59</sup> Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 236; Wu quotes from Paul Jay, “What’s the Use? Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography,” *Biography* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 51.

life as plot-structure; soon after Shen Fu returns home, begins a new career, and learns to live with his beloved wife only in memory.

*Six Records of a Floating Life* is the major exception to the dearth of “sentiment” and “wistfulness” in autobiography, if we understand autobiography as a mode authorized by its signature. Wu comments in a footnote that “this kind of autobiographical sensibility, no longer welcome in self-written biography, found its fullest expression in the great eighteenth-century novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.”<sup>60</sup>

Thus to Wu, “the personal” is a quality long present in classical Chinese poetry, but curiously absent from classical Chinese autobiography. The record-keeping or ritual purpose of self accounts constrained self-representation. But two factors mitigate this tendency and form the basis for Chinese figures of prosopopeia: first, Tao Qian’s adoption of the *zhuan* form in historical prose bestows a separate surface for the face of the author than the image whose signature is marked as such. The use of a different, whimsical name like “Mr. Five Willows” cues the departure from self-imaging, a defacement, even as it functions to produce the image that would be most indelibly associated with Tao Qian – such is the “whirligig” of prosopopeia in Chinese.

Second, classical Chinese poetry, particularly the *ci* or lyric forms (and we should include *yuefu*, or music bureau poetry composed in the *shi* style, under this heading as well) supplies a language for personal, emotive remembrance. The Chinese lyric tradition endorses varieties of plaintiveness, and specifically genders this form of the personal; much thought has been given to the feminine gender of the implied lyricist. Li

---

<sup>60</sup> Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress*, 256, note 2.



Qingzhao is a paradigmatic example of woman writer strategically taking up the language lyric for prose remembrance:

Since she is the first Chinese woman autobiographer, the question will always remain as to what role her femininity played in the writing of the postface. One could argue that her readiness in reporting her personal life and the circumstantial descriptiveness of the narration owed more to her being a practitioner of *ci*-type poetry than to anything else. A *shi* writer often maintains distance and impersonality, while a finer and more direct representation of feelings is expected of the *ci*. Being a woman may have paradoxically enabled her to insert so much autobiography into a postface, for ostensibly she writes only about the events in her husband's life that led to the making of the annotated anthology, not about herself. The single most significant fact of her life, her indisputable excellence in *ci*-type poetry, is never mentioned. She could, if she must, justify her presence in the narrative because she was a part of the story.<sup>61</sup>

I will show in this dissertation just how important is the production of literary affect in the feminine, Chinese lyric mode to Yang Jiang's remembrances, especially her two most famous memoirs, *Six Records* and *We Three*, but also throughout her prose essays. *Six Records* draws very explicitly on the discourse of *qing* in Chinese poetry, but transforms it to record the patterns of shame and complaint among intellectuals experience of the Cultural Revolution. *We Three* begins with an account of the deaths of Yang Jiang's husband and daughter that is imbued with poetic language. Amazing as it is to compare a twentieth century figure to one from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Yang Jiang as much as Li Qingzhao is enabled by her gender to insert autobiography into texts that are about others. Yang Jiang's best known texts are often thought to speak *for* others: the traumatized intellectuals of Beijing, the son-in-law who committed suicide, the long-suffering and hard working husband and daughter who passed away. This largely helps prevent her writing from accusations of self-centeredness. And yet, there is always a

---

<sup>61</sup> Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 67.

*presence* in the narratives, a presence with a certain range of emotion, intersubjectivity, tone and everyday detail.

In Yang Jiang's work, these rhetorical structures are a hybrid product of the structures of feeling outlined by Haiyan Lee – Confucian, Enlightenment and revolutionary – carried out during the time of major transformations to the dominant cultural codes and discourses as outlined in Wang Lingzhen's work. I wish to take up Wang's historical framework but shift the critical gaze from the material site to the literary. Literary affect is the image the *feeling* self, the prosopopeia figures centered on facial expression, but expansive, merging outward into the setting. In Chinese literature (and probably more generally in world literature) literary affect becomes the richer the less it respects boundaries of period or genre – thus Yang Jiang profitably moves between fiction and essay, taking up unity of action from the former and deep interiority from the other without deviating from a focus on character description.

But the use of classical Chinese figures in post-Mao personal writing brings up many questions about critical function of literary affect. To what degree do these indicate a resurgence of traditional moral values and gender codes, such as filial piety and female virtue in the current Chinese literary market? How is the complex deployment of pre-enlightenment, Confucian, enlightenment, and revolutionary structures of feeling a negotiation with dominant modes of the production of meaning? This dissertation tracks Yang Jiang's literary career during its movement from the margin to the center of dominant modes of discourse, and so forms a case study that begins to answer these questions. Following, I will consider her life story as a case – that is to say, I envision her life trajectory as an intertextual entity that follows the

model of exemplary biography outline in the work of historian Joan Judge. Literary affect is, in my view, the source of the exemplary biography's power and influence. Following Judge, we may see that Yang Jiang's life story negotiates both subversion and alignment with dominant modes of discourse, depending on what literary affective features are stressed. There is a way to tell Yang Jiang's story so that she is a liberatory, defiant figure of resistance. There is also a way to tell her story so that she is an obedient citizen, loyal wife and devoted mother.

### **An Eminent Lady for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Yang Jiang's life story has become a twenty-first century, multimedia *lie nü zhuan* – “biography of an eminent lady.” She was, and is: obedient and dutiful to her mother and father, one of eight talented children, and devoted wife to Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998) – the greatest talent of the noted Wuxi Qians, even if he did have a deplorable penchant for vernacular fiction. She is also mother to Qian Yuan (1937-1995), a “model soldier,” former member of the Red Guards, later professor of English at Beijing Normal University. Such social categories appear or don't appear in life writing on Yang Jiang, depending on the context and what category of preeminent value is being promulgated, and by whom. In traditional Chinese life writing, these are the primary materials recorded.

Also pertaining to the Yang Jiang *fabula* is a long and complex c.v., including educational records and literary production. Not coincidentally, this is a metonymic allegory of intellectual history between 1911 and the present. First educated in American and French Christian missionary schools, Yang Jiang and her sisters were among an early generation of women to master English, French and other European

languages. At the homes of their relatively progressive gentry-level parents, located mostly in the vibrant cultural centers of the lower Yangtze River delta (the Jiangnan), this generation of women was often encouraged to read, exercise, and work to build up a China that could stand up to the coercion and oppression of the Western powers and Japan. Where a previous generation of late-imperial girls had pursued study abroad, mostly in Japan, in Yang Jiang's generation more women than ever studied at native Chinese universities, both in the capital, and distributed around the Jiangnan, like Soochow University, where Yang Jiang graduated in 1934. In 1935, Yang Jiang traveled to England for study abroad together with her new husband, Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998). There, she read widely, but never sat for a degree. After two years in England and one in France, the couple returned, together with thousands of young adults who had been abroad, to a China on the brink of a decade of war and revolution.

To highlight the unity of the plot-structure that undergirds the *vitae* from this point forward, I will frame my synthesis of many biographical accounts as typically staged as a tragicomic drama in four acts. Act 1, set in Shanghai between 1938 and 1950, tells of how Yang Jiang survived war with her family, and even wrote three hit plays. Act 2, set in and around Beijing between 1951 and 1971, tells of how Yang Jiang raised a daughter and held together some semblance of a career, even though she was branded as ideologically suspect, alienated by slow, tortuous degrees from her colleagues and the larger sense of *comunidad* that she had formerly felt in the city of Beijing. Act 3, the most intense and best remembered act, tells of how Yang Jiang and her husband were among thousands of urban professionals exiled to *gan xiao* or "cadre schools," rural work camps ostensibly built for class enemies to gain "re-education

through labor,” but also as part of much larger political deformations that rocked Chinese leadership at all levels during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Act four, which is not yet complete, tells of how Yang Jiang returned with her husband to Beijing in 1972, was rehabilitated in 1974, and in 1979 began to publish again, to great acclaim.

These social categories and attached c.v. are enough material to justify a *lie nü zhuan*, particularly when we understand the role of memorial literature in testifying to membership in virtuous social groups. But this data only hints at the ways the narrative’s major reversals drive changes to the subject with respect to targeted, specific story values. This is accomplished with a third component of the Yang Jiang biography, the affective. Here we see the story of a person’s emotional development – or not so much development as emotional sequence, since “development” implies a model of *bildungsroman* which only imperfectly fits a situation of hybrid rhetorical forms. The affective dimension of the Yang Jiang story appears as a sequence of portraits – including many close-ups, some special costumes, and more than a few “lost in the crowd” shots. The portraits are physical-verbal icons rendered in mixed classical and modern Chinese. Take for example chapter names from Wu Xuezhao’s 2008 authorized oral history of Yang Jiang: *ku zai ci bie li* (“How harsh! This parting”), *Wo shi yi ge ling* (“I am a ‘zero’”), and *Sheng le wo yi ge* (“And I alone remain”).<sup>62</sup> The first utterance is a direct representation of emotion: *ku* – harsh, cruel, painful. *Zai*, the second complement to the emotion word, makes the utterance an interjection, and implies a voice, even a speaking face consumed by the expression of feeling. *Ku zai* is lyrical language of lament, resonant with many faces and many voices that lamented before,

---

<sup>62</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past] (Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2008), 67.

some historical, some poetic, some fictional. The deployment here is easily identifiable as a line from a poem by Yang Jiang's husband, Qian Zhongshu, who wrote to express his feelings on having to leave his wife and daughter in Shanghai and go assist his father in Hunan province. "This parting" directs our attention to the bonds between parting subjects, and highlights the strength of the bonds with the sympathetic suffering produced in the proper reader. The Yang Jiang icon suggested here is that of the devoted wife from the eyes of a devoted, and erudite, husband. In communion over the support that literature lends to life, the couple manages the adversity of the contemporary with the language, and implied experience and voice, of a cultural past. The line also implies a Yang Jiang alone – we perceive her as a relational being, a figure of *qing*, the feelings inflamed and activated by the reversal that is parting, and so we detect that she is painfully alone.

"I am a 'Zero'" draws a very different portrait – one of alienation from intellectual and even basic social discourse during the 1950s. The figure of the zero, the circle – her own face, close up? – erases the relationality present in her husband's gaze, and suggests the passive role she played in the political and social currents of the early People's Republic of China. The zero, the circle, by contrast is whole and round of its own, suggesting how readers often see the Communist years as a kind of tempering of the men and women of the enlightenment generation – those that would survive the political storms learned to embrace the "zero" state and pour rhetoric's of interiority into that zero.

The last line, "And I alone, remain," restores a sense of individuality and agency, and provides the emotional satisfaction of continuing the Yang Jiang's drama past acts

two and three. Like the messengers that confront Job with news of his family's destruction, Yang Jiang in the fourth act of her story becomes a testifying agent, speaking in memoriam for her father, her husband, her daughter, and all the affective transactions that affirmed and informed her perception of the human experience. Paradoxically, it is this project of cataloging parting, struggle, exile, old age, and death that seals her reputation as a cool, if benign, observer of life. Readers remark in the same breath both that Yang Jiang's style, like her personality, is a model of understatement, and that her 2003 memoir *Women sa* (We Three) had the power to make them cry.<sup>63</sup> Two principles of affect are at work here. First, prose as portraiture can be called unsentimental even if the physical features of the faces are obviously in pain. It is a technical problem of the field to show, and not tell, feeling. Second, the saddest stories are the most pleasurable. It is as mourning literature recounting the painful history of the marginalization of Chinese intellectuals that Yang Jiang's story gains the affective intensity to become exemplary biography sufficiently intimate to resonate with the contemporary reading public. A particularly popular Yang Jiang essay is "The Cloak of Invisibility" (1983), the central figure of which resonates particularly with young twenty-first century readers.<sup>64</sup> They hope to live lives somehow fulfilling of potential but at the same time "invisible" in a world under surveillance.<sup>65</sup> Like the character "Old Color" in Wang Anyi's novel *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (1995),

<sup>63</sup> A particularly strong example is Cao Wuwei 曹无为, "Du Women sa 读《我们仨》 [On We Three]," *Jiaoyu wenbao*, no. 9 (2004): 67, <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, "Yin shen yi 隐身衣 [The Cloak of Invisibility]," in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 192–196; the essay is translated into English in *Yang Jiang, Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*, trans. Geremie Barmé (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989), 127–136.

<sup>65</sup> Canqing lisu 殇情离素 (pseudonym), "Wo ye yao tuo jian yin shen yi 我也要觅件《隐身衣》 [I also want to try on the cloak of invisibility]," November 9, 2009, <http://www.xs91.net/read.php?tid-15120.html/> (accessed May 31, 2012). See also my chapter 6.

such readers draw interest and inspiration from artifacts of pre-1949 bourgeois, cosmopolitan Chinese culture; they are nostalgic at just the moment the old society has begun drop finally away from them. In the Yang Jiang story they find voices from beyond the grave, speaking to them of filial devotion, pleasure in learning, contentment in anonymity, and the emotional expression of selfhood that results from the long tradition of such devotion, pleasure and contentment.

The nostalgia that Yang Jiang invokes is for an elegance disrupted by the coarseness of revolution – an affective cosmopolitanism that places itself as the flipside of revolutionary discourse. A moment of conflict from 1952, written by Wu Xuezhao according to Yang Jiang’s oral account, illustrates this characteristic:

Back then, many female comrades had begun to follow the trend of wearing Lenin uniforms, which were gray, with long cloth pants, two buttons on the front, and a cloth sash, tight around the waist. Yang Jiang was still her old self – she’d ride in a pedicab in a Shanghai *cheongsam*, with a parasol. This of course provoked many stares on the campus of Tsinghua University. Once, as she was stepping down from a pedicab, parasol in hand, a progressive woman approached and grabbed her parasol. “And what is this?” she asked. Yang Jiang, knowing full well what she meant, smiled and did not answer.<sup>66</sup>

Parasol, pedicab and Shanghai *cheongsam* in the passage above are outward signs of the admixture of cultural tropes from both old Peking and Republican-era Shanghai, and these direct us to an affective interaction that plays out over and over in contemporary Chinese testimonial narrative: Republican-era cultural identity is violently challenged by the other set of signs – gray Lenin suits, sashed tight over a bold, decisive new revolutionary identity that snatches the parasol. The core of the anecdote is in Yang Jiang’s response to gestures of aggression – she smiles and says

---

<sup>66</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 253.



nothing. The smile signifies a gesture from 1952, but is aimed at producing a response in readers of 2008.

How does Yang Jiang's "smile" signify a practice – that is to say, following Wang Lingzhen's feminist use of the term, how is she negotiating her life and identity in history, and what does that reveal about the changing logics of the Chinese literary sphere? I would like to suggest that this anecdote contains what Joan Judge calls a "paradigmatic moment in the past," here "reappropriated" "in the political service of the present and future."<sup>67</sup> In Judge's archive, early modern women's biographies could be deployed to endorse Confucian exemplars of femininity and criticize the course of modernization, to criticize Confucian principle and endorse modernization, or some range of endorsement and criticism in between. Yang Jiang in the moment of her smile embodies one of the in-betweens, a new, 21<sup>st</sup>-century kind of "archeomodern."<sup>68</sup> That is to say, she extols certain historical forces associated with the pre-PRC past and vilifies the more recent PRC past as a metonym for moral degradation. Her person-figure is equipped pedicab, the parasol, the *cheongsam*, which form literary accessories to the affective center, the silent smile. The accessories indicate an open attitude to the evolution of Confucian principle in the Republic era, but the smile affirms a much older *ethos: jiezhi*, the female virtues of decorum, propriety, and refinement. Yang Jiang is in this moment "archeo," re-appropriating an archaic Chinese virtue, yet "modern," open to the hybrid Chinese-Western cosmopolitanism most associated with Shanghai in the Republic era. Moreover, her smile is one element in what is clearly a power struggle. To

---

<sup>67</sup> Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History : the Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the 2008 reader seeking an understanding of Chinese history for future self-creation, the message is clear: affective control wins out over violence, decorum is an achievement over discourtesy.

From this perspective, literary affect accesses the personal as a material site, and also figures wide and disparate discourses of history and gender into the post-2000 Chinese literary landscape. The case of Yang Jiang suggests the literary production of a post-2000 “archeomodern” chronotype, a re-emergence of traditional moral value and feminine virtue that once again places femininity at the center of political and cultural questions.

### **Outline**

Yang Jiang’s plays and translations have been excluded from this story for time and space considerations. In chapter two, I take a close-up view of Yang Jiang’s critical efforts as examples of the preservation of enlightenment and Confucian structures of feeling within the regime of the revolutionary structure of feeling. After the Cultural Revolution, when institutions of intimacy – especially marriage and the nuclear family – reasserted themselves, Yang Jiang began a new career of creative writing that is prefigured in her 1950s writings on character in fiction. Yang Jiang’s collection of short stories *Dao ying ji* (The Reverse Mirror, 1979) demonstrates her commitment to a realist fiction that explored the emotional and moral character of women searching for alternatives to stressful and unfair marriages and families. The stories are a triumph for affective knowledge that collectively argues for moral, even utopian vision of social roles and feelings acting in accord. The tropes of hope from these visions of the period before 1949 transfer along the axis of affect as a component of character design in Yang

Jiang's most well-known works, the essays of the 1980s and 90s. *Six Records of a Cadre School*, her memoir of exile, functions as testimonial literature in its deployment of the subdued, everyday affect previously used by Li Qingzhao and Shen Fu to narrativize trauma to the intellectual class. The affective intensity that carries forward from the Chinese past to figure the forbearance called for in the case of Cultural Revolution has a name: *yuan er bu nu* – “plaintiveness without complaint.” Yang Jiang balances what is affectively a plural protagonist – the story of all suffering intellectuals – with a portrait of the psychological interiority that such traditional motifs belie. The complex relationships between emotions, selfhood, and fictional character confuse the generic distinctions between memoir and fiction in Yang Jiang's work. Thus when chapter five examines Yang Jiang's 1988 novel *Xizao* (Baptism) in the context of the popular reading of it as a history of the feelings of the first period of thought reform in the 1950s, the terms of affect are much the same as in Yang Jiang's autobiographical essays of the same period. Essays and novel alike develop notions of moral character by developing character; the difference is that the novel plays on tropes from late Imperial fiction in a more sustained, allegorical sequence than any of the essays examined in chapter 6, which in their fragmentation concentrate our perception of individual turning points to reveal a single “I,” even if this subjectivity is unwilling to grant the long arc of its story a holistic view as an autobiography. The final chapter examines Yang Jiang's best-selling 2003 memoir *We Three* in the context of her chosen career as a literary mourner since 1997. I use Lauren Berlant's term “juxtapolitical” to describe Yang Jiang's interest in affect as a solution to, or alternative from, the strongly political content of most of the literature created around her in the years leading up to the late

1990s. But the latest stage of her work emerges in a literary market that is entirely transformed, even from its initial opening in the 1980s. In the *We Three* period, Yang Jiang's deployment of literary affect acquires a new iconicity that aligns with the more structural, political shift from revolutionary to a new Confucian structure of feeling. In this new environment, Yang Jiang recombines tropic language from a lifetime of reading to create the voice of an intimate, motherly instructor, with a life philosophy steeped in nostalgic memory, and calling for a combination of sympathy and reasoning against materialism and consumerism, though she steps carefully away from notions of the political.

Following this critical discussion, I supply three translations of Yang Jiang's work into English: "Ji Qian Zhongshu yu Wei cheng" (On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*, 1984), parts I and II of *We Three*, and a 2007 piece called "Ren sheng de jiazhi" (The Value of Human Life) from Yang Jiang's 2007 essay collection *Zou dao ren sheng bian: zi wen zi da* (Walking Towards the Margins of Life: Questions Asked and Answered of Myself). Translating these and other texts has provided valuable insights into Yang Jiang's rhetoric at its most detailed level, illuminating, for example, the deceptive simplicity of her prose and the persistent attention to character description and action. To a degree I had not anticipated before I started the work, translation also gave me deeper sense of Yang Jiang's perspective. There is a historian side to her that is best exemplified in the Qian Zhongshu essay. Here, she works to control the public image of her husband with a biographical narrative. But she always puts a great deal of craft into her work that makes it read with much more intimacy – and by this I mainly mean successful representation of emotions through literary affect – than I would expect

from historical prose. This artistry of emotional representation is featured with much more intensity in *We Three*, the first two sections of which apply a fascinating surreal style that makes use of motifs from classical Chinese poetry. Besides writing to document history and create art at once, Yang Jiang also has a set of humanist ideals that lie behind all of her work; these come out most explicitly in her most recent collection, and the selection I made attempts to represent this critical dimension.

## Chapter Two: The Literary Criticism of Yang Jiang

### Missing Links in the History of Chinese Literary Criticism

*Voicing Concerns*, a sourcebook of contemporary Chinese criticism in English, begins with Gloria Davies' statement of an important criterion of criticism in any language:

For knowledge to be recognized as such, institutional approval is essential. In the first instance – without the approval of relevant university-based authorities or the support of research-funding bodies, journals, publishing houses, and the various review processes that these institutions require – any claim to knowledge remains an unrecognized or yet-to-be-acknowledged claim.<sup>1</sup>

“Critical inquiry,” or expert knowledge in the general sense, never manages to count as such if it emerges from the academy only to meet with disapproval from the “authorities.” Just who were the “authorities” over critical inquiry in China in the early Mao years? The biographies of Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu in this period are often cited as illustrations of the names and policies that governed intellectual life, especially in Beijing.

After the conclusion of the Civil War in 1949, both Yang Jiang and her husband Qian Zhongshu accepted teaching positions at Tsinghua University, which had been founded in 1911 with American portions of the Boxer Indemnity Fund to serve as a liberal arts college, with some American staff and faculty.<sup>2</sup> In 1952, the central government of the People's Republic initiated a complete reorganization of the higher education system in China, one of the main aims of which was to imitate the Soviet

---

<sup>1</sup> Gloria Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Lanham, Md.: Roman & Littlefield, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> On Tsinghua's founding and formative American influence, see Su-yu Pan, *University Autonomy, the State, and Social Change in China* (Hong Kong: hong Kong University Press, 2009), 65-72; on the politics of reorganization, see pp., 85-102.

system that put emphasis on industrial development and took careful control over critique.<sup>3</sup> Tsinghua University was designated a science and technological campus, and all humanities researchers were moved to nearby Peking University. In early 1953, Yang Jiang, Qian Zhongshu and a small, elite set of other experts on language and literature were placed in non-teaching posts at the new Institute of Literature.<sup>4</sup> This was apparently a relief to Yang Jiang and her peers, who were afraid to teach in the wake of the thought reform campaigns.<sup>5</sup> In 1956, another set of reorganizations placed Yang Jiang's work unit, the Literature Institute, into the new *Zhongguo kexue yuan zhexue shehui xuebu* (Chinese Science Academy Philosophy and Society Study-Unit), most often termed the "Xuebu" (Academy of Studies) for short.<sup>6</sup> This unit was re-constituted after the Cultural Revolution as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), under Hu Qiaomu; all writings under discussion in this chapter are published with the support of CASS.

In the case of Chinese critical inquiry, the perception both inside and outside China is that Republican-era work was interrupted in the 1950s by radical strictures passed down from China's new leaders, and that contributions worthy of international attention for the most part only resumed during the late 1970s period of opening and reforms.

---

<sup>3</sup> Luo Yinsheng 罗银胜, *Yang Jiang zhuan* 杨绛传 [A Biography of Yang Jiang ] (Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 2004), 211.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吴学昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 265.

<sup>6</sup> I take this translation from Geremie Barmé: Yang Jiang, *Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*, trans. Geremie Barmé (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989), 55.

Inside China, more attention is paid to renegade critical inquiry that occurred during the communist years. The example of Gu Zhun (1915-1974), who after the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1958 produced liberal, anti-communist economic theories, shows how clandestine prison notebooks from the 1950s could become celebrated as pioneering knowledge in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> The post-1949 historical scholarship of Chen Yinke (1890-1969) was also anti-communist, though it looks backward to Qing evidential methods and away from any Western-influenced historiography; as with Gu Zhun, Chen's work has earned him the status of "cultural hero" in a postsocialist China mining national literatures to aid a new project of global capitalist developmentalism.<sup>8</sup> To this spectrum of criticism running between pro-Western and culturally conservative thinking we should add work by Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998) and Yang Jiang (b. 1911), the "literary cosmopolitans," carriers of the continued hope that Western critical inquiry could illuminate and re-affirm the best elements of the Chinese tradition.<sup>9</sup> The 1950s-era work of Qian and Yang was published, circulated and received relatively minor criticism. Post-1979, Qian's anthology of Song poetry was republished in China to great acclaim.<sup>10</sup> Yang Jiang's own second debut in Chinese publishing was a slim volume

---

<sup>77</sup> Yang Zao 杨早, "Jiu shi nian dai wenhua yingxiong de fuhao yu xiangzheng – yi Chen Yinke, Gu Zhun wei zhongxin 90年代文化英雄的符号与象征-以陈寅恪、顾准为中心 [1990s Cultural Heroes as Icons and Symbols: The Cases of Chen Yinke and Gu Zhun]," in *Shuxie wenhua yingxiong* (Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000), 32-6.

<sup>8</sup> Yang Zao 杨早, "Jiu shi nian dai wenhua yingxiong de fuhao yu xiangzheng – yi Chen Yinke, Gu Zhun wei zhongxin 90年代文化英雄的符号与象征-以陈寅恪、顾准为中心 [1990s Cultural Heroes as Icons and Symbols: The Cases of Chen Yinke and Gu Zhun]," 24-32; See also Wen-hsin Yeh, "Historian and Courtesan: Chen Yinke and the Writing of 'Liu Rushi Biezhuan'," The George Ernest Morrison Lectures in Ethnology, no. 64 (2003), <http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/psc/ecc/morrison/morrison03.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> I take this term from Christopher Rea, ed., *Chinas Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Modern Letters* (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuan zhu* 宋诗选注 [Poems of the Song, Selected and Annotated] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958); On how international acclaim from Japanese scholars influenced the



containing four literary critical essays that had originally appeared in Mao-era journals.<sup>11</sup>

This pattern of establishing as critical inquiry writings of the Mao era in post-Mao China deserves greater consideration more generally because it shapes and supplements contemporary exchanges with international critical theory. The Mao-era work is also a source of national pride and a legacy of critical approaches against Marxism that lingers in today's Chinese critical consciousness. In the particular case of Yang Jiang, her series of critical works from 1954 to 1959 is of intrinsic interest for understanding Yang's critical approach to writing after the Cultural Revolution. More broadly, the revelation of her discussions on literary formalism and craftsmanship in the 1950s asks us to reconsider the diversity of critical inquiry that was neither renegade, like the prison notebooks of Gu Zhun, nor officially promulgated. Luo Yinsheng, for example, calls for Yang Jiang's work to be understood in the context of a national conference on the humanities called in 1956. He Qifang, a friend and colleague of Yang's known for his more patriotic and overtly Marxist approach, delivered a speech on the Ah Q figure that included several propositions on the use of character in stories. He Qifang apparently opposed the increasing focus on characters exemplary of class struggle, and fought to gain recognition for characters and virtues common to all classes.<sup>12</sup> Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu were said to have voiced support for He Qifang's 1956 presentation, which exposed them to criticism in early 1957. However,

---

reception of this work in China, see, among other sources, Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 265.

<sup>11</sup> Yang Jiang, *Chun ni ji* 春泥集 [Spring Mud Collection] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Luo Yinsheng 罗银胜, *Yang Jiang zhuan* 杨绛传 [A Biography of Yang Jiang ], 220.

aware of the precariousness of their position, the couple did not, as He Qifang did, express political and academic critiques during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, which began later in 1957. Thus when the Anti-Rightist Campaign began in 1958, Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu had expressed no politically dangerous positions that would brand them “rightists” – this allowed the couple to continue working, and perhaps explains at least in part why Yang Jiang was able to continue publishing more or less formalist literary criticism in the later 1950s and even the 1960s. But this story is hardly even begun to be elucidated in a full form. The 1950s work of all of Yang Jiang’s colleagues including Qian Zhongshu, He Qifang, Li Jianwu, Zheng Zhenduo, and Lin Whei-yin and others all suggest themselves as the basis for a new understanding of the quiet cosmopolitanism of Chinese intellectuals who remained in Beijing after 1949, and which is gradually gaining more attention.<sup>13</sup>

In this chapter, I read all four 1950s critical essays, as well as the preface to Yang Jiang’s translation of *Don Quixote* (1978) and an essay from 1980, “Shishi, gushi, zhenshi” (Fact, Story, Reality). Viewed as a shared set of terms applied over the course of the Mao years, Yang Jiang’s critical essays outline a theory of fiction and drama centered on character. Character, in Yang Jiang’s view, is a moral and psychological unit of thought with rhetorical capacity *in excess* of the terms of her more orthodox Marxist peers. Yang Jiang’s principles of character can be inferred from her idiosyncratic readings of Aristotle, French neoclassical thought, and the histories of

---

<sup>13</sup> Besides Rea’s new collection, Mary Scott is also at work on a new biography of Zheng Zhenduo (1898-1958), Yang Jiang’s first boss at the Beijing Academy of Studies. And on Lin Whei-yin, see Wilma Fairbank, *Liang and Lin: Partners in Exploring China’s Architectural Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

drama and the novel in Europe and China. Writing in direct opposition to her peers Marxist-informed sense of characters as exemplary figures of represent class struggle, Yang Jiang developed a notion of character as the central unit of plot-structures arranged with moral content conveyed in terms human emotion and affect. What links Yang Jiang's otherwise disparate readings of such a wide range of texts is a technical interest in the kind of achievements made by Cervantes, Fielding and Austen: the creation of moving, believable characters, who stand for moral values, using the narrative structures for action and expression.

### **Character, Structure and Human Nature**

Jonathan Culler has said that within the structuralist approach to the novel, character remains the least explained phenomena – especially techniques for representing psychological depth.<sup>14</sup> Early approaches stressed the creation of the social world, in all its interpersonal and extrapersonal conflicts, and overlooked the representation of interiority. More recent analysis emphasizes character as rhetorical construct: from Todorov's predicates, to Frye's types and through Barthes concept of character as the naming of a series of semes.<sup>15</sup> But the semic code is only ever a beginning of analysis, because the codes must be mapped back onto value; "one can call for any of the languages of human behavior."<sup>16</sup>

The problem for the Yang Jiang reader is to deduce the "language of human behavior" that Yang Jiang is developing in the context of her isolation and yet relative safety in a

---

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 269.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

Mao-era Beijing think tank. My reading below establishes the key terms of this language: character (*renwu*), true character, moral character, and unique personality (*xingge*); depth of character and affectation; social realities (*shehui zhenshi*) and the orientation of true character towards society; love, passion and melancholia, all of which depend on a Chinese notion of affective bonds (*qing*); and finally character and episode (*qingjie*), which culminates Yang Jiang's structural notion of character.

### **What's Good About Her? Literary Affect in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice***

Beginning in 1953, the Foreign Literatures Institute of the new Academy of Studies began to assign critical projects according to a Marxist canon that Yang Jiang found unrepresentative of literary quality and influence.<sup>17</sup> When the department announced the validity of the Brontë sisters as research topics, Yang Jiang advocated for including Jane Austen above the works of the Brontës. “What’s good about her?” was said to the reply she got.<sup>18</sup> Her response was “You shenme hao: Du Ausiding zhi *Aoman yu pianjian*” (What’s Good: Reading Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*).<sup>19</sup> With the authoritative tone of the literature teacher, the piece patiently explains the aims of criticism, and presents the proposition that character, setting and plot are the basic elements of story. Yang Jiang discusses genre, the technique of composition, and the

---

<sup>17</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past] (Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2008), 267.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Yang Jiang, “You shenme hao? Du Ausiding de “Aoman yu pianjian” 有什么好?读奥斯丁的《傲慢与偏见》 [What Good is there? On Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 327–345.

use of marriage and love as tools for the investigation of a character's interiority, which quickly asserts itself as the central concern of the essay.

“What is good” about Austen – who is a justly popular writer but not a great writer, Yang Jiang avers – lies in Austen's ability to evoke character.<sup>20</sup> Her characters imitate reality because they are “pieced together” (*pinrou*) out of the traits of real people that the author knew.<sup>21</sup> Some say that Austen's characters are flat, and others say she displays psychological insights that presage Henry James and Marcel Proust; both are true, says Yang Jiang, by virtue of Austen's great command of literary affect, the rhetorical tools for the expression of character feeling and the concomitant manipulation of the reader's feeling. “She writes the surface of the character, but surface conveys interiority – a very complex interiority, and conveyed in minute detail. Her person is not just any person – it is ‘that one.’”<sup>22</sup>

The proposition that one must write the “surface of the character” in such a way as to give insight into the inner life of that character describes a major rhetorical feature of Yang's creative work beginning with short fiction after the Cultural Revolution. As we shall see in chapter 5, the technique of representing emotion and moral quality with physical description is a major trait of *Xizao* (Baptism), the 1988 novel set in the early 1950s and featuring a female protagonist making careful steps towards critical writing.<sup>23</sup> What the Austen essay reveals is that the early experience of disagreement with the agenda of the Academy of Studies drove Yang Jiang to think critically about the style

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 339, 345.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 339-40.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 341.

<sup>23</sup> Yang Jiang, “Xizao 洗澡 [Baptism],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004).

and function of some of her favored Western fiction. Ambivalent about the new critical order, though initially encouraged to supply her own input, Yang Jiang speaks up about the realist representation of character – the goal of fiction should be to convey a unique personality, with depth exceeding the dictates of socialist realism. In much later anecdotes, Yang Jiang remembers arguing with her fellow scholars against the principle of studying class struggle in lieu of human nature.<sup>24</sup> She once argued that an author could both love and hate the characters the author created.<sup>25</sup> Such arguments helped to leave Yang Jiang isolated when political movements began. Unlike her husband Qian Zhongshu, who enjoyed some protection from international praise for his work, and who was less prone to argue with his supervisors, Yang Jiang found herself without a support network of advocates within her work unit in the mid-1950s.<sup>26</sup> This marginalization perhaps helped her have more space to speak her mind – as one of the institute members with the least power and responsibility, she was allowed to choose independent projects that she could work on alone.

Isolated from the major projects of her work unit, yet relatively free to speak her mind, Yang Jiang argues for a theory of realist fiction that brings readers and writers into intimate associations with character. The course of Elizabeth's change in feelings towards Mr. Darcy, from dislike to love, is a model example.<sup>27</sup> Dramatic irony drives readers towards greater knowledge of Elizabeth's feelings faster than Elizabeth herself

---

<sup>24</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 266-7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-62.

<sup>27</sup> Yang Jiang, “You shenme hao? Du Ausiding de ‘Aoman yu pianjian’ 有什么好? 读奥斯丁的《傲慢与偏见》 [What is there in her? On Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*],” 340.

knows her feelings. Growing recognition of her own mistaken first impression, and new awareness of Mr. Darcy's upstanding character, lead Elizabeth to feel shame, and it is this shame that turns to love for Darcy.

Such an example of emotional range gives readers the feeling that Austen characters are "round" (*yuan de*) and "three dimensional" (*li ti*).<sup>28</sup> The technique of writing in dimension is to write in physical some details, along with representative actions, like Elizabeth overhearing Mr. Darcy's servants praise him. A limited and partial description of character must be made to convey the complexity of interiority. Character description is fiction's answer to the task of the actor in the drama: to give character the semblance of "flesh and blood" and to lodge, even conceal, abstract notions of value, like selfishness, in these matters of physical description. Austen was particularly skilled, Yang Jiang says, in the narration of action and description without any excess explanation. The omniscient narrator, having long incubated her characters, sends them onto the stage with minimal commentary:

She makes the reader understand characters by their words and actions directly; one comes to know their true character (*renpin xingge*) by listening to the way they talk and seeing the way they behave. She also gives readers the merest suggestion of a matter in order to make them guess the true depth of it. The reader passes from first attention to greater curiosity, to an inspection and estimation that leads to still more attention, still more interest. Because the author did not add commentary, the reader seems to come to know the people of her world personally, and to have experienced the events. And all that they understand and realize, they feel to have increased their own wisdom. Even though the persons are ordinary, and the events, unremarkable, still they are rich in attraction. Long after the reading, they remain rich in meaning.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 344.

Yang Jiang readers will not miss how closely this description of Austen's prose style matches with 1980s and later descriptions of Yang Jiang's own style. When Qian Zhongshu described his wife's 1981 memoir *Six Records of a Cadre School* as "brush strokes on the larger canvas," he describes a trait often spoken of in Chinese essay and poetry. What Yang Jiang's critical approach to Jane Austen reveals is a *cosmopolitan* minimalist aesthetic of affect. Just as Wang Lingzhen says of "the personal" in autobiographical practice, Yang Jiang claims that character in Austen, and more generally in realist fiction, follows tropes of metonym – outward, surficial signs *mark* interiority. This literary affect is never completely decoupled from what Wang Lingzhen calls autobiographical practice, meaning the engagement with intersubjective relations and subjective emotional states based on memories, for a specific intent. Hence Yang Jiang's emphasis on the long "incubation" (*yunyu*) of characters "pieced" from real life knowledge.<sup>30</sup> The metonymic language of literary affect will continue to be something that Yang Jiang places in critical perspective in future works. The essays that follow track literary affect, here modeled as the outward sign of character, in its relationship with human nature (in Fielding), social reality (in Thackeray), narrative convention (in Cervantes), literary language (in *Dream of the Red Chamber*), and plot-structure (in Aristotle and Li Yu).

### **Writing Human Nature in Henry Fielding**

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 343.



“Fei’erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun” [Fielding’s Theory of Fiction], published in *Wenxue yanjiu* issue 2, 1957, establishes a basic set of terms for Yang Jiang’s understanding of how character (*renwu*) might function in a morally charged, realist social fiction that could draw on classical traditions.<sup>31</sup> Her reading of critical passages from the novels of Henry Fielding (1707-1754) departs from the ideologically prescribed principle of using exemplary characters to depict class struggle, and instead argues for fiction writing that recognizes universal human nature. Following Fielding, she invokes passages from the Aristotle to conceive of human nature as that aspect of character which is illustrated in dramatic structure. Though the terms and propositions of this paper garnered criticism, Yang Jiang never repudiated them, and in fact future critical and creative writing indicates that her sense of the implied author Fielding presents in his novels is one she identifies with closely.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) theorizes character (*ethos*) in tragedy as closely associated with thought, inasmuch as characters distinguish themselves by moral choices.<sup>32</sup> This narrow conception of character reflects the superior position of action in relation to character throughout *Poetics*; poetic mimesis, the primary task of poetry generally, aimed to represent human life through action. In fact, two thirds of *Poetics* is devoted to the action as a whole, or plot-structure (*muthos*), while character is discussed chiefly in chapters 2, 6 and 15. This last chapter is the most influential, containing as it does a schematic argument involving four principles of character:

---

<sup>31</sup> Yang Jiang, “Fei’erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding’s theory of fiction],” in *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 236–266.

<sup>32</sup> This refers to passages in chapter 6 of the *Poetics*; the historicist explanation I apply here is from Stephen Halliwell, ed., *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1986), 154-5.

goodness, appropriateness, likeness, and consistency.<sup>33</sup> That the characters should be good reflects the elevating function of tragedy, which necessitates that heroic characters face undeserved suffering. “Appropriate” characters are those of age, gender and social standing to serve as heroes – high social standing was thought to imply high moral character throughout the ancient world. The principle of “likeness” reflects Aristotle’s conception of emotions: tragic characters must fall within the range of audience’s experience and empathy so that the audience could identify with the suffering of the character, and so achieve the proper emotional response, or catharsis. Consistency ensures that characters are fully subordinate to the overall unity of action – characters must not speak or act in ways not in keeping with the initial impression of their moral quality.

Such are the salient features of Aristotle’s theory of character in tragedy, and these were material for the critical propositions Fielding embedded into his novels. Aristotle’s *Poetics* was just one text in the larger critical discussion on the role of classical theories of art during the advent of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Prevailing histories of the English novel take the style and critical propositions of Daniel Defoe (ca. 1661-1731) and Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) as representative of a general English resistance to continental neo-classicism.<sup>34</sup> Research by Nancy Mace, though, shows that Fielding’s deployment of classical terms, especially “epic,” aligns the writer with an older generation of English neo-classicists, including Alexander Pope (1688-1744), John

---

<sup>33</sup> The following summarizes Halliwell’s exposition. *Ibid.*, 157-64.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy A. Mace, ed., *Henry Fielding’s Novels and the Classical Tradition* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 129.

Dryden (1631-1700), and Joseph Addison (1672-1719).<sup>35</sup> All of these writers rely on the same analytical model of “epic” as a generalized narrative art form, one derived from the work French critic René Le Bossu (1631-1680). Fielding shared with these predecessors the view that the classical tradition could enable contemporary art – novels, in Fielding’s case – to be a properly didactic, though still entertaining, form.<sup>36</sup>

Among the most general and famous of Fielding’s propositions, and the one that Yang Jiang begins with, is the famous connection between tragedy, epic and the novel that forms the opening to the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1762):

The EPIC, as well as the DRAMA, is divided into tragedy and comedy. HOMER, who was the father of this species of poetry, gave us a pattern of both these, though that of the latter kind is entirely lost; which Aristotle tells us, bore the same relation to comedy which his *Iliad* bears to tragedy. And perhaps, that we have no more instances of it among the writers of antiquity, is owing to the loss of this great pattern, which, had it survived, would have found its imitators equally with the other poems of this great original.

And farther, as this poetry may be tragic or comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise either in verse or prose: for though it wants one particular, which the critic enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely metre; yet, when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments, and diction, and is deficient in metre only, it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic; at least, as no critic hath thought proper to range it under any other head, or to assign it a particular name to itself.<sup>37</sup>

The tone of this passage is representative of the preface, and suggests the major problem in Fielding criticism: is the implied author of *Joseph Andrews* earnestly expressing Fielding’s own propositions, or is Fielding fashioning a humorous set of

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 66-7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 133-5.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1910), xxvii, [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24196947M/Joseph\\_Andrews](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24196947M/Joseph_Andrews).

false propositions?<sup>38</sup> Mace avers that ironic or not, the enumeration of individual elements of Aristotle's *Poetics* indicates an engagement with classical form, the persistence of which throughout the novels shows that Fielding was, in the main, serious about legitimizing – even advertising – his art with links to a more restricted field of cultural production.<sup>39</sup> Part of Fielding's effort to prove his novels superior to the anti-classicism of Richardson, especially, was evidently to craft a working critical approach to classical theory that would appeal equally to readers fluent in Greek and Latin, readers with only some experience with classical languages and major texts, and readers with no Greek or Latin but who could access texts like *Poetics* in English translation.<sup>40</sup>

Yang Jiang takes Fielding's critical propositions seriously, though she does understand that he deployed classical terms and propositions in pursuit of distinction for himself and his novels.<sup>41</sup> She begins by translating the “constituent parts” sentence using the terms *gushi* for fable (or *muthos*, Halliwell's “plot-structure”), *bujing* for action, *renwu* for characters, *sixiang* for sentiments (Halliwell's “thoughts”), and *cuoci* for diction.<sup>42</sup> These will remain major critical terms throughout her critical and essayistic writings. Turning to Aristotle's text, Yang Jiang finds evidence for character's subordinate, but structurally bound relationship to action, in both tragedy and epic:

---

<sup>38</sup> Booth makes this point. Wayne C. Booth, ed., *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 72.

<sup>39</sup> Mace, *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Mace, *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition*, 130-3.

<sup>41</sup> Yang Jiang, “Fei'erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction],” 237-8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 243-4.

All of the deeds within a given plot-structure (*gushi*) are episodes (*qingjie*), and arrangement of the episodes is the action. Episodes spring from the character's true character and thoughts (*renwu de xingge he sixiang*), true character and thoughts also emerge bit by bit; true character and thought support the development of the plot-structure, and the development of the plot-structure expresses true character and thought.<sup>43</sup>

In Aristotle and in Fielding, the same term carries a dual meaning of the figure of the person in the plot-structure and also the general moral quality ascribable to the person: *ethos*, character. Yang Jiang must use two terms to accomplish the same analysis: *renwu* for the figure of the person, *xingge* for the general moral character. By elucidating plot-structure as structurally bound, or even equivalent to character via the somewhat vague term *qingjie*, meaning story event or episode, Yang Jiang legitimizes her own further exploration of *xingge* almost to the exclusion of any consideration of plot structure.

All four of Aristotle's principles of character appear in Fielding's work; Yang Jiang collects these and elaborates Fielding's meaning in her own new set of Chinese terms, filtered through her readings in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century European neo-classical writings. Fielding's principle of goodness demanded characters low in social status but nevertheless good, *contra* Aristotle. Quoting his famous dictum "I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species," Yang Jiang finds a more expansive principle of likeness to include the broad elements of nature we all hold in common (*gongxing*).<sup>44</sup> But Fielding also described the unique natures of individuals (*renwu de texing*) as fulfilling the conditions of consistency, though Yang Jiang understands this quality

---

<sup>43</sup> Yang Jiang, "Fei' erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction]," 244.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

as “appropriateness” (bianli) following French interpretations of the principle.<sup>45</sup>

“Likeness” for Fielding was a humanist rejection of all elements of the mythic or fantastic, in contrast to French interpretation. As for Aristotle’s principle of consistency, Fielding understood it to be an absolute prohibition against *deus ex machina*, contra both French thought and Horace. In sum, Fielding’s interpretation of the principles of character was to avoid exaggeration and imitate nature, the better to produce pleasure (*kuaigan*) in the reader.<sup>46</sup>

The nature of the reader’s properly productive and emotional response is of great interest to Yang Jiang, particularly in its combination of pleasure with instruction (*jiaoyi*).<sup>47</sup> She returns to the *Joseph Andrews* preface to elucidate his term “the Ridiculous” in Chinese as *kexiao*, and to affirm the serious purpose of this literary affect.<sup>48</sup> Here Yang Jiang re-visits the relationship between readers and writers that is mediated by representations of character, including feelings and emotions but also physical characteristics. Yang Jiang identifies in Fielding and Aristotle alike, as she did in Austen, a concern with the production of “pleasure” in readers. The Ridiculous, Fielding says, is always the source of “affectation” (*xuwei*).<sup>49</sup> An ugly person, for example, is not ridiculous, but an ugly person who affects beauty is ridiculous. The contradiction reveals depth of character to which the reader can identify, hence Fielding’s use of the ancient metaphor of fiction as a mirror.<sup>50</sup> The pleasure of the Ridiculous is only a subset of the novel’s devotion to truth, or at least the production of

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 249-50.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.; cf. Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, xxx.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 258.

reality-sensibility (*zhenshi gan*). Fielding's use of the term "biography" (*zhuanji*), reflects the larger tendency to see the sense of reality as the aim of the novel – this constitutes another departure from Aristotle.<sup>51</sup> The broad trend towards realism in many works, including the French novel *Gil Blas*, which Fielding so admired, indicates the historical shift away from the "romance" (*chuanqi*).<sup>52</sup>

"Fielding's Theory of Fiction" is Yang Jiang's longest and most sustained critical reflection, and reveals a set of propositions she would re-affirm in later writings: the primacy and universality of human nature, the centrality of character to story, the imagined spectrum between romance and realism, and the important role played by pleasure in the reading experience. The piece pretends at first to be an apology for humanism within a Marxist framework, but by the second section reveals itself as actually aimed against the then-new biography of Fielding by F. Homes Dudden, which Yang Jiang found to have insufficient consideration of Fielding's classical thought.<sup>53</sup> In light of Yang Jiang's interest in traditional Chinese narrative, it is hard not to detect a hint of identification with Fielding as a professional hoping to raise the status of a new form by looking to the past – "putting new wine into old bottles."<sup>54</sup> The very presence of Western idioms playfully translated into Chinese (another sentence remarks on Fielding's having "an ax to grind") gently hints at Yang Jiang's impulse to carry on a Chinese conversation with English thought, to infuse into the Chinese conception of the

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 263-4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 265-6.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 237; the text Yang Jiang disputed was Frederick Homes Dudden, *Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

novelist and role of the novel some of the *ethos* communicated in Fielding's critical comments.

Yang Jiang ends demurely in a single sentence of conclusion that hopes readers might take her collection of Fielding propositions as something to reflect upon. The year was 1957, and although all members of her Beijing community of intellectuals had already undergone thought reform once before, Mao Zedong's policy of "let a hundred flowers bloom" for the time still held sway. By June, though, the political winds had changed abruptly, with Mao beginning the Anti-Rightist Campaign that was to affect so many of Yang Jiang's colleagues, especially her friends the poet and essayist He Qifang and the playwright and critic Li Jianwu.<sup>55</sup> But where He and Li were publicly criticized, Yang Jiang suffered only a small internal criticism session. The worst she seems to have suffered was a special critical article in a 1958 issue of *Wenxue pinglun*, the same journal that had published her essay. In it, a group-written piece called her Fielding criticism "a white flag," contemporary nomenclature for a supposed enemy of the "red flag" of Communism.<sup>56</sup> "The author of this piece effaces the socialist meaning of literature, overlooks the class contents of exemplary figures (*dianxing renwu*), and deliberately misinterprets realism," argue the authors of the piece; in another place they decry her "promulgation of the theory of human nature (*renxing lun*)."<sup>57</sup> As politically motivated as the negative reception may have been, these terms reveal the distinctive critical propositions current at the time that would have obstructed understanding of

---

<sup>55</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1992), 137-8.

<sup>56</sup> Kong Qingmao says the group of younger critics wrote under the direction of Yang Yaomin 楊耀民, *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.



Yang Jiang's review article. First, her profile of Fielding's innovations to character design does call into question the use of exemplary figures, or *dianxing renwu*. When Yang Jiang sums up Fielding's aim to write, not the hero, but the ordinary person (*bu xie yingxiong er xie putong ren*), she is justifiably accused of opposing a central principle of socialist realism.<sup>58</sup>

Even more transgressive was her focus on *xingge* as a basic component of a universal human nature. The entire discussion fell squarely into the category of *renxing lun*, a renegade critical stance at the time, though it has since become an accepted path of inquiry.<sup>59</sup>

### **Writing Social Reality in Thackeray**

Accounts of Yang Jiang's career in 1958-59 recall the relative seclusion to which she and Qian Zhongshu turned. She is remembered as being averse to confrontation, yet unstinting in her efforts to become a hardworking student of Marxist theory who hoped to generate acceptable critical inquiry. Moreover, asserts biographer Kong Qingmao, it was unthinkable that a resident expert in the Academy of Studies should not produce original research.<sup>60</sup> So it was that the following year, 1959, Yang Jiang once again spoke up for the value and interest of English fiction, this time Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*,

---

<sup>58</sup> Yang Jiang, "Fei'erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction]," 240.

<sup>59</sup> For a short overview of the transformations to the political and moral values lodged in the term *renxing lun*, see Sing Li Kwok, ed., *A Glossary of Political Terms of The People's Republic of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1995), 342-3.

<sup>60</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ], 138.

which People's Publishing had just then issued in a new translation by Yang Bi, Yang Jiang's younger sister.<sup>61</sup>

If we can assume that Yang Jiang was aware of the general opprobrium against inquiry into human nature in the general sense, then her Thackeray article seems, on the surface at least, a deliberately renegade manifesto. She begins by remembering the comments of Nikolay Chernyshevsky, a Russian revolutionary critic unlikely to have made for safe referencing in the years when Sino-Soviet relations were taking a turn for the worse, and Soviet experts were being evicted from academic positions as close to Yang Jiang as Tsinghua University.

Chernyshevsky praised his [Thackeray's] powers of close observation, the depth of his understanding of human life and the human condition (*rensheng he renlei de xingling*), his rich humor, power to draw characters with unusual accuracy, and his ability to tell stories that moved people.<sup>62</sup>

Did Yang Jiang naively believe this time that readers would accept an appeal to think of fiction as a matter of close observation of human nature, simply because a formerly safe critic from pre-Soviet Russia had praised the book in such terms? Or did she hope to persuade any of her readers that modern fiction should have aims distinct from the political?<sup>63</sup> What did she hope to accomplish by presenting as sympathetic the life story of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), the son of a powerful English colonialist?

In fact, Yang Jiang probably understood the political difficulties of her situation, and sought, perhaps gamely, to adapt and update her ambitious structural, character-

---

<sup>61</sup> Yang Jiang, "Lun Sakelei *Ming li chang*" 论萨克雷《名利场》 [On Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*], in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 214–235.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

centered approach to fiction with the required attention to class conflict, thus bridging a general theory of human nature with anti-capitalist revolutionary discourse.

She begins by returning to Marx's injunction to fiction writers to observe the lower classes and the growing separation of wealth in capitalist societies – Marx even encourages close description of the person for the purpose of elucidating this process.<sup>64</sup>

Thackeray had a special ability to make these observations, Yang Jiang explains, because he wasted his inheritance during a debauched and dissipated youth, discovering in his plunge into the lower classes of 19<sup>th</sup> century London his true calling as a portraitist of the poor, a “moral satirist” whose eyes had been opened to the parasitic scourge of the English ruling classes upon the poor and the colonized.<sup>65</sup>

In fact, Yang Jiang's Thackeray thesis is a major update to her formulation of fiction's role, not actually backing away from her former proposition that it be an unflinching look at human nature, but hopeful that the discriminating moral gaze of the author could bring society together to locate the evils of capitalism in the psychological profile of the selfish human being. The important thing was to bridge fictional discourses of self, abstract moral virtue, and anti-capitalist fervor. Yang Jiang offers Thackeray as a role model for this task:

He [Thackeray] was very familiar with capitalism, and so could describe this evil of society with extreme clarity. Some even saw *Vanity Fair* as a “manifesto for contemporary society.” But even as Thackeray laid bare an ugly side of

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 214. Yang Jiang refers us to Karl Marx, ed., *Über Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1953), 254-5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 218.

society, he urges us to forget ourselves (*wangdiao ziji*), and to love and protect others.<sup>66</sup>

Thackeray carried out this mission chiefly with character design, structuring the events involving Durbin, Amelia and the vast cast of *Vanity Fair* to show, not tell, how selfless devotion made cowards brave and the ashamed proud.<sup>67</sup> Show and not tell, because Thackeray “himself felt that after all he was not a teacher but a humorist, and so only used indirect methods.”<sup>68</sup> The controlling idea of his novel was to be grasped by deduction. The careful Chinese reader would see that it was congruent to the basic moral of *Jing hua yuan* (Flowers in the Mirror), a native Chinese panoramic portrait of society as an endless power struggle between individuals consumed by desire.<sup>69</sup> Except better: *Flowers in the Mirror* hopes readers will retreat from the dusty world; Thackeray asks us to be angry, and to do something about it.

The evil of a selfish mind (*zisi xin de chou'e*) occurs in every person; this is a social reality.<sup>70</sup> That is why Thackeray broke with convention to deliver a story without a hero, one that makes of each character a mix of positive and negative qualities, just as we find in reality. Past novels told of lovers’ progress up until marriage; Durbin and Amelia’s characters continue to develop during the course of their marriage.<sup>71</sup>

This emphasis on “reality” (*zhenshi*) completely replaces the term “human nature” in the Fielding essay as the crucial focus of prose description of the person, and the

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 228-30.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 217-8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 222; On *Flowers in the Mirror* by Li Ruzhen, see Patrick Hanan, ed., *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries : Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 219.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 220-1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 224-6.

standard by which an author is to be judged.<sup>72</sup> “Reality” still encompasses true character – Yang Jiang finds Thackeray’s treatment of Amelia at times contrary to reality in its inconsistent treatment of her character (*xingge*). But “reality” refers more importantly to the significance of character within setting. It is the result of an author who has the necessary objectivity to paint characters impartially – objectivity Thackeray does not have in the case of Amelia, who resembles too much the wife he lost when she, after just four years of marriage, was institutionalized for extreme depression. Still, Thackeray’s talent was to observe with psychological insight how Amelia’s condition was embedded within social conditions; her *xingge* was connected to her environment. Limitations of his personal background and concerns aside, Yang Jiang avers that he achieved a satire that recognized class conflict and the universality of human vice simultaneously.

Yang Jiang’s effort to place Thackeray within the scope of communist Chinese critical inquiry thus reformulates, without completely reconstructing, her vision of an objective writer devoted to art, working to overcome the limitations of class background to find solidarity with those oppressed by capitalist superstructure. Between the lines, the reader feels in the strained gesture towards polemic Yang Jiang’s own attempt to overcome the limitations of her identity, to do the job allotted to her according to the prescriptions of her ongoing training in Maoist thought.

Yang Jiang’s internal tension over whether and how much to accept ideological re-education probably peaked over the years 1958-9. Neither Qian Zhongshu nor Yang

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 222-30.

Jiang was as severely sanctioned as many of their colleagues during the Anti-Rightist campaign, but the couple's relative safety was the product of, and encouraged, a circumspect attitude. After Qian's 1958 anthology of Song dynasty poetry was criticized, he was reported to have remarked, "If we don't have the right to speak, we at least have the right to silence."<sup>73</sup> Qian then ceased publishing critical or creative work, though as he worked on the team to translate Mao Zedong's works into English, he is said to have updated constantly the notes that were to become a large-scale critical work called *Guan zhui bian*.<sup>74</sup> Yang Jiang is sometimes thought to have followed a similar pattern, but she would in fact author a number of additional materials in this period. The Thackeray paper was criticized, it is true, and it was from 1958 forward that, observing the harsh punishments dealt to their colleagues, both Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu avoided publishing as much as possible. When contingents of the Beijing scholarly elite began to be sent away to re-education campaigns in 1958, Yang Jiang spent several months in rural Hebei, outside of Beijing, to gain legitimacy as a "revolutionary" by cultivating relationships with the peasants.<sup>75</sup> Her report on experiences in the countryside, later revised and published as "Di yi ci xia xiang" (First time down to the countryside) largely adheres to the principles of character outlined in her critical writings on Austen, Fielding and Thackeray: colorful sketches of peasants used humor to make the reader sympathize with their poverty and illiteracy, and caricatures of the

---

<sup>73</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 260.

<sup>74</sup> Yang Jiang, "Women sa [We three]," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), check pp. in pt 3 essay 10.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* check pp. in pt 3 essay 12.

other volunteer intellectuals satirized the wide gap between peasant and intellectual.<sup>76</sup>

The report was accepted and even praised by work team leaders.<sup>77</sup> This was to be her greatest success within the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>78</sup>

The following year, 1959, Yang Jiang was assigned to translate Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.<sup>79</sup> Following the success of her translation of *Gil Blas* and the lukewarm-to-negative reception of her critical pieces, Yang Jiang still went on to produce two more, shorter pieces the very year she began work on *Don Quixote*: “Yishu yu kefu kunnan – du *Honglou meng* ouji” (Art and Overcoming Difficulty: A Short Note on *Dream of the Red Chamber*) and “Li Yu lun xiju jiegou” (Li Yu On Dramatic Structure).<sup>80</sup> The first gestures at account of the role of emotion in art, while the second gestures towards an understanding of the interrelationship between Western and Chinese theater and fiction in Aristotelian terms. “Gestures” is a good term in both cases because the first piece considers only a few examples from a single work, *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), and the second, the essay on Li Yu (1610-1680) shows little consideration of the historical contexts of the two ranges of criticism considered. Even so, both pieces advance a critical approach to narrative that is absent of Marxist and nationalist content, in stark contrast to the volunteer service and the report for which Yang Jiang was

---

<sup>76</sup> Yang Jiang, “Di yi ci xia xiang 第一次下乡 [First time down to the countryside],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 276–292.

<sup>77</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ], 143.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 311-12.

<sup>79</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吴学昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 268.

<sup>80</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吴学昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 267-8 ; Yang Jiang, “Li Yu lun xiju jiegou 李渔论喜剧结构 [Li Yu on Dramatic Structure,” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 276–292; Yang Jiang, “Yishu yu kefu kunnan: du *Hong lou meng* ouji 艺术与客服困难-读《红楼梦》偶记 [Art and Overcoming Difficulty: A note on *Dream of the Red Chamber*],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 267–275.

praised. What is consistent across all of these writings is a focus on character in realist fiction, which Yang Jiang continues to understand as a form tracing back to roots in romance and drama. While there is no clear reflection on genre that would explain why Yang Jiang would turn to short fiction and memoir immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the values presented in these last writings: overcoming adversity, representing emotion, writing about relationships, disrupting generic convention, and influence of multiple genres on each other, all foreshadow her postsocialist approach to literature.

“Yishu yu kefu kunnan” (Art and Overcoming Difficulty) brings together a dense selection of excerpts from *Dream of the Red Chamber* to show that, in contradistinction from the convention of “love at first sight,” the romance of Lin Daiyu and Jia Baoyu involves a long course of difficulty. Love is a kind of affective contagion, emerging first in Lin Daiyu and infecting Jia Baoyu as Daiyu probes Baoyu’s interiority. Witnessing Daiyu’s doomed love for Baoyu, Yang Jiang says, is like watching running water plunge past a stone with cracks. The water rushes into the cracks, swirls, and must be pressed back out and around.<sup>81</sup> Yang Jiang deduces an implied author, the narrator of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, who makes critical reflections as he tells the story, just like Fielding did in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. making critical reflections who wishes to express “thoughts and sentiments” (*sixiang ganqing*) that cannot be expressed using conventions. The implied author’s emotions encounter obstructions, and so his created character’s emotions encounter obstructions

---

<sup>81</sup> Yang Jiang, “Yishu yu kefu kunnan: du *Hong lou meng* ouji 艺术与克服困难-读《红楼梦》偶记 [Art and Overcoming Difficulty: A note on *Dream of the Red Chamber*],” 275.



as well. The swirl and re-direction of the emotions is the substance of the original artistic work, a proposition which allows Yang Jiang to conclude with a dictum by the Italian humanist Lodovico Castelvetro (1505-1571): “The appreciation of art is a recognition of the difficulties overcome.”<sup>82</sup>

In her 2008 oral history with Wu Xuezhao, Yang Jiang would say that “Art and Overcoming Suffering” was popular among the other scholars in the Academy of Sciences, and that Zhou Yang (1908-1989), founder of the League of Left-Wing Writers and an influential figure at Yang Jiang’s work unit until 1963, even used the line from Castelvetro in one of his own lectures.<sup>83</sup> Whether Yang Jiang or her colleagues understood any connection between their own lives and work and that of someone like Castelvetro, a theorist of comedy whose critical writings and translation work provoked the Catholic church to exile him from Rome, is left unsaid. But the tone of the piece returns to the firm, authoritative, lecturer of her earliest work on Jane Austen, and eschews the defensive appeals to Marxist content which had appeared first in the Fielding essay and reached a maximum in the Thackeray essay. It seems likely that despite praise for her reportage-like essay on her first stint of re-education through labor, by 1959 Yang Jiang had largely retreated from any overt efforts to develop a Marxist humanism, and is more interested in how the history of European neo-classicism might shed light on the distinctive properties of pre-modern Chinese narrative.

---

<sup>82</sup> This English version from: H.B. Charlton, *Castelvetro’s Theory of Poetry* (New York: University of Manchester Publications, 1913), 28-30.

<sup>83</sup> Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 268; Zhou Yang would return to with essays published in the early 1980s, but became a target in the campaign against spiritual pollution, 1983-4. See Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 278.

“Li Yu on Dramatic Structure” is a metacritical exploration in this vein, one that recognizes in the neo-classical transformation of Aristotle’s thesis about the unity of action a potentially new reading of comments on comedic structure in the drama chapters of *Xianqing ouji* (Casual Expressions of Idle Feeling), the expansive prose collection of the writer-entrepreneur Li Yu (1610-1680).<sup>84</sup> The piece is short and lacking in historical contextualization of Li Yu – there is no description of Li Yu’s life or thoughts on the role of the comic writer in society, and no mention of any of his plays, many of which contradict principles stated in *Xianqing ouji*. Yang Jiang includes no description of Li Yu’s understanding of a moral role for emotions, and no look at Li Yu’s understanding of comedy. Instead, Yang Jiang considers firstly that Li Yu and Aristotle have similar rules about the presentation of character, especially the principle of “likeness,” by which dialogue and action sketch characters with distinct and consistent personality.

Even given the adverse circumstances and the constant risk that the terms and propositions of Yang Jiang’s critical approach would incur punishment, the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 was a trauma whose severity cannot be overstated. The largest political movement of the Mao years also has a complex relationship with the lives of intellectuals and the critical terms of writing lives. Wu Han, Yang Jiang’s immediate superior at the Academy of Learning, was the author of the biographical play “Hai Rui ba guan” (Hai Rui leaves office) that famously signaled a new regime of inquisition. Wu Han and other top scholars in Chinese academia were accused of

---

<sup>84</sup> For more on this text, see Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 1, 28-30, 209.

counterrevolutionary activity, and had to endure physical and psychological torture in the form of struggle sessions. Wu Han died in captivity; many others committed suicide.

The community of humanities scholars in the pre-Cultural Revolution times was likely a small one, and close-knit – perhaps predictably, many of those working in Shanghai and Beijing were married scholars with families. The campaign of terror and oppression that occasioned the deaths of so many in the community is perhaps a factor in ending Yang Jiang’s efforts to engage with communist leaders, making of Yang Jiang and her husband internal exiles, acknowledged and recalcitrant reactionaries.

And yet, after the Red Guards had been dissolved, the cadre schools all closed, academic institutions reconstituted, and surviving scholars rehabilitated, Yang Jiang leapt at the chance to begin critical practice again. Why? In one of her most famous essays on experiences in this period, Yang Jiang speaks of how the slow and deliberate labor of literary thought was a mechanism of survival – Yang Jiang worked on *Don Quixote*, and her husband Qian Zhongshu on his comparative poetics notebooks.<sup>85</sup> Both would publish their work in 1978. Hu Qiaomu, Mao’s personal secretary – and the man said to have entrapped Wu Han – encouraged Yang Jiang to publish the internally circulated report on *Don Quixote* from the 1960s as the official introduction to the published edition. Perhaps Yang Jiang realized that Hu – now an important aide to Deng Xiaoping and, as director of the newly formed Chinese Academy of Social

---

<sup>85</sup> Yang Jiang, “Bingwu dingwei nian jishi 丙午丁未年记事 [Years of the Horse and the Ram],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 190-1.

Sciences – had simply been riding political winds himself, and that these had indeed changed. She obeyed Hu Qiaomu, and *Don Quixote* was published.

In her introductory essay, Yang Jiang reviews the main terms of her work on Fielding and Thackeray, calling for readers to see how Don Quixote and Sancho Panza were both archetypes and yet full of distinctive personality.<sup>86</sup> The early English audience celebrated Quixote as a comic figure, she explains – all except for Fielding, who saw Quixote not as the object of satire, but a satirist in his own right, a lone man of morals in a fallen world. In his 1734 play *Don Quixote in England*, Fielding's Quixote figures the idea that a good man seems mad in this mad world: "What is a good-natured man? Why, one who, seeing the want of his friend, cries, and pities hum!...Sancho, let them call me mad; I'm not mad enough to court their approbation."<sup>87</sup> The French, too, understood Quixote first and foremost as a hero, his story as a grand *memoir du chevalier* too dignified to laugh at.<sup>88</sup> In 19th century drama, Quixote even resurfaces in tragic guise!<sup>89</sup> To the Chinese audience, she reminds that Cervantes intended only to write a brief parody of heroism as a concept, but the true character of Quixote filled out more the more he wrote, so that the complete picture of his personality gradually forms over the course of the novel. Quixote is a hero, with honesty, purity and other chivalric

---

<sup>86</sup> YangJiang, "Yi zhe xu 译者序 [Translator's Preface]," in, vol. 5, *Collected Writings* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 1–18.

<sup>87</sup> Yang Jiang, "Yi zhe xu 译者序 [Translator's Preface]," 5, quoting from act II, scene 1 of *Don Quixote in England*; Cf. Abraham Adams, "Fielding and the Sympathetic View of Don Quixote," in *The Sanctification of Don Quixote*, ed. Eric J. Ziolkowski (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1991), 47-9.

<sup>88</sup> Yang Jiang, "Yi zhe xu 译者序 [Translator's Preface]," 6.

<sup>89</sup> Yang Jiang, "Yi zhe xu 译者序 [Translator's Preface]," 7, Yang Jiang quotes Hazlitt on Quixote's tragic character; Cf. Prince Myshkin, "Dostoyevsky and the Romantic View of Don Quixote," in *The Sanctification of Don Quixote*, ed. Eric J. Ziolkowski (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1991), 95-6; cf. Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. Percival P. Howe, vol. 6 (State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1819).

features much surpassing ordinary men. At the same time, though, Yang Jiang cannot help but conjecture that Cervantes' own life of disappointment, of under-appreciation for his military service and loyalty to the King of Spain, finds expression and solace in the tale of a protagonist who overcomes constant suffering. Suffering is the controlling *ganqing* "feeling" in the work – in this way, Yang Jiang introduces a new element to her outline of story/character structure. To the degree we observe and understand Don Quixote's strategies to negotiate adversity, we as readers empathize (*tongqing*).

The 1978 *Don Quixote* was a big success, selling out its first run of 100,000 copies almost immediately in the newly reformed literary market.<sup>90</sup> When King Juan Carlos I made one of the first state visits of a European head of state to post-Cultural Revolution China, a statue of Don Quixote was erected on the campus of Peking University, and a deluxe copy of Yang Jiang's Chinese translation was presented to the King.

Writing with new authority and freedom in 1980 – the same year she published her collection of short fiction and one year before the memoir *Gan xiao liu ji* (Six records of a cadre school) would come out, Yang Jiang wrote one more critical piece: "Shishi, gushi, zhenshi" (Facts, stories, reality).<sup>91</sup> Deploring the general tendency to read fiction for details about the author – especially hints of scandal – Yang Jiang appeals to readers to consider why it is that a write would choose fiction over memoir in

---

<sup>90</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ], 193.

<sup>91</sup> Yang Jiang, Shishi, gushi, zhenshi 事实、故事、真实 [Facts, stories, true events], in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4: plays and literary criticism (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 293–307.

the first place? The answer: to tell the truth.<sup>92</sup> But a kind of truth that is different from the truth of facts and factual experience. “Story truth” amplifies the conditions for the expression of feeling (*ganqing*), “the *true face* of human experience within consciousness” (*yishi zhong de rensheng zhenxiang*). The use of a Buddhist term, *zhenxiang*, flags an overall more mystical approach to literary inspiration and the sacred role of literature.

Yang Jiang turns the bulk of the essay into a close reading of “Hui zhen ji” (Encounter with an Immortal, also known as “Ying ying zhuan,” The story of Ying Ying) by Yuan Zhen (779–831). I quote the climactic conclusion of her reading, as follows:

The story is about the deep and melancholic personal bonds between a man and a woman. Their sublime passion, though deep, has no beginning and no end, as a single burst of love and affection creates endless despair and infinite sorrow. The romance emphasizes Scholar Zhang’s faithful character and irregular constancy; underscoring in every part how his captivation with Ying Ying is different from the ordinary philandering of a lecher. Ying Ying is able to turn Zhang upside down, which highlights how Ying Ying is different from other beauties. Ying Ying is an intelligent and unflappable young lady. She loves Zhang’s talent and is moved by Zhang’s foolish passion (*chiqing*). That she arranged the private rendezvous with Zhang in the western chamber, yet scolded him once there, is perhaps a matter of changing her mind at the last minute, or perhaps she really only wanted to see him and speak with him. In any case her “speaking of principle sharply and defensively” (*yan ze min bian*) is believable....If Yuan Zhen’s “The Story of Yingying” was really about Yuan’s own feelings, then Scholar Zhang’s restraint answers not only to the personality (*gexing*) of the character (*renwu*), but also the needs of the story. The old matron, knowing the boat has sailed, is not obstructing the marriage, so Zhang and Ying Ying can enjoy what they desire and don’t need to remain mired in melancholy. It is Zhang who restrains himself before the marriage can be completed. Zhang’s restraint is not what Yuan Zhen wants, but only a rule of the story, an internal requirement of it....Neither Ying Ying’s meandering soliloquy, her sorrowful *qin* playing, nor her plaintive-without-complaining (*yuan er bu*

---

<sup>92</sup> I summarize 296-8

*nu*) love letters can make Zhang bring his passion to a head. And even though she breaks up with Zhang in a poetic letter, still there is a lingering passion left unsevered (*yu qing wei duan*), a cavity of the heart filled with a deep depression that manages to win the reader's empathy. Yuan Zhen's "love 'em and leave 'em" story is clearly not meant to promote some grand moral involving "restraint," but rather to write out a kind of infinite melancholia. This is not just a matter of failure between Zhang and Yingying, but also a statement about how common failure is in this world; moreover, it makes manifest the conflict between intellect (*lizhi*) and passion (*qinggan*). Knowledge from the intellect is a defect that can't be patched; passion, though, is unwilling to submit, can never rest, and yet is also no guarantee of success. These feelings (*qinggan*) are the universal human experience (*rensheng pubian de jingyan*). It really proves a statement from western literary theory: "A particular fiction can lead towards a general truth." That's why this little story is so moving, and later generations never stopped praising it, and in *Record of the Western Chamber*, even gave it a happy ending.<sup>93</sup>

In this passage, Yang Jiang seals together her various concerns: the connection between a writer's characters and a writer's experience, the craft of character design, and the relation between story convention, character affect (*qinggan*), and humanist values. For the first time, Yang Jiang transcends her previous working theory that had even realist characters exemplify single, unchanging values to see that, quite the contrary, even romantic characters come alive only when values conflict. More than ever, her tone is that of the ambitious craftsman, with a strong interest in how the writer must amplify common emotions and experience to produce something audiences will love.

Undergirding her very practical understanding of story structure is the ever-present inquiry into human nature, "the universal human experience." A crucial proposition of genre follows from this strong proposition of story affect and value as metaphor for life, as Yang Jiang collapses the distinction between realism and romance once and for all, yielding something more like a spectrum: romance is dictated more by convention, and

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 303-4.

realism, less, but both depend more fundamentally on careful incubation of characters with distinguishable personalities, capable of “winning the reader’s empathy.”

Yang Jiang’s ultra-leftist critics were quite right to point out that this practical concept of human nature is rich in political content. Yang Jiang’s post-Mao biographers describe her as a proper Marxist misunderstood by the radical extremism of a past now over, but this notion is laughable in light of the utter lack of any Marxist framework. Her early work on Fielding and Thackeray reveals a surprising familiarity with contemporary Western narrative theory, including even Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, which only became available in 1957, the very year she and her fellow intellectuals underwent a second wave of criticism for straying from the socialist path.<sup>94</sup> By comparison though, her 1980s work reveals an even broader engagement with more or less structuralist criticism (Wayne Booth, Laurence Lerner, Bernard Bergonzi, Rene Wellek and Austen Warren) as well as a special fondness for critic-artists working in French and English: Conrad, Maugham, Flaubert, Pierre Laaclos (author of *Les Liasons dangereuses*).<sup>95</sup> Also in this period, even the passing mention of Marxist criticism present in the 1950s work drops away. Even such a basic thinker as Lukacs, whose work in retrospect seems to speak in direct opposition to Yang Jiang’s focus on subjective experience absent any notion of capitalist totality, apparently has no interest for her.

## Conclusion

---

<sup>94</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 240, 265, 291, 304, 308.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 228, 299, 307, 321.



Yang Jiang's 1950s criticism was republished in collected form in 1979, entitled *Chun ni ji* (Spring Mud Collection). Her preface to the volume explains that the title comes from a couplet by the Qing poet Gong Zichen:

落红不是无情物，  
化作春泥更护花。

Falling red flowers aren't passionless things,  
For changed to spring mud they protect plants more.<sup>96</sup>

The implication is that Yang Jiang's hopes her critical writing has "fallen," been criticized or gone unnoticed in the first decade of the PRC, but she issues it again in the Post-mao era in hope that future students of narrative would find them useful. One ideological reading would be to say that Yang Jiang had opposed Maoist policy on literature and the arts from the beginning, and registers her opposing views in the newly opened literary sphere at the first opportunity to advocate for a perspective that is anti-Marxist. Another reading could suggest that she once had a voice, however small, in the highest layer of PRC academe, and suggested an emotion-based perspective on fiction informed by Western and Chinese traditions, for consideration. Most of these articles mine Yang Jiang's propositions about story structure and the relation between character and writer to illuminate their readings of her later fiction and memoir. And indeed this connection exists: the short fiction that appeared all at once in a 1981 collection exhibits intermixing of genre and realist convention, clear focus on character with brilliant literary affect, and ambiguous, tension-filled moral and political content – in other

---

<sup>96</sup> Yang Jiang, *Chun ni ji* 春泥集 [Spring Mud Collection] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1979), frontispiece; Also see Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past], 265. Wu adds that this was the only volume of literary criticism published in 1979 by new Foreign Literature Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

words, stories considerably more sophisticated than the great bulk of Chinese fiction, 1979-81. Her magnum opus, also published in 1981, testifies to the experience of the Cultural Revolution in lyrical, highly aesthetized terms that dramatize the struggle of a modern selfhood under the duress of exile and ideological oppression. Like Ying Ying's love letters, the work was celebrated for its achievement of *yuan'er bu nu*, "plaintiveness-without-complaining," a phrase that suggests the depth of the textualized subject, and recalls us to her careful research on that depth in Thackeray and Cervantes. Other, shorter lyrical essays in the decade that follows reveal a continuing concern with artful self-portraiture that resonates with moral and political content – and all the more for their ambiguity and concision. The basic question of the relation between the author and the textualized subject – what it might mean to "write a life" – erupts in "Facts, Stories and Reality" but receives closer, more intimate treatment in the 1984 "On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*," a uniquely hybrid attempt to lay out the facts and reality but also connect to the story in retrospect. And as Yang Jiang continues to live, age and write in the 21st century, her critical concerns remain constant even as the political ambiguity drops away to reveal a contemporary Confucian sage, living in open exemplarity for a reading public that has come to think of her as an icon for timeless Chinese cultural values, and seems all too willing to forget that two whole generations once explored a Marxist framework for literature and arts. Thus, as with the body of fiction and essay that will be investigated in the chapters that follow, Yang Jiang's critical inquiry is broadly representative of the ongoing history of humanist values in China, and so helps us begin to fill in the many gaps to see the arc of Chinese humanism.



## Chapter Three: “Reflections in Reverse,” Yang Jiang’s Short Fiction, 1979-1981

### Short Fiction in China, 1979-1981, and Yang Jiang

Five stories set in pre-revolutionary Shanghai and Beijing, all on the theme of intimacy’s ineffability, came out all at once as the 1981 collection *Dao ying ji* (Reflections in Reverse).<sup>97</sup> Emerging just after the 1978 publication of *Don Quixote*, the stories mark Yang’s return to creative writing as she embraced the new freedom of expression offered at the end of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>98</sup> Reflections contains five stories, one from 1934 and four written between 1977 and 1980. Where other writers at the time sought out literatures of political resistance, or else explorations of individual subjectivity based in the grotesque or the satiric, Yang Jiang’s stories engage rhetorics of intimacy with a fascinating lack of consideration for nation or national representation – in short, these intimate fictions eschew the goal of “speaking for the people.” In this chapter, I offer readings that identify these rhetorics of intimacy, tracing in them a re-constitution of a particular matrix of Republican-era social values. In the terms that Haiyan Lee has coined, Yang Jiang writes in a vein that calls on the “enlightenment structure of feeling” seen in May Fourth and later writers, including Lin Whei-yin,

---

<sup>97</sup> According to Yang Jiang’s self-written *Nianpu*, the four stories were written between 1977 and January 1980. They were first published in book form in 1981 as *Dao ying ji*. Later in the same year, “Jade Lady” would appear in the journal *Shanghai wen yi*, and “Ghost,” in *Shouhuo*; See Yang Jiang, “Yang Jiang sheng ping yu chuang zao da shi ji 杨绛生平与创造大事记 [Outline Record of Yang Jiang’s Life and Work],” in *Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 394-5.

<sup>98</sup> On the new freedoms, and their limitations, Link provides a vivid account based on interviews with many writers in *Roses and Thorns: the Second Blooming of the Hundred Flowers in Chinese Fiction: 1979-1980* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 19-41. “Introduction: Writers in the People’s Republic,” esp., pp. 20-41

Zhang Ailing, and others. But characters in Yang Jiang stories share a different relation to older conventions of the Chinese love story. All deal with adverse situations caused by marital conflict, financial distress, war – what Lauren Berlant calls, after Dorothy Parker, “the messes that kill us.” As sites for the re-emergence of Confucian genres of prudent, domestic, strategizing females, they accomplish what Berlant refers to as staying “in proximity to the norm.” The norm here is an exemplary femininity that figures metonymically what Haiyan Lee has called the “Confucian structure of feeling,” the late imperial model of selfhood that stitched sentiment to social category using, most commonly, *Dream of the Red Chamber* as the template.<sup>99</sup> These stories thus deserve a place within the broader history of postsocialist Chinese fiction as a reintroduction of Republican-era humanism *and* as early signs of a Chinese woman’s autobiographical practice that would invoke an older, Confucian notion of the exemplary.

### **The Unfinished Business of Republican-era Sentimentality**

“In this work,” writes Cao Xueqin in a preface to *Hong lou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), “the main point is to discuss *qing*.”<sup>100</sup> *Qing* is a term for affective intensities that has evolved from a category of relations and circumstances into something that often reminds Western readers of the concept of “love.”<sup>101</sup> But the degree to which “to discuss *qing*” (*tan qing*) is to speak of intimate relations, including especially the dynamics of emotion in a sexual relationship, does not match the

<sup>99</sup> Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2008), 2 (其中大旨谈情, translation modified). Hsieh’s work tracks the Chinese love story, which is the focus of so much attention in Ming-Qing literary studies, to mid-Tang *chuanqi*.

<sup>101</sup> See Halvor Eifring, ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), Introduction, 3-5.

overwhelming magnitude observed in Western literature.<sup>102</sup> In early China, the representation of emotion was often thought to distract from the more proper function of illustrating the ideal structures of individuals, families and the state.<sup>103</sup> To “discuss *qing*” always presents at least the risk that the subject could be mired in selfish desires, blind infatuations, and carnal temptations that divert the subject from a higher calling: the production of human relationships according to an order principally generated by the relation of fathers over and above wives and children.<sup>104</sup> Anciently, the discourse of *qing* seems to predate official state ideology. The earliest moral and political discourse demands that *qing* relations affirm moral and political norms.<sup>105</sup> Representations of emotion were known to flourish and multiply in times of political decline; in a time of order, the people – at least, the literate, moral class – should refuse this indulgence, rid the self of affective intensity, and correct, still, or otherwise quiet the emotions.<sup>106</sup>

Chinese poetry is a site for sublimation and purification of *qing*. The primary affects of desire and shame are purified as critique; the primary affect of joy is the sublime union that figures political order. *Xiao shuo*, the loose, complex category of prose narratives that have come to be understood as “Chinese fiction,” form a site lower down from poetry, more closely associated with vulgar merchants, oral storytellers of markets, and vernacular writing that can go on sale.<sup>107</sup> Even the classical tale emerged out of unofficial, alternative, and often private histories of *guai*, a broad Confucian

---

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*, 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Hsieh helpfully collates an overview of the critical tradition of the *Shijing*, the political allegory of the *Chu ci*, early rhapsodies (*fu*) on passions, and the “boudoir lament” genre of palace poetry. *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>107</sup> Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*, 19-31; Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 4-9.

concept of alterity: people and places of the margins, the Other; the anomalous.<sup>108</sup> In and around the site of *xiao shuo*, raw, unpurified *qing* is bonded to motifs of *guai*. Hence in Six Dynasties *zhiguai*, mid-Tang *chuanqi*, and in the eighteenth-century *Liaozhai zhiyi*, sexual relationships often involve ghosts, foxes or other elements of the fantastic which mark the love story as “juxtapolitical,” Lauren Berlant’s term for aesthetic worlds that flourish “in proximity to the political because the political is deemed an elsewhere managed by elites who are interested in reproducing the conditions of their objective superiority, not in the well-being of ordinary people or life-worlds.”<sup>109</sup> *Xiao shuo* high in *qing* exists in a degree of “proximity” to political norms that varies. An achievement of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is to reduce the distance between “ordinary people or life-worlds” and “elites,” and to suggest that *qing*, while a temptation justly associated with downfall, is the source of human bonds that somehow affirm, yet transcend, Confucian norms.<sup>110</sup> Hence from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the parallel flourishing of fiction markets, Chinese theater, and discourses of selfhood under the political conditions of dynastic decline and transition, the Chinese love story came to be a site where *qing* is pure, and official state ideology becomes the thing that needs purification.<sup>111</sup>

Thanks to a series of pioneering new studies, we now understand that there is a thread of *qing* connecting the fiction tradition culminating in *Dream of the Red*

---

<sup>108</sup> Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*, 19; Andrew Plaks, “Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative,” in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew Plaks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 356.

<sup>109</sup> Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*, 19-31; Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>110</sup> Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 91-2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.

*Chamber* with sentimental fiction of the later 18<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Patrick Hanan uncovered the vibrant and unique representations of emotion from both male and female perspectives in the 1890s and early 1900s romantic fiction of Chen Diexian.<sup>112</sup> Hanan emphasized Chen's work as an autobiographical practice shaped by *Dream of the Red Chamber* – Chen loved multiple girls and described his romantic crises with an ironic sense of identification with Jia Baoyu.<sup>113</sup> Haiyan Lee, building on this work as well as Perry Link's study of Mandarin ducks and butterflies fiction, illustrates the place that Chen's work has in the gradual, staged influx of enlightenment discourses of selfhood into Chinese vernacular narrative *via* the discourse of *qing*.<sup>114</sup> Lee has gone further than almost any other scholar to illustrate how the literature of the May Fourth Movement and afterward does not erase or reset narrative features surrounding *qing* and selfhood, but rather redirects *qing* to form a new revolutionary rhetoric of Chinese national self-determination and socialist fervor.<sup>115</sup> Chen and other authors of Butterfly sentimental fiction, says Lee, “articulate a romantic moral theory in which our innate and inner capacity for feeling is a constitutive good.” This attention to “feeling” (one of Lee's glosses for *qing*) is, in the twentieth century, a cultural space of dynamic exchange between Chinese and Western literature: *La dame aux camélias*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and *A Doll's House* add as much to this new romantic model of personhood in post-May Fourth fiction by Lu Xun, Ling Shuhua, Shi Zhecun, Zhang

---

<sup>112</sup> Patrick Hanan, “The Autobiographical Romance of Chen Diexian,” in *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 199–214.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-2, see the story of Chen's affair with a courtesan, “the Zhenglou episode,” 205-7.

<sup>114</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 60-92.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.



Henshui, and Zhang Ailing.<sup>116</sup> Lee shows how stories of “free love” in these writers between the 1920s and 1940s moves away from “love at first sight” scenarios obstructed by extrapersonal conflict to stories of characters plagued by doubt and uncertainty, unable to communicate with their love interests, and unclear about their own feelings. Later romantic characters of the 1940s are quiet, awkward subjects, lonely in their crowded urban spaces, and desperate for real connections and communication.<sup>117</sup> Zhang Ailing, says Lee, is the most “artful” of 1940s chroniclers of the “metropolitan personality” who “yearns to be in touch with the heroic,” but in a bourgeois way that promises the feeling of freedom within contemporary institutions of intimacy, be they marriage, or a nice urban affair.<sup>118</sup>

This brand of Republican-era sentimental fiction was already a minor literature by the 1940s, says Lee.<sup>119</sup> The pathetic characters in Republican-era sentimental short fiction had to make way for a “recrudescence” of heroism in the war years and after. During the first three decades of the PRC, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese love story becomes a palimpsest of the ideal history of class struggle leading to the collectivized nation; a “seamless suture” of interiorized men and women into the project of nation building.<sup>120</sup>

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese intellectuals have abandoned the great “we” and returned to the “I,” says Lee. Fiction resumed the enlightenment structure of feeling “with a vengeance.”<sup>121</sup> In the work of Zhang Jie, Zhang Xianliang,

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 95-140.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 121-3, 130-1.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

Han Shaogong, and others, we see a movement to “dismantle” “the revolutionary structure of feeling.”<sup>122</sup>

This is the milieu into which Yang Jiang makes an unusual second debut. Like Zhang Ailing, Yang Jiang had been writing realist romantic drama in Shanghai in the 1940s – though Yang Jiang is better known for plays, two comedies of manners about young people’s progress towards marriage in Shanghai comprador homes.<sup>123</sup> With *Reflections in Reverse*, Yang Jiang turns her hand to short fiction for the first time since 1934. Moreover, far from overtly “dismantling” the revolutionary structure of feeling, Yang Jiang sets her late 1970s stories in pre-1949 Shanghai. All of her characters are intellectuals, and moreover the same sort of introverted and doubtful types that Lee identified in 1930s and 40s era stories. As in Zhang Ailing’s work, Yang Jiang’s characters usually don’t find emotional fulfillment in the institutions of intimacy available to them: marriage, an affair, or even the “women’s world.” Still, they continue to seek alternative spaces for intimacy that are, as Lauren Berlant puts it, “in proximity to the norm.”<sup>124</sup>

What norms? To accomplish the readings that follow, it is useful to look back on the history of sentimentality in Chinese literature, and to remember that a basic Confucian norm is the proper response to passion. It is a gesture of quieting down feelings of blind infatuation, which otherwise wreck family and state. Chinese intellectuals generally, and women intellectuals much more particularly and intensely, must practice affect control, or be lost. Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>123</sup> On the plays, see Amy D. Dooling, *Women’s Literary Feminism In Twentieth-Century China* (New York: MacMillan, 2005), 137-58.

<sup>124</sup> Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, 221.

paradigmatic example of a girl of talent who succumbs to affective contagion.<sup>125</sup> She finds herself under the control of mysterious forces that emanate from Jia Baoyu and the romantic poems, tales and drama that seem to come up whenever they spend time together. Yang Jiang writes that the misunderstanding that leads to the misfortunes of Lin Daiyu makes us understand the importance of overcoming difficulty, whether it be intimate or aesthetic.<sup>126</sup> Her characters undertake a more or less autobiographical practice to replace Daiyu's image with the figure of the woman of talent who does overcome difficulty -- who manages, somehow. Yang Jiang's return to 1940s aesthetic conventionality is a calmer, much less sentimental prose style than anything from Zhang Jie or scar literature. Tone denotes its normalism. Lauren Berlant argues of the fiction of Dorothy Parker that she stages "feminine normativity as a formalist fantasy about the pleasures and burdens of adaptation."<sup>127</sup> Parker's "hard edge" is described in *The Female Complaint* as a failed defense; Parker said so herself: "I know that ridicule may be a shield."<sup>128</sup> In Yang Jiang the shields are "warmth, equanimity, and refinement," qualities that inhere in the tone but also form crucial the core of an exemplary femininity.<sup>129</sup> By performing the necessary artistry to conquer difficulty, Yang Jiang gains the voice to be a "female complainer" of subtle power.

### Reflections in Reverse

<sup>125</sup> On this topic, see Sophie Volpp, "Wu Lanzheng's *Jiang Heng Qiu*," *Journal of Theater Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 113-138, <http://140.112.58.221/journal/sec-8/113-138.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2012).

<sup>126</sup> Yang Jiang, "Yishu yu kefu kunnan: du Hong lou meng ouji 艺术与客服困难-读《红楼梦》偶记 [Art and Overcoming Difficulty: A Note on Dream of the Red Chamber]," 274-5.

<sup>127</sup> Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, 215.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Tian Huilan, "Jiu Zhongguo dushi yijiao de sumiao: Yang Jiang Dao ying ji man ping 旧中国都市一角的素描-杨绛《倒影集》满评 [Perspective sketches of old Chinese cities: A critical essay on Yang Jiang's Reflections in Reverse]," in Yanjiu ziliao ji, ed. Tian Huilan 田蕙兰, Ma Guangsu 马光裕, and Chen Keyu 陈轲玉 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997).

*Reflections in Reverse* opens with juvenilia that is nevertheless a primer for the pattern of managing difficulty that characterizes the plot structure of all the stories. In the 1934 “*Lulu, bu yong chou!*” (Lulu, don’t despair!), Lulu is a female college student who suffers from two suitors and an excessive endowment of vanity.<sup>130</sup> In the end, Lulu need not despair, because though she rejects a poor suitor only to be rejected in turn by a wealthy one, she wins a scholarship to study abroad. As with many 1930s stories, especially in the feminine, domestic-oriented branch of Zhu Ziqing’s literary circle, “Lulu” bears clear signs of the influence of English-language women’s sentimental fiction, in that it dramatizes a young woman’s attempt to choose a marriage partner.<sup>131</sup> Lulu is the focus of gentle mocking that combines satire of a negative social value (here, Lulu’s vanity) with sympathy for the relatively new bourgeois experience of marriage by choice. Thus, when Lulu’s first suitor, Xiao Wang, arrives bleeding and swollen from a bad fall, the reader watches horrified as Lulu makes him wait in the foyer while she puts on her make-up, and upon seeing him, she sends him away immediately.<sup>132</sup> But this critical perspective turns to empathy as Yang Jiang takes us to an inner level of conflict. The omniscient narrator shows us Lulu’s thoughts directly, and these thoughts are chiefly of the faces of the boys in her life:

Lulu thought to herself about how Xiao Wang had fallen and lost a tooth for her, his whole face purple and swollen, and him unable to see anyone, and yet here she was out having fun with Tang Mi, and this made her feel more than a little awkward. Even as she faced the one, she felt she wouldn’t be able to face the other.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Yang Jiang, “Lulu, bu yong chou! 璐璐,不用愁! [Lulu, don’t despair!]” In *Collected Writings*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 1–8.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Lee’s discussion on the changes to marriage structure in the Republican era. Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 104, 120, 144, 157, 180.

<sup>132</sup> Yang Jiang, “Lulu, bu yong chou!” 1-2.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Throughout Yang Jiang's writing, affective intensity is concentrated in the face, making it the central motif connecting fiction and essay. Here, Lulu has jilted Xiao Wang, who is rich but too short, so that she can go out with her other suitor, Tang Mi, who is captivating but too poor. The comically injured face of Xiao Wang haunts Lulu's mind, forming a double image over the more handsome Tang Mi. Readers of Yang Jiang's plays will recognize, in embryonic form, the main character types that would emerge more fully formed in Yang Jiang's plays: the emancipated woman, the romantic lover, and bumbling patriarchs.<sup>134</sup> The bifurcation in the two sentences of the passage neatly captures a dilemma that was conventional even in Butterfly sentimental fiction: whether to treat marriage as a business investment, and so to see one self in the social category of "daughter," or to treat marriage as a figure for becoming a feeling – and therefore real – human being. The central verbs here, "thought" and "feel" and "face" and "feel" again, drive a rapid review and reconsideration of the situation that makes Lulu change her mind. When the story turns from interpersonal conflict to portray an interior state of mind that must decide, the reader becomes more intimate with Lulu, and the satirical function drops away. Our hope for Lulu is rewarded: she makes the more responsible decision to cast off Tang Mi and return to Little Wang. The story then returns to the level of interpersonal conflict, but our intimacy remains: Little Wang has chosen another prospect. What will happen to Lulu? Fortunately, a letter arrives from America: Lulu has won the chance to study abroad. The value invested in the choice of marriage dissolves in the face of this new opportunity and the freedom it will afford. The mess

---

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Dooling on these types in Yang Jiang's later plays. Dooling, *Women's Literary Feminism In Twentieth-Century China*, 152-58.

she has made of her relationships can yield to a cooler, more rational aim: to go abroad, become a “woman of the enlightenment,” and put off the crisis of marriage to a later date.

“Lulu” already has the tone that would make Yang Jiang a middlebrow writer in the post-Mao era – an affective control that suggests the elevation native to poetry, and which feels proper without attempting to be political. The much better-known love story “Ai, shi bu neng wangji de” (Love Must Not to be Forgotten) had pushed its author Zhang Jie (1949-) to both instant fame and critical condemnation in 1979. That work had attempted to “dismantle,” as Lee says, the idea of love and choice of marriage mate from the binds of socialism, and so refused the then-universal proposition that institutions of intimacy were mere corollaries to the common imperative to build up the nation.<sup>135</sup> Yang Jiang’s story remembers what it might have been like to have an institution of intimacy outside of the political with an equanimity that bespoke wisdom. As critic Tian Huilan commented, “the writing is like the person.”<sup>136</sup>

Tian’s sentence reveals a method of reading fiction that searches setting, plot and character as well as tone and style for signs of the personality and values of the writer. By reviving 1930s-40s domestic sentimentality, Yang Jiang opens up a new space for the development of a subjectivity that is distinctively female and that struggles to maintain poise in adversity, especially that caused by fickle men and poisonous women, as in “Big Joke,” or else in the complete absence of men, as in “The Enterprise.” In

<sup>135</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 289.

<sup>136</sup> In Chinese, 正所谓文如其人; “warmth, equanimity, and refinement” is 温婉、平和、淡雅 Tian Huilan, “*Jiu Zhongguo dushi yijiao de sumiao: Yang Jiang Dao ying ji man ping* 旧中国都市一角的素描-杨绛《倒影集》满评 [Perspective sketches of old Chinese cities: A critical essay on Yang Jiang’s *Reflections in Reverse*],” in Yanjiu ziliao ji, ed. Tian Huilan 田蕙兰, Ma Guangsu 马光裕, and Chen Keyu 陈轲玉 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 658.

these stories, intimate portraits of Republican Chinese women negotiating heteronormativity stage a series of escapes and alternatives, and so reveal an imagination actually grappling with the very equanimity critics find championed in the stories.

### Escaping the “Big Joke”

“*Da xiaohua*” (Big joke), the first the post-Mao stories, offers a refined, but ultimately too-delicate, female protagonist whose fate satirizes the exceptionalism of a group of 1940s intellectuals who live and work in an idyllic garden campus outside of Beijing:

All who gained admission to Wenjia Garden were like maggots burrowing into cheese; there being enough to burrow for a whole lifetime, they often forgot there even was any world outside the garden.<sup>137</sup>

The very setting of the story, a cemetery garden transformed into a science and humanities institute, located far to the southwest of Beijing, calls to mind the traditional motif of the garden enclave that often appeared in Feng Menglong’s vernacular stories, and arguably takes on the greatest juxtopolitical function as the main setting of the classic novel *Hong lou meng* (*Dream of the red chamber*). Yang Jiang’s garden incorporates modern expert discourses like foreign literatures and natural sciences to stage a much more cynical rendering of the hybrid Confucian and enlightenment discourse that drives late-Republican intellectuals. The thoroughly modern males in this story lack the Qing value of sacrifice; they court the female protagonist, Chen Qian, but it is not serious; they are already married, anyway; it is all a “big joke.” These men, and

---

<sup>137</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, “Da xiao hua 大笑话 [Big Joke],” in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004 [1980]), 9–20; this story is now available in English translation: Yang Jiang, “What a Joke,” trans. Christopher G. Rea, *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, no. 76 (2011): 34–67.

the women who keep their homes, are like “maggots burrowing through cheese,” a figure so biting it could have been written by Qian Zhongshu.

In fact, “Big Joke” resembles Qian’s 1940s-era story “Cat,” both in satirical function and structure.<sup>138</sup> Both stories caricature an ensemble of over a dozen educated but useless scholars and both stories set their turning points in social gatherings where a show of conviviality thinly conceals petty power struggles among the characters. The climax of “Cat” is a young man’s decision about whether to pursue an affair with a married woman; that of “Big Joke,” a young lady’s (Chen Qian) about whether to do so with a married man; both decline. But where “Cat” offers only a single intimate moment near the end that reveals the fears and anxieties of its central married couple, “Big Joke” is sympathetic to Chen Qian from the beginning. In stark contrast to the distant narrator that characterized her husband Qian Zhongshu’s Republican-era fiction, Yang Jiang produces rhetorics of intimacy that will serve the satiric function even as they meditate on the positive qualities of her suffering central character.

When one of the cloistered intellectuals dies, his long-absent wife, Chen Qian, arrives from Shanghai to pick up her late husband’s scientific equipment. Chen Qian works as a secretary in a Shanghai school – she is educated and culturally literate, but economically vulnerable. She’s also attractive, with a civilized equanimity symbolized in her smile -- a feature that captivates institute scholar Lin Ziyu right away:

Lin Ziyu noticed that she didn’t open her mouth when she smiled, nor did she resemble [his wife] Yiqun, whose every smile came with a pair of dimples. With her lips pressed together that way, and no teeth exposed, it certainly wasn’t a great smile, but carried a whiff of girlish delicacy, though not enough to annoy. Further, her smile was all in the eyes, the pair of them, vivacious, yet determined.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Cite “Cat” – Rea translation, original, critical essay.

<sup>139</sup> ang Jiang, “Da xiao hua,” 66.



A single smile initiates the desire for intimacy, and serves here to present Chen Qian's most salient personal qualities. Her smile is calm, amiable and honest, with no ulterior motives. If there is any weakness to Chen's character it is in the refinement of the properly cultured, or *siwen* 斯文 imbricates with a more compromising feminine quality of "delicacy," *jiao* 娇. In an adverse world, "delicacy" is a feature the fittest creatures would be wise to cast off. The dual quality of her refinement is perhaps also reflected in the last word of the description, "determined" (*wanpi* 顽皮), which by a twist of linguistic history can also mean "mischievous, naughty."

Chen Qian's quality of refinement, then, is both a blessing and a curse, as it helps her find welcome among strangers above her in social status, but it also causes an unhappy, hen-pecked husband to fall for her. When the wives of the institute sense that Lin and Chen might have an affair, they try to entrap the couple, the better to humiliate them both. Afflicted as they are with loveless and boring marriages, they create messes to amuse themselves. Faced with such adversaries, Chen Qian's eventual exit, alone, from the garden community is tragic in so far as her heart has been broken, but comic in that her determination is a positive value that has more fully emerged, and she may now escape the garden to have a new and different life (though just what this means is beyond the scope of the story).

This story's major innovation over the 1934 "Lulu" is a mastery of literary affect, the close description of physical characteristics and gestures meant to reveal the feelings and personality traits of that character. Chen Qian's smile is paradigmatic, with its artful arrangement of dimples, lips, teeth and eyes. Each of the characters receives such a

portrait, though most are briefer. Chen Qian's antagonist, the malicious director's wife, Cai Zhuli, shows how literary affect blossoms into other motifs that join plot-structure, character, and setting to create the *ethos* of the story. In Cai, outward physical description blends into elements of the setting which are used as an internal image system: the telephone becomes a symbol for the web of deceit, the director's parlor is her lair, and a bowl of pink ice cream topped with chartreuse serves as bait; Cai Zhuli is a spider-lady, probably a tongue-in-cheek reference to the motif from the novel *Xi you ji* (Journey to the West). Chen Qian figures an opposition to this agent of entrapment that will appear in every instance of Yang Jiang's fiction. In her elucidation of this figure, neither feminist nor quite tradition-bound, neither of the gentry class nor impelled towards revolution, Yang Jiang forges a narrative arc virtually undocumented in modern Chinese literature, and that can yet serve as a prescient sign of later fiction by members of the younger generation, such as Wang Anyi, and even more so the new stories of Yiyun Li. What is documented in all these cases is a non-revolutionary search for new and alternative institutions of intimacy.

### **Alternatives I: Defeating the "Jade Lady"**

"Big Joke," like Qian Zhongshu's own work in "Cat" and *Fortress Besieged*, examines a troubled marriage, with much of the artistry devoted to psychologically insightful portraits of what goes wrong – mostly male fantasies and female frustrations – and layering these tragicomedies of manners with historical, political and moral subtexts. Where Chen Qian shows the perspective of the subject considering an affair with a married man, "Jade Lady" takes up the less common viewpoint of the long-

suffering wife of a philandering husband. The drama covers her discovery of an alternative, a new way to get by in an adverse world.

The protagonist of “Jade Lady” is Tian Xiao, an educated young mother of two small children. The setting is occupied Shanghai in the winter of 1941-2, when Japanese forces moved into the International Settlement, forcing many schools to either close their doors or move to the interior. Tian Xiao and her husband Hao Shijie are both teachers who could have moved with their schools, but Shijie has broken his leg. He’s holding the family back in other ways as well: a bad poet, his recent work cleaves to a fantasy that he might have married his “jade lady,” a cosmopolitan girl from a rich family. Tian Xiao stands by her man, but she realizes now that she married Shijie for the wrong reasons – she only wanted to supply herself with some of the beauty and delicacy she has always lacked. Angry at her husband for not devoting himself to her and the family, and for prolonging a romantic vision she herself once had but which now has faded, she begins to hen-peck Shijie: any infraction is a reminder that he wants to run away. Meanwhile, determined to save her family, she becomes a complete master of homemaking, a veritable domestic goddess:

Whenever anything in the house broke, she could fix it; if they lacked for anything, she would rig something up. A can for milk powder could be made into a small charcoal grill; a large clam shell placed into two fragments of broken bowl, and pasted with strips of colored cloth became a plaything for the children. Old tops and pants with holes, under her scissors, all became new clothes for the children. Even the bedding on which Shijie lay was something she had rigged up on the spot.<sup>140</sup>

What this stint of intense domesticity brings about is a change in Tian Xiao’s outlook, from (formerly) a frustration bordering on despair to a new confidence in her

---

<sup>140</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, “Yu ren 玉人 [Jade Lady],” in Yang Jiang wen ji, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004 [1980]), 110.

ability to transform a bad situation into a good one. Not only can she “fix,” or repair, situations, she can “rig up” (*bian chu lai* – “to produce by transformation”) new things from previously used materials. Here, the 70-year old Yang Jiang of 1980 is re-writing into existence a distinctively feminine virtue from the Chinese tradition. The passage above, which demonstrates industry and even genius in its economic enumeration of the everyday, might also remind readers of similar passages in the second record, “on leisure” (*ji xian*) in Shen Fu’s 1809 text *Fu sheng liu ji* (Six records of a floating life).<sup>141</sup> Shen Fu’s close descriptions of his wife’s Chen Yun’s genius for keeping a stylish home in straitened circumstances aestheticized huswifery; his distinctive application of classical Chinese to the everyday, praising his wife for transforming lack into supply and plainness into elegance, found its first mass readership in the Republican era, amidst the flourishing memoirs and casual essays in magazines and cheap printed books. Shen Fu’s text, as Charles Laughlin has shown, was one of many widely circulated within “the literature of leisure,” a loose-knit body of prose writing that prioritized private concerns and personal expression over social and political content.<sup>142</sup> Yang Jiang’s industrious wife revivifies the bourgeois Republican femininity of this “literature of leisure” for 1980s readers.

Moreover, Yang Jiang combines elements of comedy and the gothic dimension of romance in mid-Tang and Qing classical tales, as well as in English detective fiction. As with previous stories, the overall structure conforms to the idea of an “education plot”: the narrator leads Tian Xiao through bigger challenges that teach her how to

---

<sup>141</sup> Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, trans. Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui (New York: Penguin Classics, 1983).

<sup>142</sup> Charles A. Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 1-2.

manage tough times and a bad husband.<sup>143</sup> First Tian successfully secures housing in wartime Shanghai, though the apartment is a small one, and the landlord a dishonest and selfish opium addict. The shrewish Mrs. Xu refuses to respect Xiao's wish that the plumbing be fixed, or that the unit's bathroom be a private one, with the result that Tian Xiao must face rivers of feces every time she visits the toilet. In her first encounter with the backed-up sewage, she even loses her wedding ring – a vivid combination of inter- and extra-personal levels of conflict that plunges Chen Qian into deep crisis. But she rises to this challenge as well by selling off the feces to fertilizer merchants; she can turn shit into gold. A complicated caper follows which ultimately reveals that Tian's adversary Mrs. Xu is none other than her husband Zhijie's "jade lady," the girl he didn't choose, now prematurely aged with a home tending fast towards squalor. Suddenly Zhijie realizes that the whole time he was fantasizing over a vague romanticized femininity, he was neglecting the true worth of his own wife. In the end the little family loses the apartment and must move into even more cramped housing, but Tian Xiao and her husband are confident and secure in their marriage, and so have found more happiness in adversity than they had in their original, pre-occupation lives.

"Jade Lady" is a whimsically comic piece, but in its linear path from inner, to interpersonal, and finally extra-personal levels of conflict, it also constitutes a psychologically insightful message about intimacy in marriage, showing us how it is a union often predicated on a mistaken sense of the partner's character. But true "character" (*gexing*, or *xingling*, as Yang Jiang would argue more explicitly in her 2007 essays) becomes visible in the decisions people make in adversity. Thus, a married

---

<sup>143</sup> Norman Friedman, "Forms of the Plot," *Journal of General Education* 8, no. 4 (1955): 255.

couple can come to truly know each other if they are able to see themselves as a unit facing a world of challenges. Later essays by Yang Jiang reveal the deeply autobiographical dimension of this exemplary life story: Yang Jiang was in Shanghai from 1938, and Qian Zhongshu was stranded and underemployed there as well after 1941. According to Yang Jiang, when Qian Zhongshu decided to write his novel *Wei cheng* (Fortress besieged) in 1944, Yang Jiang helped his efforts by letting the housekeeper leave,

...and instead took on the work myself. I was a novice at cutting wood, starting fires, cooking meals, washing clothes and so forth, and so regularly coal smoke blackened my face, or fumes filled my eyes with tears, or boiling oil scalded me, or I suffered sliced fingers. But I was so anxious to see Zhongshu write *Fortress Besieged* (he had already told me the title and main contents) that I was happy to serve as a scullery maid.<sup>144</sup>

Yang Jiang's protagonist is an expert where Yang Jiang was a novice, but a similar use of rich, evocative description of domestic industry articulates femininity within the same discourse that traces to the Republican-era "literature of leisure," including antecedents like *Six Records of a Floating Life*. This connection between the textualized personality of writer and fictional character influences the 1980s reception of Yang Jiang's fiction, bolstering the moral content of an admittedly whimsical story by virtue of its association with the literary couple. To the degree that "Jade Lady" asks 1980s readers to re-think intimacy in marriage in the nostalgic terms of the Republican past, the work is testimonial fiction calling for a more radical transformation to the social and political contextualization of the institution than, say, the more widely anthologized "Love Must Not Be Forgotten," because where work by Zhang Jie and other writers of

---

<sup>144</sup> Yang Jiang, "On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*," trans. Jesse Field, *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, no. 76 (2011): 62.

the Cultural Revolution generation question the connection between marriage and nation, Yang Jiang actively writes into existence the potentiality of traditional virtues in modern contexts – here, domestic industry in a wartime household. Taking a deeper look, we can see that the stories of *Reflections in Reverse* rethink the very terms of personhood, re-introducing multiple complex configurations of traditional relations and utterly foregoing socialist or nationalist ones.

### **Alternatives II: From “Ghost” to Modern Wife**

“Ghost,” finished just six months after “Jade Lady” in 1980, best illustrates this renewed Confucian structure of feeling by dramatizing the movements of an entire extended family.<sup>145</sup> Applying some of the more gothic conventions of Chinese vernacular fiction of earlier times, the story portrays a group of “Qing relics,” mother, son and concubine, who create new spheres of intimacy that adapt without discarding the relations they value the most.

The story opens with a protagonist named Hu Chen, a young university graduate in Shanghai who is as unlucky in love as he is in seeking employment. Hu answers an advertisement to become a private English tutor to the young scion of a wealthy family in Zhejiang province. The trip from Shanghai to rural Zhejiang is a short one geographically, but culturally it crosses a vast gulf between the most modern urban center in China to a place of haunted relics, largely bereft of living souls:

An aged *porte-cochère* had to be crossed to enter the place; not a single sound came out of it. At the western end there was a large sedan of green baize, extremely old, and covered with grayed and yellow canvas. And over on the eastern end rested a racing bike, brand new. Leaning against the eastern wall were old wooden signs bearing the words “Keep Silent” (*sujing* 肃静) and

---

<sup>145</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, “Gui 鬼 [Ghost],” in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004 [1980]), 135–65.

“Forbearance” (*huibi* 回避), as well as a few old lanterns with the words “Wang Prefecture” (*Wang fu* 王府) on them in very large red characters.<sup>146</sup>

Setting trumps character in this first part of the story, as Yang Jiang uses Hu’s gaze to give us an evocative portrait of a place where strict codes of behavior marking status and moral quality in Imperial China linger and decay.

But as Hu finds, amidst the relics are signs, such as the brand-new racing bike, that at least one resident is attempting to be more modern. So the setting, so the story: Qing relics will learn to ride new vehicles. The person turns out to be Hu Chen’s prospective student, young master Wang, a sophisticated 30-year old man with better English than Hu himself. Hu and Wang make only a half-hearted attempt to commence lessons, and Hu wonders why he has been called there.

One night, Hu Chen is visited by a ghost. Or rather, a girl — but, as he tells his friends later, it was clearly the dead body of a girl; she was deathly pale, came to him from out of the wall, spoke to him in poetic verses to say he was to be hers, and he should wait for her on future nights. This proves too much for Hu Chen. With the story barely through the first of five scenes, he runs away.

After this first scene sequence, the remainder of the story is about who this girl is and what her relationship is with young master Wang. Hu’s function in the opening sequence suggests that the modernist eyes of a Shanghai student are blind to the realities of old-fashioned relations, and that the revelation of their story will help us understand that they not only exist, but can adapt to modernity, too. The girl, we learn, is named Shen and is young master Wang’s concubine. Young Master Wang is a ne’er-do-well

---

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 136-7.



spendthrift who can't earn the trust of his mother, who controls the wealth of the old mansion and its associated properties. Nor can he get any cash from his wife, who maintains her own large dowry. Concubine Shen was a poor and sickly girl purchased to serve the clan because Wang and his wife have not been able to have a child after 10 years of marriage. Unlike the figure of the modern single woman, she cannot refuse to enter into complex homosocial relations with her master's wife and mother, and unlike the figure of the modern wife, she cannot prove her virtuous character by taking charge of household duties. Frustrated by lack of agency, Concubine Shen contrives to escape.

Naïve and prone to suggestion, Shen also overhears her husband and mother-in-law speaking ill of Hu Chen, and so conceives of a plan to run away with him, even though she has never met him. A nighttime encounter with Hu (the same encounter Hu has already described) leaves her with feelings of grave disappointment. First Hu makes his escape without her. Later, Shen finds that she has become pregnant.

Ashamed and with no way out, Shen prepares to commit suicide, but is stopped by her mother-in-law, who suggests a tactful alternative: conceal her pregnancy, pretend that Wang's wife is the one who has become pregnant, and yield her baby to Wang's wife to raise as his heir. Shen assents to this, but soon after, Wang's wife dies, and so Shen is set up as foster-aunt to her own child. Meanwhile, Wang seizes his wife's property and disappears for Shanghai. When he returns, he reports to all that he has purchased a Western house in Shanghai. He suggests that his mother sell off the Zhejiang mansion in parcels, gaining steady income to support their new life in Shanghai. He, Shen, his new child, and his mother will forge a modern life in Shanghai. Old Mrs. Wang, stunned that her son has shown some acumen after all, assents.

The motif of the concubine trapped in a grotesque situation is reminiscent of gothic stories in the Chinese tradition. “Nie Xiaoqian,” for example, a story from Pu Songling’s *Liaozhi zhiyi* collection, tells of how the ghost girl Nie Xiaoqian is bound to a sinister demon, but is saved by the young male protagonist Ning Caichen.<sup>147</sup> Yang Jiang’s false protagonist Hu Chen is a clear play on the mild-mannered young man; Concubine Shen is a play on the ghostly damsel in distress; and the gloomy old Zhejiang mansion suggests the darkly occult setting of the Chinese ghost story (in the Pu’s story, Ning was even said to be traveling in Zhejiang). The subtraction of the young hero and the re-organization of the clan, though, is more reminiscent of the English comedy of manners, especially the plays of Oscar Wilde, with their powerful old aunts who control the wealth and must determine the proper mate for their scions. As with Wilde, Yang Jiang satirizes the excesses of the traditional patriarchal way of life, but also fantasizes that the traditional Chinese family could adjust and survive. Compared to better-known Republican or even contemporary stories on similar themes, such as Zhang Ailing’s “The Golden Cangue” or Su Tong’s *Wives and Concubines* (1990), Yang Jiang’s plot eschews deep condemnation of traditional Chinese family mores, instead demonstrating a markedly positive outlook. In this respect, she calls to mind the sentimental fiction of the 1920s, or more precisely, the proposition lurking behind such fiction: that there exists an enlightened traditional life trajectory. Concubine Shen is the least well-developed of Yang Jiang’s protagonists, with none of the psychological depth of Tian Xiao’s reflections on marriage in “Jade Lady” or the uncanny literary affect describing Chen Qian in “Big Joke,” but in her positive

---

<sup>147</sup> For more on this story, see: Judith T. Zeitlin, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 35-7.

resolution of an interpersonal crisis without appeal to nation or political content, Concubine Shen's levels of conflict constitute a character with a high degree of "Confucian structure of feeling," and so represents a revival of some aspects of the pre-revolutionary rhetorics of fiction that Haiyan Lee has analyzed in *Revolution of the Heart*.

Remarkably, though, *qing* – the sublime passion between persons – is not the foundational unit of personhood that Lee found it to be in previous fiction. In "Big Joke," Lin Ziyu's captivation at the sight of Chen Qian's smiling eyes is as close as any two characters come to falling in love in all Yang Jiang's short fiction; according to conventional expectations erected by the garden setting and the "blank" intellectual male symbolizing cultural Chineseness, the two of them really *should* fall in love and thereby demonstrate their radical subjectivity to themselves and the world.<sup>148</sup> But Chen Qian's gradual awakening to the antagonistic forces at work all around her lead to a self-conscious refusal to be seduced; she escapes. Similarly "Jade Lady" undermines the moony quasi-sublime attachment that Tian Xiao's husband feels for a vague imaginary woman with the realistic depiction of Tian's own disappointment, hurt, and practical determination to provide for the children even if he can't; only when his *qing* emerges is he able to see Tian's true character. And Concubine Shen is a comic satire of the Pu Songling-style ghost romance that returns the ghost girl to the monster clan, which turns out to be a fine source of belonging in the end.

Underlying this pattern is a clear fondness for varieties of generic femininity that exhibit the determination to get by in the face of hardship. Perhaps, instead of placing

---

<sup>148</sup> On the term "blank male," see Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 22.

*qing* at the center of personhood in Yang Jiang's sentimental stories, we might turn to the term *wanpi*, "determination," which reveals itself in Chen Qian's knowing smile, pursed lips, and deep eyes. We might conjecture that *wanpi* as a style of literary affect is a feminine figure for Chinese *Bildung* equal in importance to the quality of *chi* 痴, foolishness, which animates male characters in sentimental fiction, and to which *wanpi* shares a semantic quality of mischievousness.<sup>149</sup> In the writing of the person where we locate the quality of *wanpi*, inner tension is subtly demonstrated every time: Chen Qian craves belonging even though she knows she won't find it; Tian Xiao is disappointed in her husband but still wants to make it work; even Concubine Shen can't decide whether to stay or to go. This deep examination of character continues and reaches its maximum in the final story in Yang Jiang's series.

### **Only One Spring Per Life: "The Enterprise"**

All of the previous stories explore obstructions to belonging within conventional heteronormative institutions of intimacy: an enclave of desperate housewives, a single desperate housewife, and a desperate concubine. But in her final (and, at five full acts, by far the longest) contribution to the story form, "Shi ye" (The Enterprise), Yang Jiang stages an alternative, homosocial institution of intimacy: a community of female schoolteachers linked by their mentorship under the devoted, charismatic and at times manipulative Headmistress Mo (*Mo Xiansheng*).<sup>150</sup> Likely the most autobiographical of the stories, "The Enterprise" explores the unique experience of inner tension between

<sup>149</sup> McMahon develops the connection between "blank" and "foolish" in 19th century fiction: *ibid.*, 29, 70, 136.

<sup>150</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, "Shi ye 事业 [The Enterprise]," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 166–205.

duty to others and duty to self that obtains among women of great talent and capability in the Republican era.

With “The Enterprise,” Yang Jiang returns to the realist style she used in “Big Joke” (and would go on to apply in her novel *Baptism*): a rich tapestry of characters illustrated with colorful, yet economical literary affect. The story opens in a small progressive 1910s schoolhouse for girls, somewhere in the Suzhou river valley not far from Shanghai. The central image system is composed of faces, especially eyes, dimples, and hair, which deftly differentiate five girls by personality traits. To laugh is the central figurative gesture, and no character can resist it, not even the most obedient of the girls:

Qiu Yishan was [known as] *Piqiulian* (“Ball face”); since she hadn’t any chin, everyone called her “*Piqiu*.” She wasn’t naughty (*wanpi*) in the least, but rather unusually honest; it was just that she liked to smile and laugh. The more inappropriate was the time for laughing in class, the more she’d feel like laughing, and could only stop it with the utmost effort: she’d hold her mouth shut tight, but the dimples in her cheeks would deepen, and the laugh would push down on her stomach till the bench she was sitting on began to go bump, bump, bump, bump.<sup>151</sup>

Besides Qiu Yishan, we meet Hua Shanyi (aka *Huashengmi* 花生米, the peanut eater; she’s fat), Wu Shu (aka *wuhu* 呜呼; she’s somewhat didactic), and Liu Aiqing (*xiao’ai* 小矮, because she’s short). Chen Yiyun (*chenying* 晨莺, “morningdale” because it’s an alternative to “nightingale”) is the naughtiest of the group, and its natural leader. The use of nicknames is just one way in which their school community is lively and intimate, even familiar. The girls aren’t afraid to speak up to their teachers, though when it comes to asking for an extra day for their annual spring trip, it is Chen Yiyun

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 167.

who gathers the girls and musters the courage to argue for their demands from Headmistress Mo. A brief conflict reaches an act one climax when Yiyun avers that “If I were Headmistress, I wouldn’t be so stingy!” The extra day is granted.

Act two advances to later in life, when the girls remember how much Headmistress Mo sacrificed to her school, and wonder together whether she had not given too much of herself – after all, she never married. And how much should they, as alumna now, give back to the school? They remembered when they organized an arts fair to benefit school improvements, designing spectacles like “The Pierced Lady” and “The ‘Haha’ Mirror” which were funny and popular and how Hua Shanyi had done fanciful portraits of the faculty, including Headmistress Mo. These acts had given them personal fulfillment and benefited the school, so maybe they didn’t count as “sacrifice”? Headmistress Mo hadn’t forced them to help – but wasn’t she was particularly good at using (*liyong*) the girls? Then again, the girls consider, “Can one undertake any enterprise without using people?”

Both of these first two acts feature a plural protagonist: dialogue among the five girls shows us how they grow and develop together, despite having very different personalities. They share as a group the desire to live up to the legacy of Headmistress Mo, but all worry about marriage and careers of their own; their fracturing into separate characters and subplots begins in the third act, which stages the emergence of Yiyun as a single protagonist in the third and fourth acts and the conclusion of the final, fifth act.

The year is 1938, and the Qiushi campus has been requisitioned by the Japanese army. Headmistress Mo travels into occupied Shanghai, “the Orphan Island,” to meet patrons and alumnae; her plan is to establish a branch campus in the relatively safe

environment of the international settlement. Elderly now, she is still a formidable strategist sensitive to the personal and institutional obstructions to staffing and opening a girl's school in wartime, but forceful and assertive in her efforts. The plan is already mostly in place; all Headmistress Mo needs to find in Shanghai is a school director. Liu Aiqing won't do; she's a hypochondriac tightly controlled by an overprotective husband. Wu Shu's husband is weak of will, which offers some opportunity, but Mo doubts Wu Shu's character. Through Wu Shu, though, Headmistress Mo learns that Chen Yiyun has just returned to Shanghai from abroad. Springing quickly to action, Headmistress Mo visits Yiyun at the tiny apartment she shares with her mother and daughter, initiating the first in a series of tense power struggles between the two women. Yiyun is surprised by the visit; she is, as we discover, in emotional distress:

Yiyun stood at the window with her back to the door, and when she turned to face Headmistress Mo, the latter saw with surprise that Yiyun's eyes were full of tears. She glanced over several times before jolted up, crying: "Headmistress Mo!" Then she rubbed her eyes like a child, swabbing the tears away until only her lashes remained damp. Then with her right hand tugged on her left sleeve to rub the tears from her cheeks.<sup>152</sup>

This close up view of Yiyun's affect at work drives both mood and plot. Finding out that Yiyun is upset because her mother is unwilling to leave Shanghai with Yiyun to join Yiyun's husband in the interior, Headmistress Mo knows that the job she has in mind is the perfect way to keep the family together. She makes her offer; Yiyun demurs. The headmistress reminds Yiyun of her obligation to help the Qiushi community: all must "hold up their end" (*fu yi ba*). Headmistress Mo also sighs, in strategic distress, the corners of her own eyes growing somewhat moist. It works. Yiyun

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 185.

agrees to help the new school for six months, though she does not yet know

Headmistress Mo wants her to be principal.

Headmistress Mo and Yiyun are players in the early Republican “women’s world” (*nü jie*), a community of thoughtful and self-examining subjects negotiating tension between family duties and high-level professional service in administration, medicine, science and education. One subplot involves Wu Shu as she schemes to outmaneuver Headmistress Mo and take over as principal herself. Another brings back Shanyi, now a divorcée academic struggling to raise her family alone. The story is sentimental in the sense that story events involved the flux and flow of the women’s feelings, but their quest for emotional satisfaction is an affect-rich mirror-image of the “bands of brothers” dramas of traditional Chinese fiction, with a similar core value: *zhi*, aims, ambition, calling. “*Ren ge you zhi*” – “To each their own aims” – argues Yiyun to Headmistress Mo.<sup>153</sup> “But you are altogether too headstrong,” replies Headmistress Mo. The female *haohan* is thus admonished by the female Zhuge Liang. One seeks to fulfill her calling; the other, proper employment of a human resource. Their interpersonal conflict thus dramatizes a dilemma of personhood inherited from traditional fiction.

Stating the dilemma explains the controlling idea of Yang Jiang’s feminism: modern Chinese women can and should aim high, which leads to a choice between irreconcilable goods: service and self. A whole generation of late Imperial reformers, represented by Headmistress Mo, chose service over self, the sublimation of personal matter to public good. “Headmistress Mo is Qiushi, and Qiushi is Headmistress Mo,”

---

<sup>153</sup> Yang Jiang, “Shi ye,” 192-3; Yang Jiang is alluding to main characters in the classic Chinese novel *San guo yan yi* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms).



realize the girls during one of their discussions on how best to live.<sup>154</sup> Their generation benefited from a nurturing community of affect, a school full of smiling girls, a safe and supportive environment, where enlightened male teachers worked for a woman, an institutional mother figure. The very familiarity this community breeds makes the girls bolder, more capable of speaking up and choosing their own paths. The “naughtiness” (*wanpi*) of the children becomes the “determination” (*wanpi*) of the women. Acts 1 through 3 intersplice child and adult portraits of the characters to demonstrate this affective inheritance.

Yiyun’s internal conflict stages the tension between humility and pride, service and self-fulfillment, that the story reads into all of the characters. Yiyun fares better than Wu Shu, who makes the mistake of meeting with Qiu Shi’s board of directors without Headmistress Mo’s knowledge, breaking tacit vows of loyalty. But Yiyun’s own level of this virtue is inferior to her old classmate Yishan, who in a surprise act five subplot appears to nurse Headmistress Mo to health again after the later suffers a mild stroke.

Yishan’s nursing subplot is set in an idyllic clinic in a rural portion of the Suzhou river valley, where rich patrons subsidize a close-knit community of doctors, nurses and their loved ones. The new setting makes general some of Yang Jiang’s propositions about utopia: all levels of staff and leadership should eat the same food; every woman should have a job to do; young and old should work together, each to their own ability. Headmistress Mo quickly learns to act as Yishan’s assistant in the pharmacy, which illustrates the headmistress’s deep humility, an altruist devotion to communitarianism,

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 181.

shared learning and labor. As for the subsidy of the community by the rich, Headmistress Mo is as pragmatic about larger-scale inequality as she is about managing her school under the KMT Ministry of Education: “Corruption has its uses!”<sup>155</sup>

Yiyun, meanwhile, learns to accept her own recalcitrance; she’s just a “boat running against the current” (*ni shui xing zhou*).<sup>156</sup> With this self-understanding she can face Headmaster Mo in one final scene of mutual respect in difference, her voice now clear and straightforward (*shuangqi*).

In just over 40 pages, “The Enterprise” enacts the *bildung* of a generation historian Wang Zheng has called “the women of the Chinese enlightenment.”<sup>157</sup> Superior craft in literary affect allows Yang Jiang to combine portraits from a 1920s childhood with moments of true maturation during the war era. Behind the artistry is the theory of personhood that Yang Jiang would work to develop in fiction, memoir, and criticism for the next 30 years: true character (*gexing*) exists; it is recognizable in the decisions we make in crisis, under adverse conditions. Nurturing communities are crucial for the reproduction of confident, ambitious women, but inevitably women will have to make tough choices about family, personal interest, and public service; some will choose family and personal interest over public service.

This emotional closure helps validate Yang Jiang’s own progress. Like Yiyun, she returned to Shanghai from Europe in 1938 with an infant daughter, and her husband separated from her temporarily to take a job in the interior. Yang Jiang also acted as principal of the Zhenhua girl’s school branch campus, established in the international

---

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>157</sup> Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

settlement, for some 18 months. Almost seventy years later, she would comment that she hated this job. She did not resign, though; the school ceased operations when the Japanese occupied the international settlement in the winter of 1941-2. During this period, Yang Jiang turned to writing, a personal ambition of hers since university days.

Yang Jiang's struggle with becoming a writer was an internal conflict between service and family and self that she reflects on at length in her memoirs. This motif recasts our view of the 1970s short stories, with their female protagonists on the move, seeking alternatives to the intellectual enclaves, distressed nuclear families, and decaying Confucian clans systems of the late Republican era. What the stories achieve is a union of craft and controlling idea, character and structure, and a consistent interest in how human nature as a deep structure is reflected in literary affect. They are the renewed efforts of a humanist with an exceptional grasp of narrative structure as a general concern with character and a mastery of the still largely unexplored (despite, or perhaps because it is primarily a women's) craft of Chinese literary affect.

## Chapter Four: Six Records of a Cadre School

### The Shame of the Chinese Intellectual

“When Yang Jiang finished *Gan xiao liu ji* (Six Records of a Cadre School, 1981), she gave me the manuscript to look over. I think she left out a chapter,” quips Qian Zhongshu in his foreword.<sup>1</sup> “We might provisionally call it ‘Movements: On Shame’ (*yun dong ji kui*).”<sup>2</sup> We would be amiss to take Qian at his word; or perhaps more accurately, it is better to attend to Qian’s words very closely indeed. The word “left out,” from Qian’s second sentence is *lou* 漏, which means “left out” in the sense of something that got away, like water leaking through a cracked jug; hence the idiom *gua yi lou wan*, “grasp one, leave out ten thousand.” But another meaning out of the same etymology is “to reveal,” as in the idiom *zou lou xiao xi*, “news leaks out.” *Lou*, “leaking,” in a dual sense, is an accurate figure for this text with respect to its representation of shame. Shame is the excess leaking from a text squeezed by aesthetic constraint; the text is also like the leaked droplets from an ocean of shame. As Qian puts it, the six *ji*, or prose records, are “no more than small brushstrokes in a large landscape, comic interludes in a long story.”<sup>3</sup> “No more than” seems to emphasize lack, absence and incompleteness. But the rest of the sentence summarizes what Stephen Owen has called the primary “mode of knowing” in classical Chinese literature – the logic of

<sup>1</sup> Yang Jiang, “Gan xiao liu ji 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 1–51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

metonym.<sup>4</sup> The tropic language of Chinese poetics sets up small, incomplete *links* to the past that remain open to it as form of meaning, in contradistinction from the western poetics of mimesis, which involves closed representation of the past.<sup>5</sup> The achievement of *Six Records* is to marshal Chinese literature of memory to link readers to the “long story” of Chinese intellectuals in the later Mao years, and the particular variety of shame in this class of people.

Qian Zhongshu names this variety of shame very specifically: “[We] were cowards who felt that there was some injustice here and yet never once raised a hand to resist. At most we only participated in movements without much enthusiasm.”<sup>6</sup> Each of the *Six Records* contains many repetitions of this proposition by naming when, where and how Yang Jiang does not take a stand. In place of taking a stand, highlighting the absence of taking a stand, she documents what Jonathan Spence refers to as “tiny victories”: a pair of well-sewn pants for her husband, half a bottle of wine for workers who successfully dig a well, a work assignment in a garden, where she can avoid interpersonal conflict.<sup>7</sup> All such story events speak to the forbearance and perseverance that are hallmarks of the traditional Chinese intellectual, but they also speak to repeated sins of omission, to the palpable force of shame and fear on a life that contrives smaller and still smaller worlds of escape.

---

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Yang Jiang, *Gan xiao liu ji* 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School], 3.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Spence, “Preface,” in *Six Chapters of My Life 'Downunder'*, by Jiang Yang, trans. Howard Goldblatt (Hong Kong: University of Washington Press / The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983-4), vii.

The poetics of this memoir are intertextual. They are a variation on an 1809 text entitled *Fu sheng liu ji* (Six Records of a Floating Life) by Shen Fu (1763-?). In Stephen Owen's psychoanalytic reading of the older text, Shen Fu is always "writing idylls" into his life, and these always take the form of small spaces, miniature worlds, and brief excursions.[103-4] But the idylls never last. "Always the idyll is smashed into shards; always he gathers up the broken stones and puts them together again."<sup>8</sup> "Always" – the repetition is the most salient element of an otherwise loose and meandering narrative structure. The similarity of the basic story event reveals the text as symptom, an attempt to escape the trauma of Shen's wife's death, with its attendant shame that Shen helped bring about this death by not living up to the standards of his parents and extended family.<sup>9</sup> The unspeakable that speaks in Shen Fu's text is a psychosis over *nomos*, a journey from the center that was half challenge, half punishment.<sup>10</sup> Yang Jiang's intertext is a variation on this theme that preserves its essential psychosis. Yang Jiang and her husband are exiled from their child, their home, their occupations in the field of cultural production, and their place at the cultural center, Beijing. Like Shen Fu, Yang Jiang re-constructs memory as story event with a distinctive set of patterns revelative of shame, shame overcome, and failed efforts to overcome.

In so doing, Yang Jiang speaks out strategically, in a paradoxical aesthetic mode: it reverts to pre-Mao literary conventions for the purpose of constructing post-Mao memory writing. *Six Records* is testimonial literature to the degree that it speaks

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 103-5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 104.

for a real, identifiable public, presumably all Chinese intellectuals who also survived struggle, exile and loss during the Communist years, or those who sympathized with such a class, or those who committed acts of cruelty and violence during various inflection points in the history of Chinese revolution. The last group, says Qian Zhongshu “needs ‘to record the shame’” (*ji kui*) even more than the rest!<sup>11</sup> But all members of this public share the need to bear witness to the shame over events that injured an entire nation; the trauma is an unbearable repetition of large-scale affective transaction between fear and ecstasy, now erupted into shame caused by humiliation and self-disgust. The bind that ties this intimate public is the urgent need to remember affect control in a time of political and emotional excess. Yang Jiang achieves affect control partly with a particular tone, often named in Chinese *congrong*, “calm.” Jonathan Spence calls it “gentle melancholy.”<sup>12</sup>

*Congrong*, besides describing the overall tone or mood of the text, is also a common term for Yang Jiang’s moral and personal character. By common consent of reader and author, this work is autobiographical practice. As in her short fiction, and much as she theorized in her 1950s fiction and drama criticism, *Six Records* writes the person. Literary affect, especially the representation of feelings in the face, in gestures, and in intimate groups sharing everyday experience, is the main building block of the memoir as much as in the novels of Jane Austen. To describe a deep structure of sentiment in social living that characterizes both Chinese and Western civilization in certain historical moments, Yang Jiang turns to a discourse of *qing* brewing in Chinese

---

<sup>11</sup> Yang Jiang, *Gan xiao liu ji* 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School], 3.

<sup>12</sup> Spence, “Preface,” vii.

prose since the mid-Tang (in Chinese poetry, since time immemorial). The result is a linked set of prose records with finely wrought narrative unity. Known variously as *sanwen* (essays) or *huiyilu* (memoir), *Six Records* borrows from the language of *zhuan*, biography, including conventions of the Chinese *lie nü*, “eminent lady,” a master figure for female biographical subjects throughout Chinese history. Just how do forms of Chinese narrative, poetics, and historical prose all come together as autobiographical practice in the post-Mao era? What are the politics of memory at work in Yang Jiang’s *Six Chapters*? To answer the second question and being the project of answering the first, I stage a guided close reading to pull apart the metonymic logic of this text, and ask how various rhetorical forms construct Yang Jiang’s “I” as an eminent sufferer, a possessor of prized and proper affective stance, which I identify using the key term of the work’s Chinese reader response: *yuan er bu nu*, “plaintiveness without complaint.”

### **Terms of the Self: 1. *Qing***

“Xia fang ji bie” (sent down: recording parting), the first of Yang Jiang’s six ‘records’ (*ji*) is a deep consideration of the many forced goodbyes that occurred in the latter half of 1970. Yang Jiang draws on the motif of parting in the classical Chinese tradition to amplify both the personal and the political content of what otherwise seems a plainspoken recounting of everyday experience. She tells how, during the last three months of 1970, her husband, Qian Zhongshu, was sent away to a cadre school where intellectuals would be ‘re-educated through labor’; her son-in-law, Deyi, committed suicide to escape political persecution; and then Yang Jiang herself was sent away from Beijing to the same cadre school as her husband.



Rope, threads and other symbols of ties that bind form an internal image system.

When Yang Jiang uses thick rope to bind her husband's boxes, she reflects what a shame it is that the rope could not be used to bind flesh and blood, which go through much more in life than boxes.<sup>13</sup> When she sews a hard shell onto the seat of her husband's pants, she uses the thread to help him endure the long parting. Later, when she is permitted to send away the couple's bed, she describes the ordeal of stretching rope around the separated parts of the bed, and how working alone she had to use her teeth, pull hard and nearly exhaust herself in order to bind it.<sup>14</sup>

The motif of long and thin connectives like ropes, strings and streamers was also a popular one in Chinese poetry about the theme of separation, often conventionally spoken in the voice of a female whose mate is far away. Wang Wei, for example, wrote such separation poems as "Gui ren chun si" (A Young Lady's Spring Thoughts) which opens,

Unbearable to watch these endless silk threads rain through the sky.  
Spring wind pulls them apart and intensifies this separation.

愁见游空百尺丝，  
春风挽断更伤离。<sup>15</sup>

The poem is in the *yuefu* form, in which the implied speaker takes on the voice of a woman. The plaintive affect in this poem is very appropriate as a political position, a remonstrance to unwise rule from a loyal minister jilted by his sovereign. Qing thus

---

<sup>13</sup> Yang Jiang, *Six Records*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> Wang Wei, *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*, trans. Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, and Xu Haixin (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), 84; For the Chinese text, and a dispute over the authorship of this poem, see Wang Wei 王维 (701-761), *Wang Youcheng ji jian zhu* 王右丞集箋註 [Collected and Annotated Works of Minister Wang of the Right], ed. Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成 (1683-1756) (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1977), 590-1.

takes on a dimension of patriotism that further increases its ability to bear testimony for every Chinese intellectual whose experiences could also be drawn as lonely lady, far from her lover. Here, the symbol of separation “intensifies” the feelings of suffering. Silk threads (*si*) from a willow tree are a homonym for thoughts (*si*) of the departed lover, and give the image of the emotion of longing projecting outward from the body of the waiting female.<sup>16</sup> Yang Jiang, though, uses the motif to articulate preservation of domestic, familial intimacy in the face of physical separation. Sentences about rope take on the symbolic charge of the poetic tradition by reminding readers of the deep emotional connections between family members and their severe testing as political forces ripped families apart, but in these sentences the rope always holds, as if to suggest that the emotional connection is ultimately stronger than the political forces. This message is clearest in the scene of the first parting, when Qian Zhongshu is sent away from Beijing along with many other major intellectuals who are to serve as the “advance team.” A crowd of people gathers around in the train station to see off this group, and Yang Jiang describes the scene using a memory of what for her were better times, before the establishment of the PRC in 1949:

I remember in the past seeing passengers going abroad on ocean-liners, boarding small ferry-boats, and the people seeing them off would then take many colored streamers and throw them toward the small boat, and the small boat would slowly take off towards the large boat, and then each of those colored streamers would snap apart one after the other, when those on the shore would immediately break into applause and cheers.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Roe Allen calls this the “‘Yangliu’ (willow) intratext,” and demonstrates the richness of intertextual moves that characterizes poetry composition with this motif. Yang Jiang’s adaptation of the figure for domestic separation is unique compared to these examples, however. Joseph R. Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1992), 145-56.

<sup>17</sup> Yang Jiang, *Six Records*, 7.

With characteristic concision, Yang Jiang offers multilayered memory: a bittersweet scene from the 1930s, when many young university graduates of her generation were leaving China to study abroad, screens and figures a bitter parting in 1970, lending the 1970 memory the positive value of a resilient connection. Mining the late imperial and early Republican discourse of love, she refers to this resilient connection as *qing*, the “almost visible knot between families and couples” which “can not break completely upon one break” (*bu neng yi duan jiu duan*).<sup>18</sup>

*Qing* abides; taking full advantage this poetics of relationality, the first record sets the stage for a textualized notion of *communitas* able to resist enforced parting, the basic textual figure of state oppression in China, ca. 1970. The forced separation of spouses, parents and children dramatizes conflict between state power and *qing*, but quietly gives the victory to *qing*. This reader is reminded of Haiyan Lee’s concluding question in her study of the discourse of *qing* – is there any expression of personal that is distinct from the political in Chinese?<sup>19</sup> Lee is far from the only student of modern Chinese literature to practically despair of finding texts that can resist the pull of nation: “How much longer will it be before individual identity ceases to be inexorably bound up with the imperatives of national sympathy?”<sup>20</sup> Yang Jiang points the way for further investigation by textualizing radical, relational subjectivities embarking on identity-forging modern narratives. Perhaps, informed equally by the evolution of modern identity in Western narrative structure and of the mixed structures of feeling obtaining in modern Chinese narrative, Yang Jiang has translated into Chinese the terms of

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 308-9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Western identity: interiority, a sense of the everyday, and a working notion of human nature.<sup>21</sup> *Qing* is of aid in the rhetorical deployment of modern identity in all its parts: *qing*'s endurance under strain implies depth of character; *qing*'s strain dramatizes the transformation of the ordinary to extraordinary, followed by settling into a new ordinary; and *qing*'s workings illustrate, for the morally examining self, at least, the principles of human nature.

In plucking out for display the rhetorical features of *Six Records of a Cadre School* that constitute her textualized self, I hope to gain a clearer sense of this text's achievements – and its limitations. Leaders in the field have commented on the impressiveness of the little book, but always briefly or in vague terms.<sup>22</sup> A few close readings, in Chinese and English, have isolated single rhetorical features like irony, classical allusions, and tone, without seeming to notice that these are not just the effects of the implied author, but also the building blocks the text.<sup>23</sup> As sinologist Pierre Rykmanns has already noticed, the limitation of such a text must have something to do with the limits on the sense of the class – Chinese intellectuals – for whom the text speaks.<sup>24</sup>

## Terms of the Self: 2. Shame

<sup>21</sup> This model of selfhood derives from the work of Charles Taylor. Cf. *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Spence, "Preface," vii-viii; Also note Judith Shapiro, "The Re-education of a 'Stinking Intellectual,'" *The New York Times* (November 25, 1984), <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/25/books/the-re-education-of-a-stinking-intellectual.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed May 6, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example Yenna Wu, "Ironic Intertextuality in Six Chapters from a Floating Life and Six Chapters from Life at a Cadre School," *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 26, no. 2 (1991): 51–80; A robust overview and bibliography of Chinese sources is 葉含飴, "Yang Jiang wenxue chuangzuo yanjiu 楊絳文學創作研究 [A Study of Yang Jiang's Creative Writing]" (master's thesis, Soochow University (Taiwan), 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Simon Leys, "Peking Autumn: Foreword," in *Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*, by Yang Jiang (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989).

The second record, “Zao jing ji lao” (Digging a well: recording labor) is often thought to describe the labor situation of the cadres for the purpose of shaming the political authorities who undertook a policy of such disastrous waste.<sup>25</sup> However, a more primary aim in the chapter is to document the writer’s own sense of shame at her inability to do more than “light work,” and her admiration for what strides people did make to form senses of belonging in a space devoted to labor. Once we see that the first record is an affirmation to the strength of the bonds of *qing*, the second chapter reveals itself as the growth of new bonds – the almost miraculous emergence “us feeling” (*women gan*) among exiled and traumatized intellectuals.

The conditions of the land form the backdrop of the chapter: hard soil and a low water table. “Digging a well” entails penetrating the hard ground to reach water; this is one of many actions that Yang Jiang, a small woman, and at 60 the oldest in the troop, cannot do: “Putting every ounce of my strength into it, I brought the pick down, but only managed to pound a small white mark into the earth, which made all the younger folks laugh.”<sup>26</sup> The laughter of the “younger folks” (*xiao huozimen*) signals the beginning of a system of cooperation that will lead to “collective feeling” (*jiti gan*) – as in her short fiction, Yang Jiang remains a master of literary affect, skillfully sketching facial expression and gestures, especially laughter, smiles, and (when they have a purpose to serve) tears.

Besides direct description of affect, Yang Jiang uses indirect description of feeling, an implication of affective community in motifs, like mud, which interlink to

---

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Margo Gewurtz, “The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang’s Cultural Revolution Memoir,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English* 39, nos. 1-2 (January 2008), <http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/issue/view/27>.

<sup>26</sup> Yang Jiang, *Six Records*, 14.

form internal image systems. As labor continues, Yang Jiang finds that she can aid the troop by acting as a courier of materials back and forth from the fields. As the well is finished, the water and the hard earth mix to form mud. Mud covers the ground; everyone's feet are sunk in mud. With mud comes intimacy:

In normal times, we always think of mud as very dirty, as it contains snot, urine and feces, but when our feet stamped into the mud, we grew more intimate with it, and only felt it was slippery and wet, and didn't mind the dirtiness. It was just like when a loved one gets a contagious disease, and one learned not to be revolted by the contagion, for one became intimate with both together.<sup>27</sup>

Mud is both interstitial material and an evocative element of the common experience of adversity. With common experience comes deeper intimacy, a communal forbearance not unlike the feelings of a caretaker to the sick.

The metaphor of the caretaker also begs the thorny question of the relationality hypothesis, the long-debated proposition that women's experience is formatively distinctive from men's in such a way as to encourage development of selfhood within relationality as opposed to individuality. Men break from their fathers to discover interiority, just as Freud describes, argued Nancy Chodorow, one of the original framers of the hypothesis. Women, on the other hand, maintain strong bonds with mothers, making the mothering bond constitutive of selfhood.<sup>28</sup> Since its promulgation, the relational hypothesis has come under fire for reifying gender difference, but remains a useful guide to the distinctiveness of much women's writing. Does the intimacy and relationality always just under the surface of *Six Records* gender the implied author? Certainly the audience for the book is masculine enough to refute any claims for *Six*

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>28</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 17; quoting Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 44.

*Records* as a product of a women's culture, but the deployment of *qing* within the mud and other internal image systems is indication that the Yang Jiang's style is inherited from the sentimental literature of the late Qing and the early Republic.<sup>29</sup>

The "us feeling" in the troop has limits. When Yang Jiang helps the troop to celebrate the completion of a well with a "banquet," we are reminded by the troop's use of dry, hard candies and a little cooking wine as main elements of the festivities that the troop is effectively imprisoned far from home. What from one perspective is the new ordinary is from a more distant perspective a wretched, bound existence. The "us feeling" that gradually grows in the troop is thus stunted, extending only to those who actually labor or else care for those who labor. Haughty managers are excluded. So are the peasants, as we find in the final sentences of the record. As Yang Jiang sketches them, no relationship can be had with the peasants; there is a vast gulf between them and the urban intellectual exiles. The peasants will never see the relation as anything but that of have-nots and haves; and indeed they are correct, for the entire exercise of labor in the cadre school is political theater. Yang Jiang's troop purchases food from markets, and does not actually use the food they cultivate. Yang Jiang and her colleagues can never really belong in the peasant's world – in this, the record is indeed a tacit polemic against the underlying proposition of cadre school propaganda, which was after all an idealized, unrealistic and rather shallow imagination that intimacy and true understanding would link peasant and intellectual under the aegis of national sympathy.

---

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, 95-139.



Figure 1: Idealized intimacy between peasants and intellectuals undermined in *Six*



*Records of a Cadre School*

The importance of the peasant-intellectual relationship in the formation of modern identity in Chinese cannot be overstated. Inability to understand or relate to peasants frustrated two generations of Enlightenment-espousing intellectuals in the Republican era.<sup>30</sup> If anything links the writers of the so-called “Beijing School,” it is the fantasy of affinity between intellectual and peasant, intellectual and land, intellectual and the sensibility of cultural Chineseness. Ten years after she published *Six records*, Yang Jiang would publish the essay “Di yi ci xia fang” (Sent down for the first time), a narrative of overcoming initial alienation to achieve real intimacy with peasants during a previous campaign of “re-education through labor,” in 1959.<sup>31</sup> This essay, which earned a commendation from institute leaders supervising her re-education, distinguishes Yang Jiang from her colleagues, all of them male, who fail to communicate with the peasants where Yang Jiang succeeds. In contrast, records two through six of *Six Records* delineate the intellectual class as a communal self, a plural protagonist collectively unable to bridge the gap between themselves and the peasants. Besides tacitly critiquing the policy that brought about this situation, though, the constant presence of *qing* subjectivity animating the intellectuals in a variety of conformations – the us-feeling after the well is done, the friendship between Yang Jiang and Ah Xiang, the love between Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu, and climatically in the love the whole troop musters for a small dog – argues urgently for a relocation of

---

<sup>30</sup> On the relation between this frustration and the forms of Chinese essay, see Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 80; Also note Alexandra Rose Wagner, “Landscapes of the Soul: Essays of Place and Chinese Literary Modernity, 1920-1945” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2004), 12-29.

<sup>31</sup> Yang Jiang, “Di yi ci xia xiang 第一次下乡 [First time down to the countryside],” 311-12.

cultural legitimacy in the intellectual class itself. The margin, argues the marginalized, ought to be at the center.

### **Terms of the (Intellectual) Self: 3. Refinement**

The modern self explores its interiority, more often than not, in moments of leisure. Materialist history thus justifiably views the basic propositions of modernist interiority, including human nature and humanist theories of narrative, with some suspicion – the leisure pursuits are largely unavailable to the laboring class, and so the very framework of the modern *bildungsroman*, predicated as it is on the liberation of an interior moral consciousness, assumes time and space that makes it exclusive.<sup>32</sup> Charles Laughlin's *The Literature of Leisure* documents the evolution of modern textual subjectivity in the mass publishing markets developed by Lin Yutang and others in the 1920s and 30s; not coincidentally, Wang Jing finds in the same time period and same publishing platforms a renaissance of autobiographical discourse, including much new writing by women.<sup>33</sup> This is also the milieu into which Shen Fu's text *Fu sheng liu ji* (Six Records of a Floating Life) found its first mass publics.<sup>34</sup> Readers were drawn to the characters Shen Fu and Chen Yun, a married couple exiled from Shen Fu's parents and so doomed to struggle for the dignity, individuality, taste, and basic interiority of the leisure class, without the key material basis to be among it.

Shen Fu's second record, "xian qing ji qu" (The *qing* of leisure: recording interests) documents this struggle in crisp expositions on interior design, cooking, and

---

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Regenia Gagnier, "The Literary Standard, Working Class Autobiography, and Gender," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 103-138; Jing Wang, *When "I" Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 16-42.

<sup>34</sup> Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*, 27, 32, 37-8.

gardening.<sup>35</sup> Implemented by the poor, such leisure activities figure inner struggle via the conflicts between frugality and refinement. Shen Fu's experience suggests that refinement in poverty can be a narrative of overcoming in which the struggling subject finds, and keeps, a viable identity via aesthetic cultivation. Yang Jiang's third record, "Xue pu ji xian" (Learning to garden: recording leisure) is directly inspired by the story events of Shen Fu's record: efforts to add refinement to the local environment can soothe and align both the person and the environment, but refinement unappreciated fosters interpersonal conflict and erodes what little sense of belonging had managed to emerge.

Shen Fu's record documents a doomed struggle for distinction. The "correct" sensibility towards interior design, cooking, gardening – and hence, life – is contrast and contradiction. Flowers should look "natural" at times and "unworldly" at others; things are often best plain, but it's never satisfactory to look "common." Privacy is important, though one mustn't seem confined. Together, Shen Fu and Chen Yun implement this theory of refinement in their home, which made Shen quite proud, and which supplied, for a time, a warm and lively community of like-minded intellectuals to share in leisure activities like eating, playing cards, and sight-seeing. Above all, as Shen so famously puts it, the duty of the refined subject is to

Try to give the feeling of the small in the large and the large in the small, of the real in the illusion, and of the illusion in the reality.<sup>36</sup>

The masterful sentence itself bears witness to the craft of a mind that arranges and juxtaposes binaries compulsively: small, large, large, small, real, illusion, illusion, real.

---

<sup>35</sup> See Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, trans. Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui (New York: Penguin Classics, 1983), 50-75.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, 60.

But a series of mishaps, from deliberately poisoned orchids, to property damage from stray cats, to the unemployment, poverty and illness that eventually forced them to leave, gave this life and the feelings in it a beginning and an end, and so extends the metaphor of “floating life” from space into time, with the story gaining still more power as we learn that Chen Yun has died, and all of the description we have witnessed is only a memory.

Yang Jiang adapts stylistic and thematic features of this mixed descriptive and narrative mode in her own piece, but with major transformations, including a tight unity of plot as well as a deeply ambivalent political consciousness.

Like Shen Fu, she begins by the need to design the space around her new location, but instead of decorating a home, she builds an outhouse. Also like Shen Fu, she spends a major portion of her record on description of the garden setting she helps to design, but instead of flower arrangement, her interest is in vegetables and fertilizer. Further, replacing Shen Fu’s persistent efforts to live up to the image of the “poor scholar” is Yang Jiang’s similarly persistent return to her own shame, shame at having a higher salary than even the other sent-down urbanites, shame that her work load is so light, and most of all shame at the terrible distance between the urbanites and the peasants.

As if in response to this shame, Yang Jiang transforms the sensibility of refinement that characterizes Shen Fu’s text. Where Shen Fu lamented that his orchids were poisoned and his flowerpots broken, Yang Jiang learns to accept and even welcome theft, be it vegetables, her outhouse’s privacy screen, or the human excrement

inside the outhouse.<sup>37</sup> Shen Fu's text praises his wife as the perfect partner in homemaking and hosting the local community of intellectuals with games and parties; Yang Jiang writes similarly of her partnership with the youngest woman in the troop, the Chinese-American "Ah Xiang" with whom she builds the outhouse and learns to cultivate vegetables. Ah Xiang, who as the youngest woman and a non-native Chinese seems to have been on the margins herself, not only become friends, but work together on a garden from which peasants can safely steal. Finally, when the other troops leaders begin regularly allowing Yang Jiang's husband Qian Zhongshu ("Mocun") to visit the garden, Yang Jiang jokes that "In this way, husband and wife could rendezvous in the garden more regularly than a pair of lovers in old stories and drama could have secret garden trysts."<sup>38</sup> By far the most famous line of a now well-established classic of literature itself, the image of the elderly couple capturing a few moments of private time in a cadre school garden is only the most iconic in a record that is about the shaping of the garden space into one that can recapture the refinement that speaks of a full, rich life to Chinese reading publics. The full critical import of the new "two lovers" image must take account not only of the couple's age and social classification as top Chinese intellectuals, but also of Yang Jiang's friendship with the outsider Ah Xiang, and her off-the-books allowances to peeping peasants. The cadre school garden is a stage for lowering the intensity of the shames that infect intellectuals as a class – continued distance from the peasants, alienation from each other, forced separation of families and loved ones – by providing opportunities for closer connections.

---

<sup>37</sup> Yang Jiang, *Six Records*, 22-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

It is vitally important that the cadre school garden be an open, exposed stage, observed and directed by unseen representatives of the state. Far from a secret tryst, Qian Zhongshu is assigned to the tool shed near Yang Jiang's garden, and to carry the mail past the garden, which gives him opportunities to visit her, and at the same time Yang Jiang is assigned to go to the tool shed to borrow tools, which gives her opportunities to see him. "My troop leader often asked me to go borrow a tool. Having borrowed it, of course I had to return it, too."<sup>39</sup> In such sentences, Yang Jiang portrays her overseers as reluctant tyrants, adding a comic dimension by means of verbal irony -- "of course I had to return it." Her message is that the troop leaders respect the elder couple, and so bend the rigid system of rules governing daily life at the camp.

Exiled from family, Shen Fu focuses on his garden, his domestic interior, and his homemaking wife as private refuges distinguished by a refinement that grows steadily more threadbare before eyes. In something of a stylistic reversal, Yang Jiang manages her state-sponsored exile time as a deliberate observation of the new region, bestowing refinement in self-conscious literary language on the land and peasants, as when she approaches a pair of women gathering the discarded outer leaves and stems of garden vegetables:

I asked them how they were going to prepare the leftovers they were gathering.

The younger one answered, "We boil water, then add chopped leaves and wheat flour and stir. It's delicious!"

I'd seen before how their "cereal" had a ruddy brown color, and that their flour was the same ruddy brown, but I didn't really know how this "delicious" flour actually tasted. The old cabbages and bitter turnips we ate everyday didn't have

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

much flavor, but this “delicious” flavor was something we ought to have experienced, and hadn’t experienced.<sup>40</sup>

She cannot understand these peasants because the plan to give her an experience of peasant life has not succeeded. Maybe their coarse meals, standing in perfect contradistinction to refinement as she knows it, are actually refined morally, culturally and ideologically? In so wondering, Yang Jiang captures the inner conflict of a class caught between peasants and the state.

Temporary garden refuges aside, this class ultimately feels alienated from peasants and state alike. In a skilled pivot passage that leads to the chapter’s conclusion, we witness wild boys emerge from the fields to hound at a rabbit, which they capture and destroy.<sup>41</sup> Immediately afterward, Yang Jiang describes the intrusion of officers from another troop of cadres into her garden space, where they wish to bury a dead body. Asking about the body’s provenance, Yang Jiang learns that it was a case of suicide, no doubt by a persecuted individual who had been hounded to extremity, much like the rabbit of the previous passage.

Record three is based on Shen Fu’s second record, and similarly plays with the themes of coarseness and refinement as markers of identity and belonging. In the end, the searching subjects of both narratives find themselves in very dangerous worlds, with their own deep senses of cultural Chineseness serving only to increase feelings of isolation. One is reminded of the use of the natural imagery of birds in the poetry of Du Fu, which similarly link the cycle of life and death in the natural world to the cycle of predation and deprivation among China’s neediest peoples. Perhaps it is by hewing to

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

such conventions of imagery that Yang Jiang achieves an expression of political consciousness that is ambiguous and searching, knowledgeable of traditional motifs in both their positive and negative connotation – refinement and its lack.

#### **Terms of the (Moral) Self: 4. Human Nature**

The third record's swift turn from refinement to unrefinement and coarseness, anchored in the images of soil, mud and excrement — companions to the reader throughout the text — reaches a climactic intensity in the fourth record, on the little dog Xiaoqu. The chapter's very title, "Xiaoqu ji qing" (Xiaoqu: recording *qing*), indicates a message about producing rhetorics of intimacy out of an experience of alienation that is shared by all of the other parts of the text. The pain of separation, the forging of an existence within separation, a new and richer interiority in alienation, the resumption of natural and much-needed intimate exchanges, the resulting collective feeling, and then parting again — such a list of turning points describes both the structure of the entire text and also that of this record, with the sentimental animal forming both an intimate companion to, and a miniature version of, the narrating subject. The result is a portrait of modern identity as moral subject, with glimmers of universal human nature emerging to undergird and correct for the alienation of the exile.

A figurative gesture that dominates the record is that of feeding, of humans feeding the little dog, and not for any practical or political purpose, but only because it visibly requires food and responds to feeding with warmth and happiness. To feed or not to feed the dog becomes the question, as the troop workers all feel the compunctions of prohibitions against keeping pets -- symbols of waste and the bourgeois order according to the political discourse they were forced to adopt – and yet all come



together to use a portion of the food allotted to themselves, thus elevating the little dog to the level of another human being, fed as part of an exchange that can remind each feeder of gratitude and zest, both basic features of human nature. These exchanges intensify bonds, as Yang Jiang vividly depicts in the case of her husband Qian Zhongshu (“Mocun”):

From when it would see Mocun arriving from far away, over by the brick kilns on the north side, it immediately ran out, jumping, skipping, calling out, and wagging its tail for all it was worth, hardly able to express its own joy, and even rolling over especially for him; having rolled over, it began again to wag its tail and skip about, and then once again to roll over. In his whole life, Mocun probably never received such a warm welcome.<sup>42</sup>

Yang Jiang depicts the boundless vitality of the dog with skillful attention to the particularities of its affect; the very sentence yips, with an enumerating *ya* after each verb, and manages to roll over on itself, too, by repeating the verbs of the dog in reverse sequence. Following this emulation of bodily response, she affirms the deep, genuine feeling beneath the physicality of the sentence -- this is the discourse of intimacy that grows off of the motif of the little dog.

After just a few instances of this technique, the heartstrings of the reader, too, are pulled towards protecting the little dog from vicious other dogs, possible consumption by the other humans, exhaustion and illness, and — the dog’s greatest risk — abandonment once a relation of dependence was established.

This last risk comes to fruition when Yang Jiang’s entire camp moves to a new location – the modern epic dimension of the exile narrative returns as one more assault on the basic human nature linking not only all members of the camp now, but the animals as well. As with the abandonment of the fields and the peasants in the previous

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 30.

record, the final variety of shame is the need to harden the heart against this betrayal of a small dog. Yang Jiang does so by returning, at the end of the record, to the motif of excrement.<sup>43</sup> When she wonders what might have become of the Xiaoqu, her husband opines that the animal has become excrement itself, while she prefers to think that the animal is gathering excrement to feed her young. In this way, excrement and the dog link to form a cycle of life and death that is at least of some reassurance as the couple tries to move on, down their own path through adversity and separation.

### **Terms of the Self: 5. Agency**

The fourth record in Yang Jiang's text, with its little dog willing to survive by eating shit, exhibits a defensive posture to the world; in the fifth record, Yang Jiang goes on the offense again, taking agency for herself, dwelling in her own interiority, and practicing, in 1981, a style of sentence construction that maps out the path to independent thought in general.

“Mao xian ji xing” (Taking risks: recording good fortune) is an elegant variation on the kind of travel writing exhibited in the final, fourth chapter of Shen Fu's *Floating Life*, and like the earlier text, travel carries with it many symbols for finding the way, with “finding the way” itself the most important symbol of the text. As before, mud appears as the most central motif of the entire image system. Now it is autumn, the rains have come, and mud surrounds Yang Jiang and her compatriots – surrounds them both outdoors and in. The mud forms a major obstacle to walking; rain shoes are a necessity, but these can easily become stuck in the mud. As before, the mud requires adaptation, new encouragements and, in this case, a new zest for the battle with the adversity of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 30.

surroundings.<sup>44</sup> Thus Yang Jiang sets out on a walk to see her husband, and this walk takes up half the record, but it is not a walk that serves to advance a storyline, or tell us about any other character except herself and her interior meditations; it is the journey itself that matters.

### **Terms of the Self: 6. Hope**

As a statement about the Cultural Revolution, the climax of many years of intense and traumatic political movements in China, Yang Jiang's text draws great interest for its lack of direct political content — at no point, for example, does Yang Jiang openly criticize Communist rule. Just how much indirect political and social content is contained in the text is a matter of some debate, as we shall see below. Meanwhile, it is worth noticing that by far the record richest in political content is the sixth, “Wu chuan ji wang” (Mistaken transmission: recording foolishness). This record's distinctive expression of hope sustained, even in the face of mistaken transmission, is the most outstanding characteristic of the tone that is described most often in Chinese critical writing on the work: *yuan er bu nu*, “plaintiveness without complaint.”

Eschewing much of the earlier image systems of landscape and portraiture, the sixth record narrates the days and months leading up to the couple's return to Beijing as an eclectic consideration of the circumstances and consequences of *wu chuan*, “mistaken transmissions,” which takes on symbolic significance as the gesture which, more than any other, irritates Yang Jiang to the point of indignant outburst (*da nu*). Equanimity and poise, Yang Jiang's most famous characteristic, return with new,

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 40-5.

perhaps ironic, charge in the repeated gesture of self-deprecation that deflates indignation to mere foolishness (*wang*).

The opening anecdote, relating how Yang Jiang was irritated to discover a mutilated mouse carcass, sets up the complex of feelings she will mold in the rest of the text: the deep urge to leave rural Henan, a desolate and unforgiving place, failed attempts to resign oneself to permanent exile, and the possibility, suggested by her husband, that the mouse is an omen, and so perhaps return is imminent.<sup>45</sup> Hope, then, could be the primary value symbolized in the mouse carcass. Just after, Zhongshu hears from a colleague at the post office that a contingent of sick and elderly cadres is to be sent home, and Zhongshu's name is on the list. But the rumor is overblown; a contingent was indeed sent back, but Zhongshu wasn't on the list. Much more than in any of the previous records, Yang Jiang's tone for once intensifies to express her desperation all the more powerfully by her quick success at regaining composure:

I was ashamed of myself, that such foolish thoughts (*wang nian*) arose in my heart upon this mistaken transmission: I only wished that Mocun [Qian Zhongshu] could return to Beijing to be together with Ah Yuan, and only thought of this improvement in my own family circumstances, and not of anything else.<sup>46</sup>

Here we come to a crisis in interpretation: when Yang Jiang calls her concerns for her family “foolish thoughts,” are we to take her at her word? Or is there a sarcastic content here, containing a deeper criticism of the political propositions – perhaps the past five years policy, which had divided and badly damaged society, was a mistaken transmission? Readers likely to be critical of Cultural Revolution policy as a whole, and to blame the central power structure including Mao Zedong for what amounts to a

---

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

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

drastic reduction in the happiness and self-determination of the Chinese people, will find in Yang Jiang an ideological compatriot; this includes virtually every Western reader (with one exception whose reading deserves a closer look, below). Readers likely to avoid criticizing Chinese policy choices, to allow the central power structure to preserve face, also find a like mind in Yang Jiang; this includes a majority of Chinese readers. Record six thus maximizes complex rhetorical features involving irony and tone with the result that there are two distinct readings of the text as a whole, one that observes and amplifies critique, and one that observes and minimizes it.

Dwelling on the negative consequences of mistaken transmission, and remembering the events of 1969, when the Red Guard movement at last breached the hallowed walls of the Academy of Studies (Xuebu), Yang Jiang records in an aside how anonymous accusers wrote “Big Character Posters” denouncing Qian Zhongshu for making statements he never made.<sup>47</sup> Yang Jiang is deeply irritated (*da nu*), not at the larger scale set of events in motion around her, but at the untruth of the accusations, and especially at the fact that such “mistaken transmissions” would be entered into the official archives of the Academy, thus staining her husband’s reputation forever. Yang Jiang becomes obsessed with clearing her husband’s name, recording how Zhongshu told her her efforts were of no use (*wu liao*); she admits that indeed she was being ridiculous, that she was thinking “foolish thoughts” (*wang xiang*), but couldn’t shake them off.

The passage bears witness to the unfairness of the entire Cultural Revolution, but is also a frank indication of Yang Jiang’s self-centered approach to the political

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 48-9.

questions. She laments the mistaken nature of her husband's accusations, and of the forced separation of her family, without going so far as to accuse the entire movement or the political apparatus that designed it. Unless, that is, we read further layers of verbal irony, such as in her statement, "The Red Guards must have made a thorough examination..."<sup>48</sup> If Yang Jiang is being earnest here, then she tacitly endorses the examination of the Red Guards, or at least ignores the situation of total political chaos to defend her family's personal case. If she is being sarcastic, then she wishes to point out the whole idea of Red Guard private invasions and public defamations is a violation of basic, universal principles of human relations. The crisis of interpretation returns.

As the text comes to a close, the focus moves from "mistaken transmissions" to the unabashedly self-oriented "foolish thoughts." Yang Jiang projects in herself the righteous indignation of Han Yu in exile, thus taking on a sense of self that doesn't just survive, but thrives on, the experience of being wronged and the stubbornness born of righteous indignation.<sup>49</sup> Some of the most elegant sentences in the entire text occur in this final section, such as Qian Zhongshu's thoughts on whether he regrets staying in China instead of fleeing with other intellectuals who feared Communist rule: "Were time turned back, I'd have done just the same."<sup>50</sup> To Yang Jiang, her husband functions as an anchor, with his calm, immediate and firm decisions, and his refusal to change his mind or express any regret. This helps her put an end to her own "foolish thoughts," and regain composure. She begins to reflect more proudly on the culturally conservative

---

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

<sup>49</sup> On Han Yu's role in the creation of an "exilic mode" of writing, see Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 121-2.

<sup>50</sup> Yang Jiang, *Six Records*, 49.

values she has exhibited throughout the text: the sensitivity to parting, the value of family, and the many varieties of shame at broken social relations. Because these are valid to her, she feels unaffected by “re-education”: “I was still the same old ‘me’ as before.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Memory Outlaw or Enforcer of Self-Censorship?**

The most sophisticated and comprehensive English-language close reading of *Six Records* is by Margot Gewurtz.<sup>52</sup> In her view, Yang Jiang’s work makes her a “rebel” who appeals to stylistic conventions of Chinese writing to advance a critique that is formal, political, and feminist all at once. Because Gewurtz’s reading brings together other English responses to Yang Jiang’s work and is largely congruent with my more general understanding of the text as testimonial appeal for the identity of the modern Chinese intellectual, I will review her exposition in some detail.

Following the literature of trauma studies, Gewurtz agrees with Lloyd Dittmer that the Cultural Revolution constitutes a national trauma that an entire culture must learn to negotiate — it is not a matter for elites alone.<sup>53</sup> And yet, Chinese intellectuals as a class are seen as having a special duty to remember. In her writing on the memory practices of Chinese intellectuals, Vera Schwarcz has averred that obstacles to a mass psychological need for memory limit memory writing to the “periphery” — thus more memoirs of the Cultural Revolutions are by Chinese writing from abroad, often in

---

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

<sup>52</sup> Gewurtz, “The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang’s Cultural Revolution Memoir.”

<sup>53</sup> Gewurtz, “The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang’s Cultural Revolution Memoir,” 29-30, describing an argument in Lowell Dittmer, “Learning from Trauma: The Cultural Revolution in Post-Mao Politics,” in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, ed. William A. Joseph et al. (Harvard University Press, 1991), 19.

languages other than Chinese.<sup>54</sup> Yang Jiang's work is an exception in this set because it is testimony from an intellectual who never left China; on the other hand, being a woman writer suggests traditional Chinese conventions of writing from the "periphery" used by women writers of the past. But if Yang Jiang is an intellectual who writes mostly of intellectuals, how does her work qualify as part of Dittmer's scheme for "cultural learning" among the masses? Here, Gewurtz confronts a question that is tantamount to the basic problem of testimonial literature: how to represent the story of a marginalized and oppressed class in terms that involve, engage and affect readers in more general reading publics? What would be the goals of such a story? What sort of political and moral work does it do? Gewurtz hopes that Chinese readers, being culturally literate in Yang Jiang's intertextual rhetorical universe, will grasp Yang Jiang's complex use of *irony*.

Irony is the tool of the Chinese "rebel" writer, avers Gewurtz.<sup>55</sup> Yang Jiang employs formal irony in the title and section headings of her work, which invite comparison with Shen Fu's 18<sup>th</sup> century text and announce stylized "record" passages. The shared themes of Shen and Yang's "records" — affection, description, and the sense of parting, loss, and futility, are all narrative conventions in both narrative and poetics, and so ready to be reused and recombined. The purpose of the memoir, to apply terms Prusek has previously introduced, is to apply conventional affect in the mode of poetry and history, which carries the weight of *shi*, or truthfulness, and which most

---

<sup>54</sup> Gewurtz, "The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir," 30-1, 40-1; Schwarcz's terms are from, "Strangers No More. Personal Memory in the Interstices of Political Commemoration," in *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (School of American Research Press, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



avoids the pitfalls of fiction, which is only a fantasy, and so *xu*, or empty.<sup>56</sup> A formal irony present in Yang Jiang's text is to invoke *xu* but imbue it with *shi*; like the composer of a *yuefu*-style lyric, she speaks generically and strategically "in the voice of others."<sup>57</sup>

One effect of this formal irony is to screen, but still express, the "basic irony": the gap between stated aims of the cadre schools and the reality of the experiences of people who were "sent down."<sup>58</sup> Figure 1, a contemporary poster promulgating the purpose of the cadre schools, shows the idealized situation. With the caption "the university contingent arrives in our village," it shows the peasants beginning a close, intimate relationship of instruction with the visiting intellectuals. The basic irony of the entire situation was that the situation portrayed in the poster was quite the opposite of the reality. Thus, a productive way to understand Yang Jiang's text is as a deep criticism of the policy of sending down intellectuals, with each ironic twist functioning as a point of deficiency from the ideal.

Gewurtz models the response of an implied reader who can make the connection between the idealistic portrait of the poster and the ironic description that undermines such a portrait. When Yang Jiang describes in minute detail how she altered Qian Zhongshu's pants, the reader should understand the passage as an expression of deep love between two married people, and so can extrapolate a critique of the policy that separated them. Similarly when Yang Jiang praises the regime for helping to produce

---

<sup>56</sup> Gewurtz, "The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir," 30; These terms are introduced in Jaroslav Prusek, "Reality and Art in Chinese Literature," in *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies in Modern Chinese Literature* (University of Indiana Press, 1996), 19.

<sup>57</sup> After Joseph R. Allen, *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> Gewurtz, "The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir," 36.

men like her son-in-law Deyi, the audience either knows or will soon find out that a certain political storm of 1970 would force Deyi to commit suicide. These ironies – which are also carefully crafted exemplary life narratives – climax in the portrait of the little dog Xiaoqu, whose ability to bring staff and occupants of the cadre school together in mutual affection and compassion highlights how degraded human relations had become.<sup>59</sup>

Xiaoqu, the dog who surprised some camp members by eating its own shit, is part of an ongoing motif of shit throughout Yang Jiang's memoir. Gewurtz finds a political testimony here, what she calls "the survivor's metaphor": "to eat shit and survive."<sup>60</sup> The most ancient of China's women writers, Ban Zhao (45–116 CE), used the same metaphor to describe to women readers the way to survive the most difficult times of a woman's life. Yang Jiang appropriates from Ban Zhao, Shen Fu, and many other texts in the Chinese tradition a mode of testimony that crafts life experience into a message about "overtly accepting" the life handed to one, but resisting "in indirect ways." The master life narrative at work in *Six Records* is, in other words, an exemplary femininity:

...it is possible to read it [*Six Records*] differently as one of the "patterned ... indirect and concealed ways" Chinese women achieved some control over their lives "even as they overtly accept" the system imposed on them (Johnson 17). Ban Zhao herself endured a difficult marriage and found freedom only as a widow. Her book was written for her daughters and may well have served as a survival guide for women in "the most difficult and degrading" (Johnson 10) point in their lives, as new brides entering their husband's household. While this new bride experience could vary significantly depending on region and class, it was one commonly fraught with danger and required survival strategies.

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 37-9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

Gewurtz's reading is quite right to elucidate the figure of the new and uncertain bride as the distinctive *ethos* of Chinese intellectual, but her strong sense that this figure is meant to be ironic, that its application is specifically feminist, and that it is a figure in "absolute opposition to the totalizing authoritarian Communist state" is not one often described in Chinese readings. This should arrest our attention and cause us to reconsider how the metonymic, "open" logic of Chinese remembrance, precisely because it applies conventions, can satisfy multiple kinds of reader expectation. Publishing in *Ariel*, a journal devoted to literature in English translation, Gewurtz aims to elucidate the intertextual dimension of Yang Jiang's memoir to its *English* readership, which reads for irony to supply the critique that is only ever half-present in the text. On the other side of the Pacific, Yang Jiang's *Six Records* survived the 1981 crackdown on political critique to become, in the 1990s and 2000s, a much-reprinted and anthologized classic of literary memoir. The text is regularly included on middle- and high-school booklists, and curriculum guides for teaching the text are available on Chinese education websites.<sup>61</sup> Over the past thirty years, a dense bibliography of critical writing on *Six Records* has accumulated, enabling the contemporary reader to compare and contrast Chinese and Western reactions.

To understand the popularity of Yang Jiang's prose styling, and how important is the influence of style over the work's potential political content, one need only turn to the phrase most commonly associated with the text: *yuan er bu nu* "plaintiveness without complaint." The first critical notice of the work, a short response by the

---

<sup>61</sup> Guidelines for teaching *Six Records* in Hong Kong are supplied by the Hong Kong Bureau of Education at "*Gan xiao liu ji* 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School]", [http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content\\_3687/15.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_3687/15.pdf) (accessed May 6, 2012).

historian of Chinese aesthetics Hou Minze (1937-2004) – himself a rehabilitated "bourgeois reactionary" – introduced the phrase as way to describe the work used traditions of artifice to establish a sense of reality.

There was once a time, in the history of the revolution, when the term "cadre school" meant something great, and it was used with enthusiasm, but after ten years of chaos, "cadre school" now means something else altogether, just as the great terms "Marxism" and "socialism" have become no more than deceitful signboards for the dirtiest counterrevolutionaries.

Author Jikang [Yang Jiang] felt just as any person of wisdom and proper feelings would: full of "sorrow" (*ai*) and "rancor" (*yuan*) for those times. And so under her pen, "the circumstances are all authentic circumstances, the feelings, all genuine feelings," fashioning without the slightest ornamentation "the better to draw out the reader's feelings forth the feelings of the reader, that they linger and return to it, unable to stop themselves" (Lu Wenchao (1719-1795), Colophon to the poem 'Hou Shan', from the *Baojing Hall Collection*).

But in *Six Records of a Cadre School*, we also see the author's sense of propriety. Not only is she spare in her direct description of things, she also refrains from excess narration, writing with extreme concision. With no more than a few strokes, and these pale, even, with clear diction carrying profound meaning, she provides "endless surfeit of flavor."

One comrade, on reading *Six Records of a Cadre School*, made the following comment: "Touching and riveting, fulfilling a lament without excessive pain, showing a wound yet uttering no complaint, every line is the truth."<sup>62</sup>

Hou Minze's rhetoric here embeds both Yang Jiang's text and the reader reception into the language – and the problems of – pre-modern and even early Chinese aesthetics. *Yuan*, resentment, is also a verb for political plaintiveness – Legge translates the word as "to repine." In *Lun yu* (The Analects), Confucius list *yuan* as one of the applications of quotations from the *Shi jing* (Classic of Poetry).<sup>63</sup> *Yuan er bu nu* used as a critical expression gestures strongly at early Chinese notions of propriety, prudence

<sup>62</sup> Hou Minze 侯敏泽, "Gan xiao liu ji du hou 《幹校六記》讀後 [A Response to *Six Records of a Cadre School*," *Du shu*, no. 9 (September 1981): 12.

<sup>63</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1979), 145.

and decorum. Within the rigid hierarchy of ruler to subject, poetry had archaic function as an evaluation of the ruler's policies. Poetry was understood to serve as a cry of joy when the ruler kept order, and a cry of anguish when the people became disordered. Hou Minze places his critical evaluation in the voice of an anonymous representative of the people to repeat the gesture of the text's poetic tone, to have the very public for whom the text cries endorse it with the virtue of propriety. All of Yang Jiang's spareness, literary allusion, and literary affect create the image of a female of talent who is deeply shamed by her experience, and whose words of wisdom can suggest the affective excesses without having to completely name them.

Without saying so directly, Hou Minze may be trying to distinguish Yang Jiang's work from *shanghen wenxue*, or "literature of the wounded," a vast outpouring of prose narrative with similar themes, usually traced to a story called "The Wounded" by Lu Xinhua (b. 1954).<sup>64</sup> Where Yang Jiang keeps a stiff upper lip, "The Wounded" wails of a life ruined; where *Cadre School* only obliquely criticizes China's leaders, "The Wounded" takes direct aim at the so-called "extreme left," exemplified in the Gang of Four. "The Wounded" and most similar stories have one of two endings: either a hopeful, positive attitude that the PRC will return to its official Marxist teleology now that the Gang of Four is out of power, or else deeply pessimistic subject doubts whether any PRC ideology could be recovered.

Not coincidentally, these writers are mostly of the generation born after the establishment of the PRC. What Hou Minze and so many other readers find articulated in Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution memoir is the longer perspective of the older

---

<sup>64</sup> Geremie Barmé and Bennett Lee, eds., *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution*, 77-78 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1979).

generation, which is bound to a pre-PRC, cultural sense Chineseness. At the center of

this sensibility is *qing*:

*Six Records of a Cadre School* has another very attractive ideological characteristic, which is that in the midst of great adversity the author would re-discover and write of the nobler sensibilities internal to the intellectual facing harsh circumstances -- especially the nobler sensibilities of the older generation of intellectuals.<sup>65</sup>

Hou's term "nobler sensibilities" (*gaoshang de qingzao*) here deserves comparison to Haiyan Lee's term "Confucian structure of feeling." Both locate absolute good in the bonds between human beings, and understand the challenge of surviving to be a close focus on these bonds. This, and not irony, not critique, is the value of literary techniques including allusions, quotations, and omissions.

The exception among Western readings of *Six Records* is Pierre Rykmans, writing under the pen name Simon Leys about how tendency away from direct critique cripples Chinese intellectuals as a class.<sup>66</sup> To Leys, Yang Jiang's narrowness of scope, and fragmentary sketches which imply only the broadest background of the "collective madness" of the period, is a sad testament to the continued subservience of the intellectual to the political. The idiom *yuan er bu nu*, writes Leys, is reminiscent of nothing so much as the idiom *tuo mian zi gan* "the spit on the face should dry by itself." This refers to an anecdote of an official so circumspect that when spat upon, he did not so much as wipe his face for fear it would seem impudent, and so simply let it dry by itself.

---

<sup>65</sup> Hou Minze 侯敏泽, "Response," 11.

<sup>66</sup> Leys, "Peking Autumn: Foreword."

Who is Yang Jiang, and what is a Chinese intellectual like? How could Gewurtz's rebel and Leys' lackey be the same textualized self? To answer this question we must put *Six Records* back into its context in the life of the writer, where it is contemporaneous to renewed efforts at criticism and fiction in a renewed literary sphere. Yang Jiang's interest is in human nature as an abiding object of the art of story regardless of political situation, which is relegated by story structure analysis to the role of setting. As a storyteller, the events of her exile are of interest chiefly for what they bring out in her own true character – curiosity, stubbornness, composure, self-sufficiency, and an irrepressible need to build community. Love for family, sympathy for the peasants, and finding new friends all fit neatly into this latter feature, which may be restated in terms of rhetorical analysis as the discourse of *qing*. What needs to be recognized is that this patient, artful delineation of textualized self draws elegantly on a modern, cosmopolitan and tradition-rich perspective that was marginalized in China for many years, but in the contemporary surpasses its bounds to reach mass audiences learning these Chinese terms of selfhood. Just as Yang Jiang's 1950s ultra-Maoist critics argued, the search for a morally evaluative self in the written life is not a directly heterodox position, but filled as it is with Enlightenment terms of selfhood, it is imbued with political content.

## Chapter Five: *Baptism* and the return of Enlightenment-Confucian Structure of Feeling

By the end of 1981, Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu were perhaps the most famous literary couple in China, as both were centers of attention being paid to the pre-1949 cosmopolitanism. In her 1984 essay "On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*," Yang Jiang asks her husband whether he had any interest in a sequel to his 1947 novel *Fortress Besieged*, now on every Chinese reader's list of top literary novels. Qian Zhongshu famously disavowed, pleading old age.<sup>1</sup> The stage was set, then, for readers to welcome Yang Jiang's first novel, *Xizao* (Baptism, 1988), as the sequel novel about the private lives of Chinese intellectuals that Qian had declined to write. But where *Fortress Besieged* had satirized the generation of intellectuals who returned to a China on the verge of war, *Baptism* figured at least some members of this same generation as tragic figures swept up in the new revolutionary regime. The chief tension in the novel is between the values of the intellectuals, which blend the liberal humanism learned abroad with the patriotism, filial piety and female virtue of their habitus, against new, gradual PRC demands that these values be abandoned in favor a new personhood, marked by the "baptism" of early 1950s thought reform.

The main tool of the novel is the writing of "character," both in the sense of a realistic personality (*renwu*) and in the presumed inner qualities of the personality (*xingge*). *Baptism* presents, as many readers have noted, very deep and intriguing

---

<sup>1</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, "Ji Qian Zhongshu yu *Wei cheng*" 记钱钟书与《围城》 [On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*], in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 158-9.



characters, more mixed in their good and bad qualities and so satirized with less astringency than the cast of *Fortress Besieged*.<sup>2</sup> Where the earlier novel by Yang Jiang's husband famously told of the generation born around 1910, and their scramble for marriages and careers in the 1930s, *Baptism* follows different intellectuals of the same generation as they attempt to keep those same marriages and careers during the period following the formation of the PRC.

And yet, as we shall see, all of the characters in *Baptism* are variations of types familiar from late Qing sentimental novels (*xieqing xiaoshuo*), chief among them “the remarkable woman,” whose persistent agency symbolizes female virtue and the idealization of femininity.<sup>3</sup> This character interacts with male characters coding a range of values from dominant masculinity to the feminine possibility of radical subjectivity. In addition, Yang Jiang weds to these types a sense of interiority traceable to the European psychological novel, in the process shifting the politics of the late Qing love story slightly away from a fantasy of Chinese regeneration and towards a Chinese-centered liberal humanist conception of universal human nature.

As in both traditions of the novel, the characters are widely read as caricatures of the authors and members of their social circle, with the result that readers use the works to explore, and dispute over, the lifestyles, cultural values and political events of the era. *Baptism* enacts a fantasy of constraint and non-involvement among its most

---

<sup>2</sup> Douban.com lists over 6000 reviews of the work, many dozens of which have their own favorite characters. One reader, for example, simply writes “My favorite character was Luo Hou.” “Douban du shu: Xi zao,” <http://book.douban.com/subject/1078250/> (accessed May 23, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 2, 17-9; on the term, see Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 4.

moral characters that is directly associated with Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu. As

Judith Amory and Yaohua Shi say in the introduction to their translation of the novel:

One of the most unusual characteristics of Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu is that throughout their lives they managed to avoid co-option by any political movements. They did not feign enthusiasm, nor did they feel driven to denounce colleagues. This behavior, as well as their extraordinary accomplishments, has won them a great deal of admiration in China.<sup>4</sup>

Although few readers force a completely autobiographical reading of *Baptism*, the common characteristic of the three characters in the book's central love triangle – Du Lilin, Xu Yancheng, and Yao Mi – all also avoid feigned enthusiasm and public denunciations, or at least seem to, to some readers. The major problem of *Baptism* is what to make of its third part, which dramatizes the experience of thought reform (*sixiang gaizao*) among all of these characters. Thought reform meant re-making character, but can character be remade? Yang Jiang's take on this subject is a delicate re-consideration of the early Communist effort to have its intellectuals “reborn,” but even though she refrains from direct criticism of the regime, this take is anything but free of political baggage.

### **Baptism in Context**

One productive way to read *Baptism* is as a postsocialist contribution to the discourse of *qing*, a deep structure within Chinese fiction that has been the subject of two recent studies: Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* and Keith McMahon's *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity*. Lee and McMahon alike argue that the discourse of *qing* constitutes a radical subjectivity – or better, a fantasy of egalitarian, gender-

---

<sup>4</sup> Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, trans. Judith Amory and Yaohua Shi (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2007), ix.

bending intersubjectivity. *Qing*, as both authors show, names a chaste, feminine romantic love overburdened with political, cultural and social subtexts.<sup>5</sup> Qing dynasty sentimental novels rework traditional notions of personhood, placing sentiment at the center of identity, in contradistinction to an earlier narrative regime that had not focused on feelings.<sup>6</sup> Keith McMahon argues for seeing in many love stories a master narrative that locates a fantasy about traditional Chinese moral and cultural value in the dynamics of this reworked sense of personhood.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I will briefly elucidate this master narrative of McMahon's, and then show *Baptism* can be read as a variation on the master narrative.

McMahon's identifies polygamy and courtesan culture as major signs of dynastic China in decline in Qing sentimental fiction. The embattled demimonde acquired an aura of *otherworldliness* in books like *Fengyue meng* (Seductive Dreams, 1848), *Pinhua baojian* (Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses, 1849) and *Hua yue hen* (Traces of the Flowery Moon, 1858).<sup>8</sup> Large casts of courtesan characters pair up with patrons. In each case, one pair becomes the most representative of sublime passion, or *qing*, by their chaste desires, their affirmation of each other as full and emotive persons. The courtesan figure gains the agency to emerge from a harsh life; the male consort approaches femininity in his deep empathy for his love object. Their love is usually doomed, but the symbolic death they undertake in each case reaffirms a basic loyalty

---

<sup>5</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 58, 69.

and trueness of selfhood that is associated with the theme of loyalist lover martyrs from the late Ming and early Qing.<sup>9</sup>

In *Traces of the Flowery Moon*, for example, dynastic decline is vividly evoked in the form of the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864); the rebels represent “a demonic force threatening the Chinese state.”<sup>10</sup> Liu Qiuhen is the most refined, loyal and melancholic of courtesans, and Wei Xiuren is the most understanding, feminine, and sublimely indecisive of male consorts. The two bond over “tears, melancholy, and poetry,” remain surprisingly chaste throughout, and eventually seal their union in a pact of death.

McMahon comments:

The simplest way to state the formula of the novel’s retrospective conclusion is that the regeneration of Chinese civilizational order occurs over the dead bodies of the martyred lovers Wei and Liu. In this light, they form an integral part of portraying the way in which China marshals healthy sexual energy into a force that overcomes the obscene excesses of the Taipings, the rude intrusions of Westerners, and the social degeneration that made it easier for such enemies to succeed to begin with.<sup>11</sup>

Key to the couple’s relationship is Wei’s “foolish infatuation” (*chiqing*), which knows no practicality, makes no major decisions, and sublimely sympathetic to the tragic conditions of the courtesan.[58-9] She takes agency to mastermind the deaths that will make give their relationship meaning, a “mark of cultural identity” in the face of historical change, which is marked immoral. *Seductive Dreams* plays out a similar fantasy of purity in a declining Yangzhou, with the opium trade playing the role of villainous forces.<sup>12</sup> In *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses*, lewd homosexual excess, and

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 6, 67.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 55-8.

the venality associated with prostitution and the theater, play against the chaste and heroic love between a sensitive patron and the most beautiful of female impersonators.<sup>13</sup>

McMahon infers an allegory of history that hinges on the “sexual and romantic energy” embedded into late Qing characters. Where he finds a Lacanian fantasy at work, Haiyan Lee identifies a major transformation to the role of “emotion talk” centered on the term *qing*.<sup>14</sup> Underlying the late Qing historical allegory is a new bond between *qing* and identity that reinterprets Confucian virtues as the product of affective transaction – Lee calls this the “Confucian structure of feeling”:

The Confucian structure of feeling is an essentially modern formation in its celebration of feeling as fundamental to human existence, its rendering of ethical codes into subjectively meaningful experience, and its dramatization of what Hegel calls “love's collisions” with the interests of the state and family.<sup>15</sup>

Where McMahon emphasizes the leap of empathy required of the blank male consort to enter the otherworldly domain of the melancholic feminine subject, Lee instead concentrates on a gesture of “homecoming” that marks the end the story -- a purging of subversive elements and construction of a moral exemplar. To elucidate the gesture Lee focuses on *Ernü yingxiong* (A tale of heroic sons and daughters, ca. 1870), with its variation on the Mulan narrative: the woman warrior engages in both heroism and romance, but dutifully returns to the family to create a bound image of a heroic, sentimental and filial subject.<sup>16</sup> Both *Flowers* and *Heroic Sons and Daughters* are “swan songs” to a belief in the harmony of moral virtue and romantic energy which was

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 58-67.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 7-8.

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

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 52-3.

on the wane, even if it continued on in twentieth-century Butterfly novels of sentiment, says Lee.<sup>17</sup>

I find that both McMahon's master narrative of melancholic subjects and Lee's conception of a Confucian structure of feeling are useful concepts for reading *Baptism*. As in Yang Jiang's four post-Cultural Revolution stories, *Baptism* revolves around the feelings and experiences of female characters negotiating agency in times of historical transition. Much more than in the stories, though, in *Baptism* Yang Jiang embeds a love story that invokes tropes of otherworldly settings against a backdrop of cultural invasion and decline, idealized feminine subjects approached by indecisive male consorts, and a comment on the what type of moral personhood is best suited for the brave new world of revolutionary modernity.

### **The Setting and Cast of *Baptism***

All scenes in *Baptism* takes place in a small graduate institute in Beijing during the transition to Communist Party rule, 1950-1. As with such settings as the brothel in *Traces of the Flowery Moon*, the *jianghu* in *Heroic Sons and Daughters*, or the world of the theater in *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses*, the institute is a refuge for traditional values endangered by paradigmatic change. Founded as a center for "national studies" (*guo xue*) earlier in the century, by the time of the second Sino-Japanese war the place was literally a refuge for scholars unable to flee to the interior.<sup>18</sup>[pt 1 ch 3. E16-20] While the hopes of the Republic crumble in the rest of Beijing, inside the institute scholars take long afternoons for leisurely chats over tea, and continue the kind of

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 58-9.

<sup>18</sup> Yang Jiang, *Xizao* 洗澡 [Baptism], in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), Part 1, chapter 3, 222-4.

evidentiary scholarship that characterized the Qing dynasty. Between 1945 and 1949, the institute foundered in its financial support of researchers, several of its leaders disappeared, and the place seemed likely to close. But in 1949, the new PRC government sent a group of new leaders to renovate the buildings and expand the faculty. By the time of their inaugural meeting in 1949, the new leaders called the institute the “Literary Research Institute,” though no sign hung in front of the building because a formal name had not been selected. In this way, much as in her 1979 story “Big Joke,” Yang Jiang portrays intellectuals working on literature and the humanities with uncertain ties to the Republican-era field of “national studies” and even older Chinese traditions of cultural production, full of trepidation for an uncertain future. The institute occupies a liminal position, between the worlds of the past and the future, and for the time being remains an refuge of intellectuals still operating according to the mixture of cosmopolitan and provincial moral and social values, with little consciousness, other than trepidation, of the new revolutionary politics that supports them.

Yao Jian, the institute’s founding director, passed away before the end of the war, and his wife suffered a debilitating stroke. Their only daughter, Yao Mi, sacrifices her chance at a university education herself to stay and care for her invalid mother and her father’s valuable library of world literature.<sup>19</sup> Like He Yunfeng in *Heroic Sons and Daughters*, she studies and masters her art – though here the arts are cultural, and not martial – for the sake of her dead father.<sup>20</sup> And like Liu Qiuhua in *Traces of the Flowery Moon*, her mastery of both female virtue and cultural education in the context of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Part 1, chapter 3, 222-4.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 55-6.

otherworldly setting of the institute prepares her for a sublime, chaste romance with a passive polygamist blank male.<sup>21</sup>

Xu Yancheng, a sophisticated Shanghai intellectual long abroad but eager to serve his country now that the war is over, comes to the institute and promptly falls in love with Yao Mi.<sup>22</sup> Du Lilin, his wife, is in despair over her husband's disaffection, but still hopes that he will prove as loyal and honest as she. Meanwhile, Yu Nan, another new scholar at the institute, is everything that Xu Yancheng is not: selfish, dishonest, lustful, inconsiderate, provincial, unscholarly, and politically ambitious. As in *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses*, the role of cruder male characters is to set off Xu's virtue by presenting its negative obverse.<sup>23</sup> Yu Nan also has a long-suffering wife named Wan Ying, who takes solace in her ability to serve the interests of her husband and three children, even though they seldom so much as eat the dinners she slaves to cook them. These five characters form the core of a plot that will at first turn on Xu's feelings for Yao Mi, Du Lilin's struggle to negotiate her husband's feelings, Yu Nan's attempt to profit in the new bureaucratic structure at Yao Mi's expense, and his wife Wan Ying's heroic agency in defending Yao Mi from her husband.

### **Love in a Fallen Institute**

The central plot of the first two of *Baptism's* three parts concerns the love triangle of Xu Yancheng, his wife Du Lilin, and the young Yao Mi, and this is a variation on the Qing sentimental plot that allegorizes cultural regeneration over encroaching forces of

---

<sup>21</sup> McMahan, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 69-71.

<sup>22</sup> Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, Part 1, chapters 7-9, 240-59.

<sup>23</sup> McMahan, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 61.



destruction. In this scenario, the nascent PRC bureaucracy employs a variety of hypocritical, incompetent, and treacherous characters.

Yang Jiang's omniscient narrator voice is especially intimate when it examines the perspective of Du Lilin, a self-made woman who fears that she lacks the cultural and social refinement to hold on to Yancheng.<sup>24</sup> We learn from her that her marriage lacks intimacy, perhaps because he had over two years working in the UK while she earned a degree in the United States: "Now that they were living together, Lilin felt as if there was a hard shell between them."<sup>25</sup> Yancheng spends lots of time away from the family in room he calls his "den," or in the library, where he soon encounters Yao Mi. When Xu Yancheng tells his wife how much he admires "the person who looks after the books" for being literate in English and French, and able to fetch all of his books so rapidly, his wife is immediately suspicious, but is temporarily mollified by the fact that Xu Yancheng does not seem aware that Yao Mi is pretty.<sup>26</sup> As in Qing romance, Xu's love for Yao Mi is born of admiration for her abilities, though in this case a worldly knowledge of Western literature has replaced previous signifiers of high culture like calligraphy and poetry.<sup>27</sup> Also as in Qing romance, Xu Yancheng admiration turns to a chaste sort of affection based on their shared interests – the romance proper begins in part 1, chapter 9, when Xu Yancheng helps Yao Mi catalog her father's collection.<sup>28</sup> Cloistered in the private space for uncatalogued books at the back of the institute

---

<sup>24</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 1, 240-7.

<sup>25</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings*, v. 1, 241; I use Amory and Shi's translation here: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 1, 242-3.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. plot elements in multiple novels described in McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 53, 57, 66, 71-2.

<sup>28</sup> McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 53, 57, 66, 71-2; Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, 253-9.

library, the two tell each other about their lives. We learn that Xu Yancheng has told a lie to his mother about the number of children he has had while abroad, and faces an awkward meeting with her now that he is back in China. Yao Mi reassures him that he can be a filial son, and that even her mother would like him. After this scene, the two cannot stop thinking of each other.

After a subplot involving many of the other minor characters ends with all of uncatalogued books moved to a storage room in Yao Mi's quarters, this room becomes another cloistered private space where the two can develop their relationship – albeit without sexual contact, and often without physical presence at all.<sup>29</sup> Yancheng develops a habit of coming to play the gramophone he has lent to Yao Mi's invalid mother, and goes into the new library to select books for Yao Mi, leave notes for her, and read notes she has left.

The basic moral character of Yao Mi and Xu Yancheng is demonstrated by their ability to avoid a sexual relationship – their relationship is based firmly on mutual compassion and understanding. And yet, the situational irony of the climatic episode to their relationship is that despite their triumph over infidelity, a risky date makes them vulnerable to criticism by the treacherous elements of the institute's new leaders.

Xu Yancheng asks Yao Mi to accompany him to the Fragrant Hills, a popular Beijing day-trip destination for married and dating couples.<sup>30</sup> Yancheng himself had visited the spot with his wife Du Lilin only days before. At the last minute, Yancheng, stuttering and embarrassed, cancels the date. Yao Mi, angry and despairing, gets on the bus and travels to Fragrant Hills anyway, and Yancheng, torn by his desire to remain an

---

<sup>29</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapters 4-7, 297-320.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 2, chapter 8, 320-5.

honest and faithful husband and his other desire to pursue the true connection of mind and spirit that he knows he never had with his wife, jumps on the bus at the last minute via the back door. Unable to fully change his mind and re-approach Yao Mi, or to get off the bus and leave her alone, he effectively stalks her all the way to Fragrant Hills. Indecisiveness, a major characteristic of male consorts like Wei Chizhu in *Traces of the Flowery Moon*, serves as a sign of the sensitivity and sentimentality of the male subject, linking it closer to the idealized femininity that is the image of *qing* in the Chinese love story.<sup>31</sup> Previously, Du Lilin had remembered how Xu Yancheng's indecisiveness made it necessary for her to ask him out, to propose, and to take charge of building a family; now Xu's indecisiveness meets its emotional mirror image in Yao Mi, who knows she loves Xu but hopes that she would never come between him and Du Lilin. Thus the date gone bad, and the male character who might seem maddeningly passive to a reader unfamiliar with the history of narratives detailing the "cult of *qing*," actually prove the deep worth of the couple.

Unbeknownst to either, one of their younger colleagues at the institute has seen them. His casual remark on this sighting will plague Xu Yancheng and his wife in the coming Three Antis Campaign, as they fully expect enemies to use the possibility of scandal against them. To prevent the scandal, Yao Mi demands to meet Du Lilin and Xu Yancheng together in her home, to assure Lilin that they would never break up Lilin's family.<sup>32</sup> McMahan's argument that the traces of passive polygamy live on in a post-polygamous world comes to mind here: Lilin realizes that she can never have the depth of connection with her husband that Yao Mi has, and rankles at this even as she accepts

---

<sup>31</sup> McMahan, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 75-6.

<sup>32</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapter 17, 370-5.

her lot and takes him back.<sup>33</sup> And Yancheng and Yao Mi know that they will never pursue their romance again, though even to glance at each other brings up such deep feelings, as there were “a thousand years of *qing* between them, and that they had known each other in their previous lives.”<sup>34</sup>

The bond forged between the two of them in her father’s library symbolizes the radical subjectivity that is possible in China, if only people could cultivate the manifold devotions to study, to teaching and writing, and to the generosity of spirit that permits a man to appreciate the mind of a woman, and vice versa, outside of the framework of gender and sexuality completely. The fantasy of the deeply feeling, unlustful, and indecisive male each moving towards a radical state of intersubjective feeling is one that Yang Jiang inherits from Qing sentimental fiction, where it expressed the fundamental uncertainty of sociality in a time of radical change. Perhaps most curious is the end of this affair, in which Xu Yancheng returns to his wife and learns to be content with meaningful glances at Yao Mi for the remainder of the book. McMahon comments that the melancholics Liu Qiuhun and Wei Chizhu in *Traces of the Flowery Moon* prefer the “traces” (*hen*, literally “scars”) of *qing*.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, like these two lovers, Xu Yancheng and Yao Mi replace lovers’ meetings with exchanges of notes and books; it could also be said of Xu and Yao as much as any Qing dynasty lovers that “[t]he ultimate trace is the missed opportunity to secure their relationship.”[70] The “trace” is itself a powerful sign of *qing*, reflected multiply in the expression of intense feeling and in a bending of the gender boundaries that is a variation on older convention. The

---

<sup>33</sup> McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapter 17, 372.

<sup>35</sup> McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 70.

finalizing devotion to traces climaxes when Yao Mi puts in writing that she would have had an affair with Xu Yancheng, and he takes the words as much an expression of feeling as if they had had the affair. With telling intertextuality, the narrator declares that Xu feels just as Lin Daiyu did when Jia Baoyu assured her “Don’t worry,” in chapter 32 of *Hongloumeng* (Dream of the Red Chamber) – “more sincere than if she herself had pulled it out of her own heart.”<sup>36</sup> What they feel for each other, he writes back, is that he would write to her forever: “What I have to say to you goes on for miles, at the very least longer than the thread a silkworm can spin out. I could scarcely spit it all out in a lifetime. I hope you will let me tell it all to you, very, very slowly.”<sup>37</sup> Here, the note virtually becomes the poetic love exchange of times past in its use of literary allusion. The motif of the silkworm spinning threads as a metaphor for eternal longing paraphrases a line from one of the *wu ti* (untitled) poems by Li Shangyin. Li Shangyin’s poem is a gloomy expression of the frustrated passion of a man in love with a woman he cannot have. The erudite Yancheng imitates Li Shangyin in envisioning his passion as something that will last forever despite the frustration of the circumstance; frustration is thus made to serve as a comment on the power of love and the depth of soul implied by love.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapter 14, 360; I use Amory and Shi’s translation here: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapter 14, 360; I use Amory and Shi’s translation here: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 178

<sup>38</sup> Thanks to Amory and Shi for mentioning the literary allusion in their translation; Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 178, n. 38; For a translation and discussion of Li Shangyin’s poem, see James J.Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 66. My translation runs as follows:

Seeing you is hard; leaving, also hard,  
The east wind is weak; the flowers are all wilted.  
Till death do spring silkworms spin their threads.  
The candle’s turned to ash, the tears begun to dry.  
Morning mirror only brings sorrow: my hair is turning;

For any reader of old Chinese love stories, this tribute to the trace, the missed opportunity, can serve as an elegant comment on 1951 as the real end of an era, a time when it was too late to achieve the grandeur of lovers of old, which figures the idea that an old morality was on the decline. Or was it? The bittersweet return of Yancheng to his wife reproduces the gesture of homecoming that Haiyan Lee identifies in *Heroic Sons and Daughters* as most central to the Confucian structure of feeling, which celebrates emotive selfhood unresistant to filial piety. The “symbolic death” that McMahon finds actualized in *Traces of the Flowery Moon* (which has a real lovers’ death pact) and in *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses* also bears some consideration in our reading of *Baptism*.<sup>39</sup> In *Precious Mirror*, the chaste boy Du Qinyan must die as a *dan*, or female impersonator, and be reborn as a real man.<sup>40</sup> His unlustful and compassionate lover Mei Ziyu must redeem the boy and allow him to become a peer, though he will have the help of his assertive wife, who speaks with the authority of orthodox moral discourse when she tells him it is time for him to grow up and marry her.

The third of *Baptism*’s three acts stages a comparable “symbolic death” in the form of the thought reform campaigns that would begin at the end of 1951. Coming after the end of the affairs detailed in parts one and two, the forced self-criticism and passage to self-renewal can function as “an attempt to repress the uncertainty of

---

Reciting poetry at night makes the moon’s rays feel so cold.  
 But the way to Peng Mountain isn’t far –  
 Green Bird, search ardently!  
 相见时难别亦难,东风无力百花残。  
 春蚕到死丝方尽,蜡炬成灰泪始干。  
 晓镜但愁云鬓改,夜吟应觉月光寒。  
 蓬山此去无多路,青鸟殷勤为探看。

<sup>39</sup> McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 60, 71.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-5, 65-7.

sociality,” as Haiyan Lee has said of *Heroic Sons and Daughters*.<sup>41</sup> Yang Jiang, like *Heroic Sons* author Wen Kang, attempts to re-appropriate the Confucian structure of feeling to model filial heroism within the revolutionary discourse of thought reform, to create an all-encompassing vision that repudiates subversive elements in both Confucian and revolutionary discourse: selfishness, hypocrisy, ignorance, greed and treachery. Below, I describe the play of antagonistic forces against the heroes of the love story with special reference to Yang Jiang’s prose description of the physical expression of feeling and virtue – what I call *literary affect*. In conclusion, I will discuss the role of ambiguity and irony in reading the book’s climatic final part.

### **Character and literary affect**

Much as in her short fiction, Yang Jiang introduces character after character in a very short space, and each introduction is a sparkling exercise in literary affect -- the use of appearance, and feelings represented through appearance, to grasp the unique moral complexity of a character. A minor character called Fu Jin, for example, takes up the post of institute director, which calls on him to obey party cadres but to lead the intellectuals. The tension he faces is conveyed through his physical presence right as he takes the stage:

Fu Jin sat the head of the long table, facing south -- the chairman's place. He was both a large and a tall man, with broad cheekbones and a high nose, and ears that stuck out on the sides. Although his eyes were small, and his chin receded, he always considered himself too tall, and his ears and nose too presumptuous, so he often carried himself with a slight hunch, and as chairman, he preferred to sit.<sup>42</sup>

Here as in many other places, the deep tension of the situation is expressed through the central crisis of the character – should Fu Jin lead, or not lead? – which in

---

<sup>41</sup> Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 1, chapter 5, 230.

turn is expressed most elegantly in physical description. He is a tall man who wishes to sit: he's modest, and uncomfortable with his new authority.

Fu Jin tries to represent both the state and the intellectuals at once, and to buffer the effects of the new state on the lives and values of the central intellectuals. Opposed to this task stands Nina Shi, who wants to shake up the hierarchy of intellectuals, ostensibly in order to rectify their political thinking but actually out of a deep jealousy and wish to enter their ranks by force. Unlike the others, Nina has traveled to the Soviet Union. Her challenge is Yang Jiang's embodiment of revolutionary subjectivity, and one for which Yang Jiang chooses a monstrous, even shocking appearance:

To make it easier to smoke, Nina Shi sat off to one side of the table, Jiang Taotao by her side. She had just now grown impatient; with a few blinks of her half-angry eyes, she said to him in a low but acerbic tone, "First things first: move your butt."

Yu Nan sat down right next to her, and stared at just this portion of her person, firmly seated and packed like a sausage into the pants of a Western suit.<sup>43</sup>

Smoking, homosexuality (Jiang Taotao, Fu Jin's wife, is always by Nina's side), an acerbic tone, obesity (her nickname throughout the book is "Miss Hippo") are all signs that Nina stands in opposition to the virtues of the filial heroes Yao Mi, Xu Yancheng, and Du Lilin. To describe Nina's eyes, Yang Jiang always uses the idiomatic phrase *si chen fei chen* ("as if furious but not furious"), which captures the character's cold and animal-like presence.

Not that the filial heroes aren't similarly clever caricatures. Meeting Du Lilin, we see that

She was tall and slight, with a lovely complexion, an expert with make-up and accessories, and so good at interpersonal relations that her classmates nicknamed

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Part 1, chapter 5, 232.



her "The Standard Beauty." It was said that her suitors outnumbered the seventy-two disciples of Confucius.<sup>44</sup>

In these and corresponding descriptions of Yao Mi, Xu Yancheng and the other more positively-encoded characters, we witness a witty pairing of 1930s and 40s cosmopolitanism (lipstick) with updates to traditional Confucian virtues -- here, Lilin's facility with interpersonal relations.

Yang Jiang's portraits of Du Lilin, Yao Mi, and Xu Yancheng are, to use Haiyan Lee's terms, a redaction of the Confucian structure of feeling. They are dutiful, honest and rather erudite (all have graduate education abroad, and a few have PhDs). Similarly, characters that speak the language of Chinese institutional Marxism, and so stand in for the revolutionary structure of feeling, carry forward the features of antagonistic forces from Qing sentimental novels. Students and scholars familiar from socialist realist plots like, for example, *Qingchun zhi ge* (Song of Youth, 1958) are recast as hypocrites and petty hedonists.

One of the earliest and most memorable scenes in this power struggle introduces emotional intelligence and knowledge of world literature at once as the stakes of conflict between Yao Mi and Xu Yancheng, who symbolize courtesy, decorum, empathy, and broad knowledge, and Nina Shi, who is rude, fat, uncaring, and shallow. The scene is the (closed stacks) library, where Yao Mi is working at the circulation desk, receiving returned books and accepts requests for new books. Yancheng has arrived just as Nina is making a scene over an unfillable request:

Yao Mi took the card with the missing call number, and read, "The Red and the Black, by Balzac." She shot a glance at Yancheng and their eyes connected. Yancheng wanted to laugh.

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Part 1, chapter 6, 234.

Yao Mi said, “We do have *The Red and the Black*, but by another author, not Balzac. Will that do?”

Nina said vehemently, “I want the one by Balzac!”

Yao Mi said, “We don’t have Balzac’s *The Red and the Black*.”<sup>45</sup>

This scene is most characteristic of the play of literary affect to drive the power struggle between two highly charged groups of characters. Nina’s caricatured ridiculousness first brings together “the eyes” of Xu Yancheng and Yao Mi, which conveys the new understanding, empathy, and intersubjective bonds that form in that movement. When Nina challenges Yao Mi further, hoping to look for her non-existent book among Yao Mi’s father’s books, we have that “Yao Mi’s eyes shone like an evening thunderstorm, when the lightning pierces the black clouds before the thunder sounds.”<sup>46</sup> This sight, witnessed by Xu Yancheng, illustrates great contrast between the prim, decorous exterior that Yao Mi has constructed, and gives him a view to the tumultuous emotive self within. He has begun to fall in love. The *qing* relationship is fundamentally a reaction of moral persons to times of adversity.

Multiple invocations of French literature, especially Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine* (but here, also a glancing allusion to Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le noir*) are probably not a coincidence. Balzac’s work presents a wide range of characters in episodes examining their character and psychological responses to a modern 19<sup>th</sup> century world that is deemed more focused on money and power than ever before. Yao Mi, Du Lilin, and Xu Yancheng must make decisions and pursue relationships under the pressure of massive extrapersonal forces, complications arising from marriage and romance, and based on

---

<sup>45</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 1, chapter 7, 244-5; I use Amory and Shi’s translation here: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 44-5.

<sup>46</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 1, chapter 7, 244-5; I use Amory and Shi’s translation here: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 44-5.

their own inner natures, which emerge gradually through Balzac's techniques of prose character description.

One subplot of the first two parts involves Yao Mi's production of a research thesis that thoroughly reviews these techniques in French literature – thanks in part to crucial help from Xu Yancheng.<sup>47</sup> When the resulting review article is stolen by Yao Mi's ambitious, but shallow colleagues, they write a crude criticism of her bourgeois values in a second rate literary journal. These are still the early days of dogmatic criticism as power machination at the institute, and so the efforts of the group are unsuccessful. But Yao Mi learns the stakes of world literature research in the new regime. Readers attending to the autobiographical dimension of Yang Jiang's work of course link this subplot with an episode in Yang Jiang's own life – her production of several research articles in the later 1950s, all of which were criticized or ignored by the increasingly dogmatic and fraught literary institute where she and Qian Zhongshu both worked. Both writers report that their initial enthusiasm to work for the new China was dampened by the growing realization that the project of giving Chinese literature a major role within the liberal humanist traditions of Western literature were not welcome.<sup>48</sup>

This subplot suggests that *Baptism* might be read with some of Yang Jiang's 1950s critical propositions in mind. Yang Jiang transforms the discourse of *qing* in linking it to a fantasy of cosmopolitan culture never allowed to develop properly, but

---

<sup>47</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 2, chapters 12-3, 342-55.

<sup>48</sup> The most complete coverage of Yang Jiang's life in these years is Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past] (Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2008), 250-69.

supplements her fiction with a troubled vision of universal human nature (*renxing*).<sup>49</sup> *Qing* is the better part of our natures; selfishness, pride, fear, dishonesty and other vices are the lower part. Each person's true character (*xingge*) is a combination of negative and positive qualities, and the task of the story is to celebrate *qing* without forgetting that each individual falls short of a perfect alignment with their better natures, and that it is human nature to form communities with persons of similar character -- hence Yang Jiang's overt effort to eschew main characters.<sup>50</sup> Her comment to this effect is strongly reminiscent of her exposition on Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the "novel without a hero" that explores the baser side of human nature even as it celebrates the human virtues of benevolence and loyalty.<sup>51</sup> Du Lilin, for example, perhaps inherits some of the features of Amelia Smedley, the good woman who marries unwisely but carries on, devoted to her philandering husband and peevish mother. Yang Jiang wrote that the Western social realist novel and the Chinese satirical romantic novel worked in alignment to illumine human nature, but that each had relevant distinctive qualities of narrative structure; *Baptism* is in a basic sense the project of employing the shared set of these qualities.

### **Finale: Thought Reform and Human Nature**

Although Xu Yancheng and Yao Mi surely *are* protagonists in the first and second parts, they are never heroes in the sense that flaws in their character – naivete, timidity, self-absorption – don't shine just as brightly as their virtues. In part three, the final act of the drama, Yao Mi makes virtually no appearance at all. Yancheng is

---

<sup>49</sup> The most complete statement of this view is Yang Jiang, "Fei'erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction]," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 2004); also see my second chapter, which examines Yang Jiang's 1950s critical writings.

<sup>50</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Preface, 310.

<sup>51</sup> See Yang Jiang, "Lun Sakelei *Ming li chang* 论萨克雷《名利场》 [On Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*]," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 2004), 214–235.

functionally back with Du Lilin. All character positions are reset to show the stresses of the major story event – a campaign of thought reform – on their weaknesses, in an effort to show true character.

To emphasize the suddenness of the Three Anti Campaign, the first of many political purges designed to consolidate party control and erode private business in China, Yang Jiang begins part three from the perspective of the most colorful of the minor characters, Zhu Qianli, the pipe-smoking and braggadocio scholar of French symbolist poetry.<sup>52</sup> All members of the institute agree that Zhu is most likely to receive deep criticism for his vivid demonstrations of his class ignorance and political naivete even as he has confidence in his position because he is a decent scholar. Though a sexual bully at the office, Zhu is a hen-pecked husband at home; badly struck and clawed one evening, he spends a few days away from work to recover. Back at work again, he discovers that everything has changed. “The masses had begun to organize, to undergo repeated study, and to begin a movement.”<sup>53</sup> Normal research work has stopped while all institute members meet in their small groups to work on self-criticisms (*jiantao*), the texts of which must be read aloud at public struggle sessions. Successfully passing the public struggle sessions is called “baptism” (*xizao*). Zhu Qianli, unable to grasp even the simplest of the new contingencies of this situation, is left in a daze.

Increased levels of presentational and dramatic irony suffuse this politically charged atmosphere – what appears at first to be a plainspoken narration of events gradually reveals itself as a wide-ranging denunciation of the varieties of hypocrisy

---

<sup>52</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, Part 3, chapter 1, 382-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3, chapter 1, 382.

exhibited by all participants in the struggle sessions – the aggressive audience, anxious institute administrators, falsely confident party cadres, and the all-too-human intellectuals who are forced to squirm under the gaze of them all. Yang Jiang’s use of irony is complex and not always complete, which is the feature that gives the novel its ambiguity on the question of political movements and Chinese communism in general.

First, the presentation of the *xizao* process, especially the tortured discussions that lead to the self-criticism, is on the surface a simple declarative introduction to the terms of the political movement.<sup>54</sup> What Zhu Qianli finds the day he comes back to work is an argument about the necessity “to cast aside all of one’s baggage” (*paoqi baofu*) in a public declaration from “the masses” (*qunzhong*), who judge whether the confession goes deep enough, or whether it may still be concealing errors, fears, antagonism to the party, or other “baggage.” Self-criticisms deemed honest enough garner the “help and enlightenment” (*bangzhu he qifa*) of the masses to join in solidarity and achieve complete unity of institutional purpose.

But Yang Jiang undermines every single step of this process, starting with an examination of the “masses,” the irony of which term becomes clear when we see that this often meant just a few people sitting on benches, or else a mob mobilized by a few of the struggling subject’s personal enemies who disguise gossip-fueled spite as ideological duty. Every person has “baggage,” from illicit love affairs to business associations and even mixed motives for returning to China from abroad. Every person can find some way to rationalize, to explain, to confess and to swear to change. And so

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Part 3, chapters 2-5, 386-402.

every person can achieve “baptism” in the end.<sup>55</sup> The very repeatability of these events shows the reader that they are stagy, cheap actions that teach participants to perform transformation, and not actually transform; but the new false face of the character is the real transformation.

The intent of thought reform was that the subject should be pressed into intense, forced soul-searching to achieve the authenticity of feeling to change and join more fully into the revolution. The subject of thought reform should search for the *mot juste* to build a self-criticism capable of earning a baptism. Zhu Qianli’s traditionalism and general egotism landed him in hot water, but after three tries and some outside help he writes an acceptable speech. Yu Nan, the politically ambitious sycophant to the Communist Party, is surprised to find that his own self-criticism fails on the first try – he soon realizes that his most aggressive questioners are armed with personal information supplied by his daughter, who has “drawn a clear line” in order to advance her own position in the revolution. Still, with a new and more deeply sentimental performance, he at last passes muster.

Of greatest interest, though, are the statements of Du Lilin and Xu Yancheng, in which we see that the emotional obstructions to their marriage, up to this point a deeply private and personal matter, become a subject of public interest.<sup>56</sup> Lilin and Yancheng write statements that address each other, with deeply personal accusations via public, staged confessions. Their power struggle on the struggle session stage re-enacts the story of their courtship from part 1, chapter 4. Back at university in Shanghai, Lilin had first asked Yancheng out, and Lilin had proposed to Yancheng – a textbook example of

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Part 3, chapters 8-11, 416-434.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Part 3, chapters 7, 11, 409-16, 430-4.

the blank male becoming the consort of a remarkable woman, as McMahon would put it. In Beijing in 1951, Lilin carefully contrives the rhetoric of authenticity that earns her a baptism on the first try, and then coaches her recalcitrant husband (he at first refuses to participate in the political campaign, and must realize over time that he has no choice) in the writing of his own, ultimately successful self-criticism. The alignment of these two plot structures entangles the discourses of *qing* and revolution. The reader is not permitted to decide that Lilin is a hypocrite in 1951 but was honest in the 1930s, or vice versa. Neither is the reader permitted to decide that Lilin's deep, instinctive commitment to the discourse of *qing* insulates her from taking a stake in the complex ideological struggle, or vice versa. This distinctive ambiguity, shaped with extreme care as an act of combinatory narrative structure, is an outstanding portrait of modern Chinese subjectivity in the year 1951. All enthusiasm for the regime of personhood before the revolution is past; all engagement with the new reality is forced; but there is a way to tell the story to show that true character (*xingge*) has not changed.

Looking back over the third act, this homology applies to the other characters as well. Zhu Qianli presents an extravagant lie to the party, is much abused for his presumed disrespect, and learns in the end to accept a relationship based on mutual distrust and abuse – just the lesson he learned in his own marriage: the spineless rat belongs with the shrew. Yu Nan hoped to become a Communist Party cadre himself, but learns that his age, class background, and most importantly his small-minded focus on himself over others, mean that he will at most become a lower-level intellectual-bureaucrat. And he accepts this, just like back in part one, chapter one of the novel, when hoped to run away to America with a Shanghai beauty, but she dumps him



because he can't find the generosity to give her a decent betrothal gift. Like Zhu Qianli, he knows he is too small a person to be the philanderer he fancies himself to be. Again, undergirding Yang Jiang's proto-structuralist – even Aristotelian – proposition that crisis determines true character are the embers of polygamy, the figurative narrative arc of philanderers, male consorts, and remarkable women.

Yang Jiang's achievement is to represent the Chinese experience of what has since come to be known as "brain washing." *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China* is the report of US army psychologist Robert Jay Lifton on data from forty subjects who actually experienced struggle sessions and were forced to write self-criticisms.<sup>57</sup> One subject, Professor Chin Yüeh-lin, supplies a translation of the full text of his self-criticism which appears in an appendix to the report.<sup>58</sup>

The text is a confessional life story with the following structure: subject acknowledges that early life was a mistaken pursuit of happiness predicated on the false consciousness of individual agency, but this was followed by a gradual dawning that individual agency was in fact distance from social reality and both conscious and unconscious abuse of privilege. Chin recounts the progress of alignment into bourgeois subjectivity, disavowing every decision and pledging to pursue a new political consciousness. He acknowledges that the first steps toward political consciousness were merely acts of self-preservation, and not true change. Finally, he now affirms the need to become a new, selfless, person.

---

<sup>57</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 473-484.

Every element of this self-criticism is represented in Du Lilin's self-criticism, the text and recitation of which form the focus of part 3, chapter 7.<sup>59</sup> Lifton's American psychoanalytical perspective finds a ritualistic denial of the father, but notes in every one of his forty cases the failure of the conversion to lead to a new sense of belonging. Usually, the subject has fled the regime (all subjects were Hong Kong refugees) because he or she was dissatisfied with the new job assignment, post baptism ("washing"). Hu Weihan, a much younger interviewee for Lifton who was doing graduate research at an think tank in Beijing, was reassigned to China's northwest, and refused to take his new position.<sup>60</sup>

Yang Jiang's epilogue is remarkably congruent with Lifton's findings. She tells how the characters squabbled over their job assignments and pay grades, thus revealing rapid disillusionment post-baptism. The main difference, of course, is that Hu and other subjects reporting to Lifton rejected their assignments and ultimately escaped the country to live in exile; Yang Jiang testifies to the compromises made by those who ultimately accepted their assignments and remained in China.

In the end, all of the institute's members "pass," and yet readers find it all too clear that none of the scholars have actually taken any steps towards greater political consciousness. Yu Nan and Zhu Qianli squabble over salary; Xu Yancheng and Du Lilin move on the best they can without solving their marriage crisis. This layer of dramatic irony is only the base; another layer is the sense of relief that each character feels. Thank goodness the struggle sessions are over, every scholar thinks. Now there can be no more such political conflict. Readers of course know that 1951 political

---

<sup>59</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, 409-16.

<sup>60</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform*, 453-473.

campaigns involving struggle sessions would reappear in waves for the next three decades, driving Chinese society apart and permanently affecting the role of intellectuals and humanities research in China.

Other post-Mao writings, perhaps most notably the short fiction of Feng Jikai, portrays the scenes of struggle sessions and the anguish of scholars forced to write self-criticisms. Yang Jiang's chief innovation is to distribute positive and negative qualities of true character evenly among Chinese intellectuals and those who sought to control them. The year 1951 is a rare and distinctive literary setting when most intellectuals succeeded in convincing "the revolutionary masses" that they deserved a role in society; Yang Jiang solves the problem of illustrating the trauma of their success. She does so with a highly sophisticated character-based sense of narrative structure that draws on social-themed fiction from both Western and Chinese traditions: irony and psychological insight from Western novels, Confucian virtues and vices and Chinese romantic archetypes from Chinese novels. A major proposition of liberal humanism at work here is the universality of human nature, which Yang Jiang pits against the bureaucratic fantasy of a renewed and obedient personhood. By imbuing the characters Xu Yancheng and Du Lilin with the most honest attempt to remain the same people before and after their "baptism," Yang Jiang proves at once the universality of human nature and the moral uprightness that is Xu and Du's Chinese inheritance – thus, their "baptisms" function as signs of regeneration.

### ***Baptism's* Political Content**

The greatest achievement of *Baptism* is the refinement of a prose style, first employed in the memoir *Six Records of a Cadre School*, so characterized by

understatement -- what Chinese critics call "even and natural" (*pingdan ziran*) -- that whether the work functions as polemic or not is entirely left to the reader. Touching briefly on the novel as a paradigmatic examination of thought control in his 1997 book *In the Red*, Geremie Barmé comments that the "almost playful humor and irony employed by the writer make the excoriating process [of washing, of thought control] all the more chilling."<sup>61</sup> Barmé sees an author possessed of "considerable wit" who intended every step of the way to examine "thought reform as an inexorable passage away from individual will to group consciousness under collective state tutelage."<sup>62</sup> Ruminating on the work in the same year, though, Yang Jiang's biographer Kong Qingmao finds in the work a defense of thought reform in the new PRC. For Kong, *Baptism* demonstrates that thought reform was "without the least doubt absolutely necessary."<sup>63</sup>

Kong's lengthier consideration builds a fair case for this view. Evidence includes the three headings of the novel's three parts, all of which are lines of classical Chinese poems imbued with strong political subtexts by centuries of commentators. Part 1, *Cai ji cai feng*, "Gathering vegetables, discarding husks," is a line from a *Shijing* poem spoken by a woman whose husband has taken another woman, and so must refer first of all to Wan Ying, Yu Nan's wise and virtuous wife, on whom Yu Nan cheated. But the heading may also be taken as alluding to the state as the force that gathers the best talent and discards the "husks" – a reading that Kong sees as endorsing the project of thought

---

<sup>61</sup> Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1992), 248-55.

reform. Similarly, part 2 is labeled with the *Shijing* line "the clothes are still dirty," which describes both how Xu Yancheng and Yao Mi's *qing* was sullied with sexuality and how the members of the institute are all in need of washing; and part 3 is labeled with the line "When the waters of Canglang are clean," which Kong takes to mean that the water is clean, meaning of course that the washing process has been a success and that Xu Yancheng and Yao Mi have rectified their relationship with each other.

Kong's reading fails to account for the novel's epilogue, in which we see that the true character of the main characters is unchanged: Yu Nan is still rapacious; Zhu Qianli is still small-minded and easy to confuse; Xu Yancheng and Du Lilin are still as unenthusiastic about the PRC (and each other) as ever. Human nature, the novel seems to say, is not fundamentally altered by thought reform. Yang Jiang's selection of classical Chinese poetry for her act headings shows an awareness of the popular allegory of *qing* romance and good government, but her tragicomic conclusions -- lovers are not united, bad marriages continue, thought reform fails -- encourage us to see her act headings as their own form of presentational irony. An institute that chooses Yu Nan patently fails to "discard the chaff;" the plot undermines the political interpretation of the line. "Clothes still dirty," implies that something can be done by the state to wash them, but this is undermined throughout as we see the very worst scholars gain institutional capital. And "the waters of Canglang are clean" is the most poignant and cutting irony of all -- the full quatrain that Yang Jiang quotes is "When the waters of Canglang are clear, I can wash my tassels of my cap in them. When the waters of Canglang are muddy, I can wash my feet in them." The vices of the institute's new

leaders suggests that the “waters” were never clean in the first place, which makes “washing” a fruitless activity.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, the novel as a unified, single action of intellectual experience in 1951 opens the possibility of political endorsement or at a least politically neutral account that avoids the chest-baring associated with the literature of the wounded, even as it undermines the account with a complex application of irony. Further, the former is the more active reading among mainland readers.<sup>65</sup> This disturbing fact gives us pause - is Yang Jiang's text politically effective, given that Kong's reading is unexceptional in mainland China even today? Should the artist be held responsible for applying irony with a subtlety that escapes a mass audience? I would answer in the negative on both counts. The text may have largely failed to be politically effective inside of China. But that is because early critical readings of the text did not account for irony in all the forms they occur in this novel. *Baptism* embodies too well the politico-romantic fantasy it inherits, and so has largely escaped notice as a satirical political polemic. If and when a Chinese-language critical approach to the novel elucidates its forms of irony, the book may enjoy a new afterlife as a meditation on the relationship between human nature, institutional change, and the fate of Chinese intellectuals in the crucial years just following the foundation of the PRC.

---

<sup>64</sup> Yang Jiang, *Collected Writings* v. 1, 382; also see the note appended in Amory and Shi's translation: Yang Jiang, *Baptism*, 205, n. 41

<sup>65</sup> “Douban du shu: Xi zao,” <http://book.douban.com/subject/1078250/> (accessed May 23, 2012).

## Chapter Six: “About to Drink the Tea”: Yang Jiang’s Essays, 1981-1991

### The Modern Chinese Essay and Yang Jiang

Western scholarship since the 1990s has argued that the Chinese essay form is far more important in the context of modern literature than had been previously acknowledged. As Charles Laughlin puts it in his latest work on the subject,

[M]any of the authors we know best for their achievements in poetry, fiction and drama also have significant accomplishments in the form of the essay, and readers of their time and later generations have read their essays with just as much interest as their other work. They have done so, moreover, not merely to discover biographical information about the author, but to experience further the author’s literary personality through his or her style, vocabulary and rhetoric. What they hope to find, if appreciations of essays are any guide, is not artistic achievement, but sincerity and authenticity.<sup>1</sup>

The combined discourse of biography and personality – the discourse of ‘writing the person’ (*xie renwu*) – in the modern Chinese essay takes on a hybrid role that easily falls into the cracks between contemporary fields of study: essays are literary, but also popular and often pedagogical; “authenticity” as well occupies multiple valences of historical and artistic truth; moreover, the discursive political and social content of the essay is often subtextual, an effect of rhetorical features that are still little understood by Western scholars of the Chinese language.

Pioneering work by David Pollard, Chen Pingyuan, Charles Laughlin, Susan Daruvala, and others has gradually begun to illuminate the complex history of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 15.

multiple forms generally referred to as *sanwen* today.<sup>2</sup> Chinese essays have a long history as records of private lives, which makes them seem marginal to a more mainstream Chinese discourse on public affairs like state and society.<sup>3</sup> Essays turn away from orthodox literature's service to state and society to focus on the emotions, the everyday, and the life of the mind at leisure – a mode present in the Song dynasty (960-1279), highly developed in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and lingering on in Qing dynasty (1644-1911) writers like Yuan Mei (1716-1797). In the space of the essay, description of activity, domestic space, and landscapes are all understood as articulations of personality, marking the interiority of the writing “I” and so outlining a private individual, distinct from the crowd. Still, the basic presentational irony of the form is that prose conventions of setting, literary affect, humor, trivia and the everyday serve to constitute an sensibility that simultaneously reasserts Chinese traditions of leisure literature and conveys a modern, urbane personality. This is what makes the modern Chinese essay a truly popular form, accessible across gender, class and political leaning, and an important tool for the teaching of writing.

During the “literary revolution” (1917-1937) that saw the emergence of a mass market for books and periodicals, as well as increasing political polarization in the nascent Republic of China, the role of the essay in the new literature came under

---

<sup>2</sup> David Pollard, ed. and trans., *The Chinese Essay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Chen Pingyuan 陈平原, “Xiandai Zhongguo de “Wei Jin feng du” yu “liu chao sanwen” 现代中国的 “魏晋风度” 与 “六朝散文” [The Wei-Jin style in modern Chinese essays and Six Dynasties essays],” in *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu zhi jianli* 中国现代学术之建立 [The establishment of modern Chinese scholarship] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998); Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure*, 1-7.



debate.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1930s, Zhou Zuoren (the older brother of theand Lin Yutang marshaled publishing apparatus and writing communities in defense of *xiaopin wen*, a form thought to have found a happy meeting between Ming Chinese and modern Western familiar, personal forms. In 1933, Lu Xun ridiculed Zhou (who was his older brother) and colleagues for producing overly casual forms – “antique curios” – and he demanded that the mass interest in the essay be exploited in the service of pressing social and national content; other writers on the left, including Zhu Ziqing, made a similar call for less “frivolous” essay writing in the pages of the journal *Taibai* in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

The essay career of Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948) demonstrates the importance of the essay to teaching practice in this period. Charles Laughlin tells how Zhu’s early essay practice was influenced by his experiences at the short-lived Chunhui Middle School in 1924 and 1925, where he taught students to write in an idyllic rural environment that also fostered a warm community of writers. Zhu brought his “moderately leftist educationalist” views on essay-writing not only to the journal *Taibai*, but also to his new post as a literature professor at Tsinghua University, where he oversaw the earliest essays by Yang Jiang – one of which, “Shou jiaoyin” (Collecting footprints) appeared in the literary supplement to *Da gong bao* in 1935.<sup>6</sup> This piece, along with a set of descriptive essays vaguely dated “1940s” surfaced in the 1994 volume *Yang Jiang sanwen* (Essays of Yang Jiang), suggesting that Yang Jiang’s essays in the 1980s and

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7-14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>6</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ] (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1992), 34

1990s continues a practice she took up in university days, continued through the war years, and then discontinued for three decades.<sup>7</sup>

What Yang Jiang shares with Zhu is an approach to essay that embeds memories of people known and events experienced into a special rhetoric of literary affect that activates both traditional Confucian and “moderately leftist” content – in other words, Yang Jiang’s essays serve as exemplary life writing in contemporary China. Spanning the division in 1930s and 40s essays figured by the feuding Zhou brothers, Yang Jiang’s work belongs in a new episteme that derives national belonging from cultural features of Chinese family and intellectual life, as Zhou Zuoren, and Liang Shiqiu. They remember fondly how traditional Chinese literature could be a respectable a contribution to world literature. And they also preserves a sense of essay as educational enterprise, adding even a dimension of historical documentation not known to the 1930s modern essay.

As artistically crafted historical records, Yang Jiang’s essays reveal the capacity of the form to bridge historical writing and fiction. Yang Jiang’s critical writings, both from the 1980s and the 1950s, show how a consistent framework of narrative analysis, the key terms of which are character (*renwu*) and plot (*qingjie*). Following Fielding, every story, Yang Jiang averred, was essentially a life story, or biography (*zhuanji*), and the main trend of innovation since Fielding had been to expand the pedagogical value of life story from the classically heroic to encompass the actions and decisions of ordinary

---

<sup>7</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, *Yang Jiang sanwen* 杨绛散文 [The Essays of Yang Jiang] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1994).

characters in their everyday lives.<sup>8</sup> Historical writing's ancient purpose had been to praise and blame; usually the historical memoir (*zhuanji*) took as its main object the historical figure (*renwu*) and made of their actions a generalized account linking historical event and personal qualities. Yang Jiang's essays, like those of Zhang Zhongxing and a few other "old generation" writers active in the 1980s and 90s, remember interactions with people of the past with a simplicity and reserve that suggests a rhetoric of conservatism. Just as Laughlin says of the other older generation writers,

In the wake of the Cultural Revolution and the thought patterns and prose conventions that characterized it, the appeal of an unassuming yet sophisticated and fluent discourse must have been similar to the appeal of *xiaopin wen* when revolutionary literature first attempted to dominate the literary scene.<sup>9</sup>

But though Yang Jiang at first seems as attractively apolitical as other older generation writers, her sensibility continues, I argue, a project she began with *Six Records of a Cadre School*, that is imbued with political content, located primarily in the portraits and actions of persons – writing lives writes of power. As I illustrate in what follows, the central imagery of Yang Jiang essays is people. Facial expressions, physical characteristics, gestures, and a rich language for emotional states combine with the essay tradition's emphasis on concreteness and the everyday to present life in the past as a struggle – conventional expressions of parting are another main feature -- that affirms a set of Confucian virtues updated to place the bonds of friendship and kinship at their core. This sensibility is, I argue, not apolitical.

---

<sup>8</sup> See my chapter on Yang Jiang's criticism, and also Yang Jiang, "Fei'erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction]," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 236–266.

<sup>9</sup> Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure*, 179.

### The Memorial Essays

A particular subtype within modern *sanwen* is the memorial essay, which experienced a renaissance in tandem with short fiction and the much shorter, lyrical occasional pieces associated with *xiaopin wen* during the renewal of the literary markets in the post-Mao era.<sup>10</sup> Yang Jiang made three significant contributions to this form: “Huiyi wo de fuqin” (Remembering My Father), “Huiyi wo de gumu” (Remembering Third Aunt),” and “Ji Yang Bi” (On Yang Bi); these works review the potential and limitations of the Yang family values, a progressive Confucianism that sought social justice but turned away from revolutionary discourse, instead working to adapt normative social relations, most especially in striving for a gender framework that expanded the agency of the “good mother and worthy wife” (*liang mu xian qi*) role. Yang Jiang’s memorials testify to the possibility of a culturally conservative politics that produces a strong sense of individuality within the traditional family structure, an ideal vividly evoked in the story of Yang Bi (1922-1968), Yang Jiang’s younger sister and translator of several English novels including Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*. Yang Bi’s life shows that filial piety need not preclude a successful professional life; indeed, Yang Jiang stages Yang Bi’s life so that nurture within clan structure supplies her with the strong sense of self necessary to stand up to extremism at Fudan University in the 1960s.

“Remembering My Father” is intertwined epic and *bildungsroman*, a simultaneous story of Yang Yinhang’s fraught construction of a new role as altruistic

---

<sup>10</sup> Cyril Birch, “Literature Under Communism,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar, vol. 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 805.

leader to family and society and of Yang Jiang's own path to literacy and political and social consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

The first, major plotline is Yang Jiang's response to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Modern History (*Jindai lishi xueyuan*), which was hoping to collect information on the major actors behind the 1911 Xinhai Revolution.<sup>12</sup> Yang Yinhang was a founding member of the Jiangsu *tongmenghui*, Yang Jiang admits, but he also witnessed firsthand the early Republican government's failure to establish an independent judiciary and subsequent inability to battle rampant corruption in the capital and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Disillusioned with political service, Yang Yinhang began to openly regret his embrace of revolutionary politics after 1916. After a soul-searching expedition with friends in China's countryside, he rejoined fellow members of the gentry in the South and built a career up in journalism and private law practice – often working *pro bono* to help the indigent.<sup>14</sup> Following the life trajectory of the incorruptible official, he purchased and restored a Ming dynasty home and grounds and worked tirelessly to support the servants and extended family like his sister Yang Yinyu.<sup>15</sup> Disaster struck in the summer of 1937 when the clan abandoned the property in the face of Japanese invasion, several family members died, and the remainder of the clan regrouped as refugees in occupied Shanghai.

As with many memorial essays, Yang Jiang tells her father's story with a tone of deep intimacy, but she eschews typical patterns of memorial praise in favor of a chatty,

---

<sup>11</sup> Yang Jiang, "Huiyi wo de fuqin 回忆我的父亲 [Remembering my Father]," in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 59–115.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-69.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 62, 70-1, 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-83.

at times even funny and irreverent set of snapshots that animate the gradual, interior growth of her own cultural and social values. From age 5, when she couldn't understand why a photograph of the President bore her father's name (it was autographed), the narrating "I" develops into a full equal and "friend" of her father.<sup>16</sup> Literature was their common interest, with Yang Yinhang encouraging his daughter in her studies and opening his entire vast library to Yang Jiang. "Father would place whatever book I was interested in on my desk. If I took too long to read it, the book would disappear – that was how he censured me."<sup>17</sup> Totally absent of the harsh discipline required of parents and teachers in most stories of the kind, Yang Jiang hints that the relationship between father and daughter was a model of Confucian transmission – and not just of literacy, but of morality, of the diversity of Suzhou society, and of the nature of politics in the modern world. An interior conflict emerges in the young Yang Jiang: should she pursue a career of service, or follow her own nature (*xingqing*) and take up the study of literature, especially fiction and poetry? Looking back on her upbringing, she credits her father with teaching her to follow her nature, a core of ambition that aims for improvement but does not depend on experience, learning, or talent: "I simply couldn't be a doctor that cured sick people; nor was I suited to be a politician that could bring the state to order and peace to the people. All could do was follow the path of my own nature (*xingqing*) with all my power."<sup>18</sup>

Yang Yinhang's remarkable progressivism helped instill in Yang Jiang a strong sense of self, enabling her to approach her education and career with a high level of

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 94

agency. This story also yields important testimony on what Tani Barlow calls the “discontinuous accumulation of feminist enlightenment in China.”<sup>19</sup> Yang Jiang offers a father-daughter relationship narrative leading to full personhood very deliberately, re-activating for 1980s audiences what Barlow has described as the “progressive feminism” of “bourgeois colonial modernity,” yet lacking the eugenicist and ethnographic propositions Barlow finds permeating actual 1920s and 30s feminist discourse. Instead, Yang Jiang draws more heavily on the discourse of *qing*, focusing closely on how father and daughter bonded over shared interests and ultimately overcame the social and familial hierarchy between them to become friends.<sup>20</sup>

The obstructions to this successful nurturing of a daughter appear in the tragically negative obverse case of Yang Yinhang’s younger sister and Yang Jiang’s aunt, Yang Yinyu (1884-1938).

Prompted once again by the Institute of Modern History, Yang Jiang’s aim with “Remembering My Aunt” was to at least partially restore a reputation destroyed by her experiences as president of Beijing Women’s Normal University from 1923 to 1925.<sup>21</sup> But this is difficult for her, Yang Jiang says, because Yang Jiang herself always disliked this woman, who joined the Yang household at Suzhou, was often mean to the children, and treated Yang Jiang’s mother like a servant. Indeed, Yinyu is a negative counterpoint to Tang Xu’an, who managed the household as co-partner with Yang Yinhang. Jiang produces a dialogue between her mother and father in which the two lament Yinyu’s

---

<sup>19</sup> Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Yang Jiang, “Remembering my Father,” 92.

<sup>21</sup> Yang Jiang, “Huiyi wo de gumu 回忆我的姑母 [Remembering my Third Aunt],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 116–133.

failure to achieve the role of “worthy wife and good mother.” In a perhaps the only instance of disavowal from her father’s position, Yang Jiang concludes that Yinyu “had no intention of being a ‘worthy wife and good mother.’”<sup>22</sup> Having rejected “feudalism,” says Yang Jiang, Yinyu had “turned her mind entirely to society.” Juxtaposed with Yang Jiang’s own decision to follow her own nature rather than devote herself to national salvation or the expectations of her family, the implicit message is that Yinyu’s tragedy lies in the severing of the path that tradition had laid out in favor a new, public life that ends in rejection from the public. Disgraced as a supposed conservative, but functionless in a Confucian household because anti-traditional, Yinyu is a painful case of Barlow’s “discontinuous accumulation of feminist enlightenment.”

Yang Bi, by contrast, is framed as a success story, proof that Yang Yinhang’s and Tang Xu’an’s method of nurturing daughters could yield the best of both Confucian family roles and independence of spirit. Like the other memorial essays, “On Yang Bi” recreates the space of the Yang home, this time as a kind of Chinese Alcott house – all eight daughters were readers of *Little Women*, and “A Bi,” the youngest, is sickly and soon becomes overly “delicate” (*jiao*).<sup>23</sup> Yang Bi’s closest intimate, seventh sister (A Qi) takes responsibility for curing Yang Bi of her delicate constitution by drawing on a practice which Yang Jiang names in her native Wuxi dialect: “Drawin’ Ol’ L’il” (*yin lao xiao*). This of course refers to teasing the child:

A Qi liked to draw...In just a few strokes she did a portrait of A Bi...As A Qi painted, she recited some words.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>23</sup> Yang Jiang, “Ji Yang Bi 记杨必 [On Yang Bi],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 254–266.



First she painted two deeply convex brows, saying "Squashed are her brows."  
Then she painted two eyes with tips facing upwards, "With *yu* ("wings" in Wuxi dialect) for the corners of her eyes."

Then she painted a little round circle, "A little circle for her nose."

Then a big, wide mouth, open in laughter, "So wide is her mouth."

Then she drew around these an egg-shaped head with a child's hair. "Face like a duck egg."

She added two round ears. "Big and round, her ears."

A Bi took a great interest in this caricature. She picked it up and looked at it closely. Thinking it did indeed quite resemble her, she let out a "Waaaa" and began to cry. We all laughed and laughed.

Later on each time A Qi drew "Squashed are her brows, with wings for the corners of her eyes...", before she came to "Face like a duck egg," A Bi would start crying. After that, she'd cry before A Qi got to "A little circle for her nose." This caricature just got more inspired each time she drew it. Everybody enjoyed and admired it. One time A Bi huffed and puffed but managed to keep herself from crying. Seeing A Qi getting to "Face like a duck egg," she snatched up the brush, added many dots to the face, and said herself, "Face like a preserved egg!" She meant those eggs covered with chaff and mud over their shells. And then she laughed with all of us. This was Yang Bi's great victory. She killed off her delicacy, and she gained a sense of humor.<sup>24</sup>

The narrative of overcoming is here shared by the whole family, who are the public for an intimate performance of literary affect, portraiture, and person-making.

Yang Bi would go on to graduate from Aurora University in occupied Shanghai, begin a successful career as a translator of English novels including *Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray, and would earn a position as one of few female professors at Fudan University in the early 1950s. As the Cultural Revolution gained momentum at Fudan in 1966, Yang Bi remained defiant in the face of constant struggle sessions, despite suffering from chronic illness. Though she never married, she was always sociable and

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 257.

caring towards family and friends, even when her work unit put pressure on her to renounce ties – in this way, Yang Jiang argues that Yang Bi united independence of mind with the goal of being a “good mother and worthy wife”. That Yang Bi should have died in her sleep during the struggle session process seemed to Yang Jiang just the sort of defiance that the little girl displayed back in Suzhou:

To gain "clean" status, the revolutionary masses wanted her to explain her work with the International Labor Bureau [during the War]. She wrote several explanations. One evening, she went to sleep and didn't wake up again. She really reminded me of when she was little and didn't want wash her face, calling out over and over "*Tao tao tao tao tao!*" ["Flee flee flee flee flee!"]. Her two little feet hurried off, but she was always captured by Mother. This time she wasn't captured. She'd made a clean, dexterous break for it.<sup>25</sup>

This final image of the great translator restores her to the Suzhou home where she cultivated the personality that would have the strength and fortitude to deny her tormenters in 1966-8. What might otherwise have been lamented as a tragic and wasteful death is instead framed by Yang Jiang as a victory for the Yang clan's brand of bourgeois Confucianism.

Compared to other examples of the memorial essay, the literary quality of Yang Jiang's offerings is outstanding, for she almost totally dispenses with both the maudlin chest-baring and the prideful family genealogies that plague the form, instead using the memorial essay to develop the same cool and collected mastery of literary affect that characterized her short fiction, *Six Records of a Cadre School*, and, three years later, her novel *Baptism*. Images of the self-righteous Yang Yinhang with his legs stuck out in court, of the aggressive and mean, because wounded, Yang Yinyu scolding her nephews, and of the small but toughened-by-her-sister Yang Bi all leave an indelible

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 265.

impression and deftly suggest the combination of virtue and weakness that define personality (*gexing*) to Chinese readers.

Yang Jiang's focus on character description, with its application of a strong central image, a protagonist facing conflict, is all the more remarkable in the context of her (mostly male) forebears in the modern essay. As Charles Laughlin's analysis of this "literature of leisure" in its earlier manifestation before 1949 showed, essays typically "wander." They can range over a heterogeneous set of locations in space, or, as in the case of women writers like Su Xuelin, "wanderwithin emotional landscapes."<sup>26</sup> Yang Jiang only allows a narrow range of setting, and cares little to flesh out physical surroundings; compared to the deep lows and ecstatic highs in her women-writer contemporaries, interior conflict in her essays is muted. Still, a "meandering logical and rhetorical structure" does characterize the set of memories presented. The memorial essays take up historical intentions, but open up the private life of public personae through combination of heroic and quotidian story events that build up the sense of personality, of "wandering" through a life story. If structured story event is the basis of story generally, then Yang Jiang's memorial essays do not make a structural distinction between essay and fiction – the distinction is only a matter of intention (to document the past) and reception (the authentic sense of reality). In the shorter essays of the later 1980s and 1990s, most of which are collected in the volume *Miscellaneous Thoughts and Miscellaneous Writing*, the narrative focus on "writing the person" is retained to a remarkable degree. The three most sophisticated essays Yang Jiang was to produce – "On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*," "The Years of the Horse and the Ram,"

---

<sup>26</sup> Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure*, 70.

and “The Cloak of Invisibility” all exhibit significant expansions of her character-oriented form to include critical content, rich interior exploration, and the genesis of a life philosophy.

### **The Shorter Essays**

When Yang Jiang’s second volume of essays came out in French, the title given was *Memoires decousus*, with “*decousus*” – “unstitched” – serving as the main character and mood of the writings. Reviewing the French edition for *World Literature Today*, Bettina L. Knapp admired this form that presented “seemingly inconsequential imaged fragments of an individual’s life,” stopping short of any “giant frescolike visions.”<sup>27</sup> “Seemingly” is the keyword here, for in Knapp’s own words Yang Jiang’s shorter essays are also “finely tuned,” and what is more, “well orchestrated.” Each one takes the form of an evocative portrait of a person or persons from Yang Jiang’s life – old servants, minor acquaintances, and snapshots of the “revolutionary masses.” Taken as a unity, the short essays form a small archive, or encyclopedia, of social values organized in an idealistic update to traditional Chinese patriarchy. Memories of Yang Jiang’s mother’s household (an exemplary progressive household), public life in 1950s (with all its new possibilities and pitfalls for social structure), and a reemerging Confucian humanism (which should bring together the altruistic qualities of pre- and post-Revolutionary China) are depicted in tiny, compact narratives, invariably ending on a note of parting. Parting is the chief narrative convention in Chinese discourses of *qing* – discourse which advances what Haiyan Lee calls the “revolution of the heart.”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Bettina Knapp, “Review: Memoires Decousus,” *World Literature Today* (September 1997): 70.

<sup>28</sup> Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

The strands that connect us are highlighted best when broken, and empathy is easier to craft in the suffering, and the guilt-ridden. Following up on Lee's work, Yang Jiang's little archive is a good sample from which to continue to ask: can the project of civility that constitutes Chinese literature yet break from the tradition of taking the personal as political, and taking destiny always in terms of the national?<sup>29</sup>

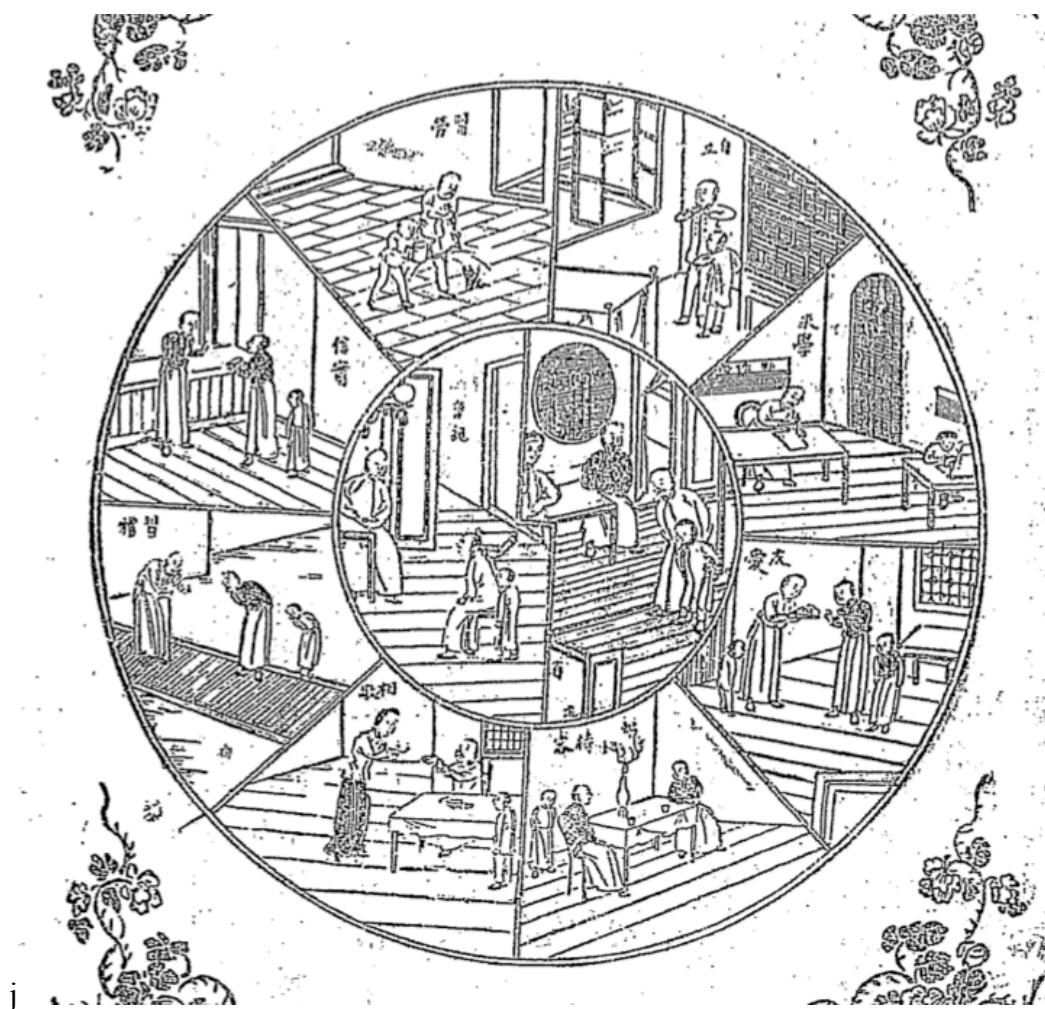


Figure 2: A properly managed household, here illustrating opportunities for *shen jiao* 身教 (“teaching of the self”), from the *Jiating quanbao shu* (Household encyclopedia)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 308-9.

In shorter essays like “Zhao Peirong and ‘Strong Hero’” and “Lucky and Nimble,” altruism emerges from a tradition of service which functions (ideally, at least) to elevate the indigent and disabled, giving them work and shelter and helping them.<sup>30</sup> These short portraits work much like textual versions of the diagrams seen in Republican-era household encyclopedias. Figure 1 shows one such diagram in a work described by Haiyan Lee.<sup>31</sup> Just as Lee argues, the management of the domestic space and its members was the responsibility of the female head of house; the systematic approach to the organization of her work was the Republican update to the notion of the “worthy wives and good mother” (*xianqi liangmu*), which term Yang Jiang uses liberally to describe her own mother, Tang Xu’an.<sup>32</sup>

Good servants are an achievement of the good household manager. They can also serve as symbols of the methods for social advancement through *shen jiao* or “self teaching,” as in the stylized snapshot of the family’s gatekeeper. “I am gatekeeper to the Yang’s of Temple Lane...Zhao’s the name, Zhao Peirong. That’s *Zhao* 趙 with a *xiao* 肖 and a *zou* 走.”<sup>33</sup> Zhao is the head of a whole servant class attached to the “Yang’s of Temple Lane” and dependent on them for helping the indigent – even providing paths to literacy, a virtue captured in the prose description of Old Zhao with its trope of his physical appearance as Chinese characters.

---

<sup>30</sup> Yang Jiang, “Zhao Peirong yu Qiang Yingxiong 赵佩荣与强英雄 [Zhao Peirong and ‘Strong Hero’],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 247–249; Yang Jiang, “Ah Fu yu Ah Ling 阿福与阿灵 [Lucky and Nimble],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 250–253.

<sup>31</sup> Haiyan Lee, “All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print. The Community of Sentiment and the Literary Public Sphere in China, 1900-1918,” *Modern China* 27, no. 3 (July 2007): 291–327

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>33</sup> Yang Jiang, “Zhao Peirong,” 247.

“Lucky and Nimble” were two such beneficiaries of the Yang’s, presented to Yang Jiang’s mother for aid by Old Zhao, just as Xianglin’s wife was to the clan castigated in Lu Xun’s short story “New Year’s Sacrifice.” That Yang Jiang values the very clan structure that Lu Xun deplores, treasuring memories of her father’s old household and idealizing it as a model for altruistic devotion to community improvement, is indicated by the endings of the two essays, which pitch sympathetic, if tragic, servant characters into the extra-personal conflict of the Second World War. Flight from the Japanese motivates the break-up of the manor homes of Suzhou, ending service as a continuous tradition from the Qing, but leaving open a gap that Yang Jiang would often think of in years ahead, when new faceless multitudes replaced traditional households, and still later, when service re-appeared in the public sphere.

Essays like “My First Public Assembly” and “Criticism Meeting” offer a cool, collected subjectivity facing the “revolutionary masses,” and struggling against alienation, whether or not she was the target of criticism.<sup>34</sup> The first essay depicts a Yang Jiang unwilling to lose herself in the crowds of a Beijing assembly; the second tells how bewildering it was to see the crowd end her career as a teacher in 1951. “In Memoriam Mister Winter” mourns an intellectual friendship unsustainable in this new revolutionary community of affect, and “Huahuar,” tells how the family’s last cat fled

---

<sup>34</sup> Yang Jiang, “Kongsu da hui 控诉大会 [Criticism Meeting],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 240–244; Yang Jiang, “Di yi ci guan li 第一次观礼 [My First Public Assembly],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 339–342.

the new Beijing residence, no doubt as unwilling as Yang Jiang to adjust to new conditions of socialization.<sup>35</sup>

The value behind service, an altruistic notion of *comunitas* and self-improvement, exists in extra-personal conflict with a newer value lingering behind the anonymous crowds of the “revolutionary masses” – extremist devotion to leftist ideology that endangers sense of self. Knowledge of these conflicting values helps us understand the depth of meaning in Yang Jiang’s most famous pieces in the form, “Old Wang” and “Granny Lin.”<sup>36</sup> With fewer than 2,000 characters total, “Old Wang” is a case study in economy of prose, a concentrated portrait of an old pedi-cab driver struggling to maintain dignity and independence as his health fails and there proves to be no social safety net sparing him from the misery of urban labor. When age and exhaustion force Wang from his job, he promptly dies, a break that makes Yang Jiang realize how Wang’s relationship with Yang Jiang and other clients was a performance in the public sphere that sustained him, and that the community’s lack of attention to him as a human being helped push him out completely. The message of “Old Wang” is that each member of society, even servants, has a constitutive relationship with each other member, and so what we owe to each other is a chance to allow each member to function so as to optimize these constitutive relations. “Granny Lin,” a longer piece whose tight plot that could just as well be labeled fiction (*xiaoshuo*) as essay (*sanwen*),

---

<sup>35</sup> Yang Jiang, “Ji nian Wen De Xiansheng 纪念温德先生 [In Memoriam Mister Winter],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 213–217; Yang Jiang, “Hua huar 花儿 [Huahuar],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe).

<sup>36</sup> Yang Jiang, “Lin Nainai 老王 [Granny Lin],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 206–212; Yang Jiang, “Lao Wang 老王 [Old Wang],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 202–205.



is a more comic look at the service classes, this time a hardworking older woman whose struggle to organize her family extends even beyond the grave. Both portraits are set in the 1980s, and dramatize the re-emergence of the spectrum of human bonds, from service to kinship, that for Yang Jiang animate and order social structure and sense of self. What becomes apparent when the contemporary settings are viewed in context with memories of the revolutionary and late Republican years is Yang Jiang's sense that the socially altruistic organizing principles at work in her old Suzhou household, interrupted by the revolution, emerge again, scarred and somewhat warped, but intact, in the postsocialist era. "Old Wang" and "Granny Lin" are thus exemplary portraits of a traumatized society on the mend.

**Innovations in Form: "On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*," "Years of the Horse and the Ram" and "The Cloak of Invisibility"**

"On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*" (*Ji Qian Zhongshu wu Weicheng*) has become Yang Jiang's most oft-quoted essay because it was the first biographical treatment of her husband after his 1947 novel *Fortress Besieged* became the most highly-praised work of literary fiction in the 1980s literary market, but the work's dual goals of shaping a textual persona for Qian Zhongshu and distinguishing that persona from the characters in *Fortress Besieged* offers much more than archival material.<sup>37</sup> The essay is Yang Jiang's most complex consideration of the relation between personality in fact and fiction, opening up the terms of large propositions about self and subjectivity that deepen and mature in later works, especially her in-depth reflections on the

---

<sup>37</sup> Yang Jiang 杨绛, "Ji Qian Zhongshu yu Wei cheng 记钱钟书与《围城》 [On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*]," in *Collected Works*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 134–159.

experiences of the Red Guards, and her effort to generalize from experience to life philosophy.

To draw Qian Zhongshu's personality, Yang Jiang takes up the same biographical mode she applied in her memorial essays, arranging events to stage the nourishing of an independently-minded self in an extended family – though the Qian clan is not progressive like the Yang clan. The interpersonal conflicts that shape Qian's upbringing pitch resistant, leisure-loving wanderers against strict, convention-bound elders to suggest in Qian himself an inner admixture of discipline and abandon. This admixture Yang Jiang labels with the Chinese character for “foolishness,” (*chi*), an ancient motif of “blankness” in Chinese narrative that is often associated with male characters possessed of deep cultural virtue.<sup>38</sup> Qian Zhongshu's foolishness, Yang Jiang fancies, might have come from his wetnurse, a strong-willed woman known for her bouts of catatonia. Or he might have learned it from his Uncle Jicheng, who adopted his nephew as his son and raised him among the teahouses and bookstalls of Wuxi, much to the dismay of Zhongshu's father Jibo, who yielded to the elder brother's adoption right but longed to discipline his son and prevent the family curse – the house of the elder Qians shall not prosper, it was said -- from descending on his heir. Like the rope in a tug of war, Qian Zhongshu grew up as a kind of blank male, tending towards the leisure pastimes of the teahouse – especially reflected in reading outside the canon – but commanded, sometimes in secret, by his father to master the discipline to become a complete scholar combining classical learning together with English and mathematics. Qian's fate was to combine these opposing qualities of his clan, earning a place by his

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 142.

father's side writing *guwen* prefaces but also always a fool, a secret student of poetry who could hardly tell left from right, a fan of English literature but a failure in mathematics.

Qian Zhongshu's combination of foolishness and discipline is the quality that drives him as a fiction writer, Yang Jiang argues in the other, literary critical portion of the essay.<sup>39</sup> Her intention is to explain what a fallacy it is to consider his characters in *Fortress Besieged* as simple representations of himself and people he knew. In fact, Qian's characters are "fabrications" (*chuangzuo*), combinations and amplifications of character traits he saw and experienced. Yang Jiang boldly touts her own intimacy with the man to say that she can distinguish biographical from fictional elements, but avers that for the general reader, it's the artistic play behind character that should first make one laugh, and second make one think. For *Fortress Besieged* is a product of the war, Yang Jiang reminds us, and it shows Qian Zhongshu at both his most foolish and his most dedicated and loyal: its satire and the deeply negative perspective on human nature that it outlines is meant to affect readers on an emotional level, to rouse them to attend to the plight of the common people in turmoil. In effect, Yang Jiang asks readers to imagine a way of being Chinese that combines the "blank," cultural subjectivity of the discourse of *qing* with the dutiful, patriotic subjectivity:

I believe that the author of *The Pipe-Awl Chapters* and *On the Art of Poetry* was a Zhongshu who loved to learn, and thought deeply, while the author of *Poetic Remains of Locust Grove* was a Zhongshu who "worried for the troubles of the world." As for the author of *Fortress Besieged*, this was the abundantly "foolish" Zhongshu. In our daily interactions, he loved to say foolish or silly things, and then make them even more creative, more associative, and more

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 135-143.

exaggerated. From these I could often perceive the style of *Fortress Besieged* at work. I think this foolishness of his was what breathed the life and believability into the characters and plot of *Fortress Besieged*. But even so, he was not the sort of fool who is ignorant of world events; nor was he the sort who is indifferent to social reality. So, though the details of the story leave people in stitches, the atmosphere of the whole book is precisely as it says in its conclusion, “containing a satire of, and disappointment with humanity that runs deeper than any language, than any tears or laughter.” It hits the reader right in the gut.<sup>40</sup>

In the context of the 1980s, within a renascent literary sphere struggling to combine new narrative freedoms with despair over the failure of revolutionary discourse, such a portrait was exemplary of a new and much-needed form of personal civility.

Yang Jiang’s examination of her husband is innovative in its combination of biography on the one hand and a literary criticism on the other that distinguishes core personality from fictional work. In contrast, “The Years of the Horse and the Ram” represents the most sophisticated in a series of interior meditations, beginning with *Six Records of a Cadre School*, and then turns back towards coming-of-age memories in “Remembering my Father.”

“Years of the Horse and Ram” continues this project in a narrative of overcoming revolutionary discourse during 1968-9, when Yang Jiang was subjected to Red-Guard managed political oppressions including criticism in big character posters, forced separation from her husband, public struggle sessions, physical humiliations, and near-complete ostracism.<sup>41</sup> At first unable to find belonging even among other

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 157-158.

<sup>41</sup> Yang Jiang, “Bingwu dingwei nian jishi 丙午丁未年记事 [Years of the Horse and the Ram],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 2004), 163–191.

oppressed intellectuals and uncomfortable with appearing in public with her husband, Yang Jiang records the only instance of identity disintegration in all her writing. “Who is this person Yang Jiang?” the work team controlling her unit demands, and she is unable to answer. “I thought to myself, ‘What am I? Neither ‘cow monster and snake demon,’ nor ‘authority,’ nor even ‘scholar’ were appealing, so decided not speaking at all was best.”<sup>42</sup> As with other accounts of Cultural Revolution experiences, ongoing extra-personal psychological pressure forces open mental space for the inner exile; Yang Jiang’s distinctive rhetorical take on the inner exile phenomena was to articulate the new accumulation of self in terms of reserve, sublimating outrage or desires for vengeance with a quiet sureness of self that, though skillfully drawn out in a cosmopolitan vernacular Chinese, resonates with the classical Chinese cultural value of “reserve” (*hanxu*). Used most emblematically to speak of a leader’s ability to keep calm amidst the fierce and violent movement of battle, Yang Jiang turns to the tradition of reserve to describe an equanimity she says she found amidst the angry crowds who insulted and criticized her in the summer of 1969.

But even though I wore the placard of a criminal on my chest every day, and even had to try, amidst the stentorian noise of insults from the angry masses, to actually believe that I had let the people down, and let the party down. But I felt rather that even if this were true, I still had no shame in my heart, because – well, the reasons need not be given in detail. I can’t be bothered to justify myself; in any case, “I rose above, unperturbed.”<sup>43</sup>

The allusion Yang Jiang makes here is to none other than Mao Zedong himself, from a 1928 poem about surviving encirclement by KMT forces, lack of local support,

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 171.

and a pervasive feeling of isolation at Jinggangshan.<sup>44</sup> As in *Six Records*, but in contrast to “Sent Down for the First Time,” Yang Jiang textualizes a self locates culturally Chinese courage in the preservation of a her own placidity. The newly “unperturbed” Yang Jiang finishes the year 1969 on notes of triumph, discovering community among her fellow intellectuals, secretly sympathetic servants and service workers, and even, in the end, Red Guards, whose deeper human empathy for the plight of the people they oversaw confounded their own orders to dehumanize, making them “sheep in wolf’s clothing.” Over the course of the essay’s seven sections, a palpable rhetorical change occurs, from detailing the breakdown of human relations with painful realism, to a more playful narration packed with allusions and witticisms reflecting a new detachment that finds its center in Yang Jiang’s vision of herself as Sancho Panza, Don Quixote’s companion who accepted the degradation of society with a laugh, secure in his own earthy, low and ugly status.

Yang Jiang’s greatest significance as a Chinese stylist arises in this peculiar production of inner exile, which maps a path back to private selfhood out of the traumas of China’s revolutionary years. The philosophy of life that such a path suggests is first fleshed out in “The Cloak of Invisibility,” an essay still in wide circulation.<sup>45</sup> “When you place yourself in humility and insignificance, people observe you without seeing you, or see you without studying you closely,” runs the basic message of the text.<sup>46</sup> People should recognize that life offers a multiplicity of ways to be, and not all are

---

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 100.

<sup>45</sup> Yang Jiang, “Yin shen yi 隐身衣 [The Cloak of Invisibility],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 192–198.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

destined to become heroes. The ethics of humility is the common cultural heritage of Sancho Panza and Zhuangzi, and is grounded in the patterns of the natural world – we must train ourselves to be like the radish, which seeks no more than to be juicy and crisp.<sup>47</sup> The training for humility is to appreciate invisibility, to step away from the center of attention; this goes against popular habit, but can yield powerful interior modes of sensation: intuition. Intuition provides a more detached, wider-encompassing view of the world.

This essay and reader response to it makes clearer than ever before the power of Yang Jiang's rhetorical features, which marshal cultural allusiveness into simple sentences, yielding a plainspoken tone that is nevertheless felt to be rich in cultural and political value. One critic hails "invisibility" as the basis for Yang Jiang's "philosophy for being in the world" (*chushi zhexue*).<sup>48</sup> Yu Jie, whose review I will discuss below, notes the compatibility of "invisibility" with the Daoist recommendation to "hide from the world."<sup>49</sup> Younger internet readers comment that the essay inspires them not to seek fame for its own sake, as they had before reading the it.<sup>50</sup> As with essays by elders like Sun Li, Yang Jiang is perceived to be writing from a perspective of long experience that has given her both wisdom and a distinctive personality. There is even the sense that the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>48</sup> Zhang Jiaping 张家平, "Yin shen yi' shang xi" 《隐身衣》赏析 [The Cloak of Invisibility: a Critical Appreciation], in *Zhongguo xian dang dai wenxue mingzuo shangxi* 中国现当代文学名作赏析 [Critical Appreciations of Renowned Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literary Works] (Hefei: Hefei gongye daxue chubanshe, 2006), <http://culture.mastvu.ah.cn/xsyd/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=780> (accessed May 23, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Yu Jie 余杰, "Zhi, xing, you de zhi xing xian shi 知•行•游——重读杨绛 [Wisdom Revealed in Knowledge, Conduct, and Excursion: Re-reading Yang Jiang]," *Dangdai wentan*, no. 5 (1995): 41, <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed May 31, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Canqing lisu 殇情离素 (pseudonym), "Wo ye yao tuo jian yin shen yi 我也要觅件“隐身衣” [I also want to try on the cloak of invisibility]," November 9, 2009, <http://www.xs91.net/read.php?tid-15120.html/> (accessed May 31, 2012).

writing of essays is in itself something that is productive of wisdom and even able to prolong life.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Charles Laughlin has commented that the form of the Chinese essay reflects the cultural counternarrative to an orthodox Confucian framework for identity, opening up a rhetorical space for the terms of the private self out of a language whose mainstream application is to map the writer in terms of power, duty and social responsibility. Lin Yutang, Zhou Zuoren and other practitioners of the essay before, during and after the May Fourth era of literary revolution associated the form with the reclusion-seeking, nature-loving rhetoric of the *Zhuangzi*. Yang Jiang's essays prove no exception to this idiom of reader response; however, the textualized persona of the essays has become celebrated in China today for its ability to combine terms of social responsibility with the privacy-seeking self. She does this by drawing on a discourse of literary affect that 'writes the person' (*xie renwu*), capturing essential features of expression, gesture, voice, and emotional interiority in a complete set to portray strong-willed characters pursuing a quotidian, non-heroic, ethic of *comunitas* that adapts Confucian social relations and remains mostly invariant during the stages of the Chinese century of revolution. By writing of a culturally Chinese life that attempted to join the revolution in good faith, failed, and rethinks the post-revolutionary period in terms of Confucian humanism, Yang Jiang provides moral clarity for Chinese readers since the 1980s.

---

<sup>51</sup> Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 424.



At least one reader has argued that this moral clarity is a kind of false consciousness characteristic of Chinese intellectual discourse, pointing especially to the ideal of “invisibility” as just the sort of uselessness Chinese writers must dispense with. In 1995, Yu Jie was still a graduate student at Peking University but already an outspoken dissident, decrying single-party rule and often bearing witness to the violence and censorship in the wake of the 1989 student protests at Tiananmen Square.<sup>52</sup> He took a position reminiscent of Lu Xun’s diatribe against the 1920s *xiaopinwen* -- like Lu Xun, he opposes escapism and calls for stronger political and social content. Yang Jiang’s essays, for Yu, exhibit a Zhuangzian tendency to “wander at ease, without a care” (*xiao yao you*), which ultimately seeks to hide and disperse all terms of the self.<sup>53</sup> “Hiding” (*taobi*), Yu Jie avers, is the common vice of both Yang Jiang and Wang Shuo, two writers of otherwise opposite theme and style, but equal in literary and social influence in the 1980s. Wang Shuo “hides” in a deeply vulgar and sarcastic wit (*qiaopihua*), and Yang Jiang “hides” in an ethereal world of intellectuality that avoids contact with the vulgar world at all – it even avoids admitting the distinctiveness of intellectuality.

Yu Jie proposes that Yang Jiang’s essays lack any practical dimension, and so remain complicit in a general Chinese intellectual cowardice that makes them slaves to power.<sup>54</sup> A bibliography of source material accompanies to illustrate Yu’s contrasting,

---

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Mirsky, “China: A Maverick Dares to Challenge the Party Line,” *The New York Times* (August 25, 2005): 424, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/24/opinion/24iht-edmirsky.html> (accessed May 6, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Yu Jie, “Re-reading Yang Jiang,” 41.

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Rykmans (writing as Simon Leys) makes much the same point. See my chapter 4 and Simon Leys, “Peking Autumn: Foreword,” in *Lost in the Crowd*, by Yang Jiang (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989), 3–6.

heroic vision of intellectuality: Ba Jin, for his “confession and self examination;” Victor Hugo, for refusing to return to France under Napoleon III, and Wu Mi, who wanted to ride both of the “two horses” of culture and politics.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps most fascinating is that all of the writers Yu Jie mentions, except for Yang Jiang, are male. Yu Jie takes Yang Jiang seriously as a public intellectual without overt reference to gender, but gender haunts Yu’s analysis in a complex way in its erasure of other women’s contributions to literature and its failure to consider Yang Jiang’s strategic deployment of female virtue. Kong Qingmao makes this consideration, though similarly without a critical consciousness of the changing codes for feminine virtue. Speaking for the majority in defense of Yang Jiang’s essays a major literary contribution, points to the motif of service, of relationships with servants, as indicators for the influence of Yang Jiang’s mother upon the daughter’s identity: both are “great ladies” (*da xiaojie*) of a different kind, combining the generally feminine trait of social compassion (*renci zhi xin*) with a radical sense of subjectivity that treated all equally, servants and masters, intellectuals and peasants.<sup>56</sup>

This commitment to equality is at all times a function of the author’s skill in manipulating literary affect, fashioning characters with palpable personality (*gexing*) that capture the readers empathy, stirring the affective responses that Kong’s critical writing lists *ad nauseum*: understated mournfulness (*cangsang gan*) in the memorial essays, subtle forms of alienation (*geshi zhi gan*) and the ethereality of community spirit

---

<sup>55</sup> Yu Jie, “Re-reading Yang Jiang,” 41-3.

<sup>56</sup> Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂, *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ], 232.

(*renqin zhi gan*) in the shorter essays.<sup>57</sup> The goal of large-scale portraits like that of Qian Zhongshu is to “capture the essence,” in this case “foolishness” (*chi*), which can serve as both the key quality bringing to life Qian’s personality in the essay and a positive cultural value aiding identity formation in the reader. It is this transmission of value through literary affect which deserves our further attention in its complex relation to the rhetoric and identity of the implied author.

In her preface to “About to Drink the Tea,” Yang Jiang reiterates the common 1980s proposition that essay writing nourishes the spirit, and is so a particularly apt genre for the elderly preparing to depart this world.<sup>58</sup> The substance of essay is memory, deposited out of the brain before “drinking the tea” – a reference to the legend of Old Lady Meng, whose beverage removes the memories of newly departed souls. In this magical realist prefatory text – Yang Jiang dreams that she must cross the gap from the real world to the afterlife on an automated conveyer belt that almost, but doesn’t quite, have a place for her:

With my blurry seat number in hand, I searched back and forth. One section was seats for teachers, but they were all full, with no seat for me. One section was seats for writers – also full, with no seat for me. One section was seats for translators, marked by country names like England, France, Germany, Japan and Spain; I looked in several spots but there was no seat for me. The conveyer belt had many conductors in grey uniforms. A conductor approached and asked if I was perhaps on the “tail.” Those on the “tail” had no reserved seats. But there’s a token in my hand! He’d have to examine the register. Forget it, said another conductor, we’ll be there in just a moment anyhow. They placed a bench in the center aisle of the conveyor belt, and bade me sit.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 232-5.

<sup>58</sup> Yang Jiang, “Jiang yin cha (hu si hu xiang, da xu) 将饮茶(胡思胡想,代序) [About to Drink the Tea (Messy Thoughts in Lieu of a Preface)],” in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 55–58.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 55.

In this way, Yang Jiang deliberately portrays a writing self marginal even within the world of intellectuals. As perhaps the only female celebrity essayist of her generation working in China in the 1980s and 90s, this self-positioning of hers makes sense after all. Moreover, for a writer with such an emphasis on marginality and liminality, close, lifelong identification with the essay form, liminal and marginal as it is to fiction, critical inquiry, and history, makes sense as the form most representative of Yang Jiang's textualized self.

## Chapter Seven: “All Alone, I Think Back on We Three”: Yang Jiang’s New Intimate Public

By the 1990s, Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu considered themselves retired. Though she continued to write intermittently, Yang Jiang’s publication rate greatly decreased after the 1991 volume *Za yi yu za xie* (Miscellaneous Thoughts and Miscellaneous Writings). Beginning in 1994, Qian Zhongshu’s health began to fail, and he was moved to Beijing Hospital, where he would remain until his death in 1998. Early in 1996, the couple’s daughter Qian Yuan suddenly became ill herself. At first, the diagnosis was unclear. More tests were done. It would turn out to be cancer. Fading quickly at Beijing Xishan Hospital, far in the suburbs, Qian Yuan died March 3, 1997. Qian Zhongshu died the following year on December 19.<sup>1</sup>

These losses served as inciting incidents for a new stage of writing, one that would have a deeply memorial dimension, but which would also continue Yang Jiang’s long-standing innovation in the prose description of the self. The best known and most significant of these post-loss interventions is her 2003 *Women sa* (We Three), an elegiac memoir that frames the family’s 60 years together, from 1935 to the 1990s, as a “ten thousand year dream.” But other key projects include a new translation of *Phaedo*, new essays about childhood experiences, a book-length collection of essays about the nature of human life, and an oral history project. Thanks to the careful records contained in the 2004 *Yang Jiang wen ji* (Collected Works of Yang Jiang), as well as extensive attention

---

<sup>1</sup> See Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭, *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past* (*Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi*) (Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2008), 342-362.

from Chinese news and social media, readers have an unprecedented opportunity to view the ongoing production of Yang Jiang's public image in its relationship to her writing practice and to the contemporary Chinese cultural scene.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I argue that Yang Jiang's aesthetic project is to leverage discourses of the self to produce an intimate public with social and ethical content that is explicitly *Confucian*, if expansively cosmopolitan in its literary scope.

### **The Consolation of Philosophy: *Phaedo***

In a short afterword to her 1999 edition of *Phaedo*, Yang Jiang writes that when she selected the volume from her husband's library, "I was taking on a project greater than my strength could manage, casting my entire spirit into it and so forgetting myself."<sup>3</sup> The translation quickly gained a reputation in print and online as a kind of mourning ritual that affirmed Yang Jiang's resilience in the face of loss.<sup>4</sup> Reviews on Douban.com, an online reading community, reveal readers stimulated by the personal dimension of the new Chinese text to re-consider death and loss philosophically.<sup>5</sup> Many of the readers approached the *Phaedo* after reading *We Three*, and see the two texts as

---

<sup>2</sup> In 2012, according to reports, she will release a second novel. See Gao Qiufu 高秋福, "Yang Jiang at 100 is not old at heart" (*Yang Jiang bai sui xin bu lao*), July 16, 2011, *Hong Kong Wenweibao* <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2011/07/16/OT1107160011.htm> (accessed January 18, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Yang Jiang's translation of *Phaedo* was first published in 2000 by Liaoning renmin chubanshe, and reprinted in the *Collected Works of Yang Jiang* (*Yang Jiang wen ji*), volume 8, 287-376. Yang Jiang does not read Greek, but began her project with the Loeb Classical Library edition (1953, translated by Harold North Fowler, 193-403) but also relied on a 1980 printing of a Harvard Classics edition, which contains the translation of Benjamin Jowett. She also credits notes and explanations from three other scholarly English editions. See *Collected Works*, volume 8, 289.

<sup>4</sup> An anonymous early notice for the work in *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* avers that Yang Jiang's translation is a more intense consideration for being the product of a "translator over 90" who had "lost her husband and loving daughter." (*Dangdai zuojia pinglun* 5 (2000): Chinese Academic Journals database (CAJ), retrieved November 27, 2010.)

<sup>5</sup> "A Debate on the Existence of the Soul" (*Guan yu linghun cunzai de lunzheng*) [<http://book.douban.com/review/1030702/>]; "Reviews of *Phaedo*" (*Feiduo de pinglun*), [<http://book.douban.com/subject/1050471/reviews>] (accessed January 17, 2012).

related.<sup>6</sup> Yang Jiang's *Phaedo* thus builds a uniquely intimate relationship between translator, audience, and text.

This public intimacy is helped by and helps carry forward the main theme, Socrates's argument for the existence of the soul and life after death. Socrates, ready to die, faces one more large audience: close friends, political sympathizers and opponents, and even his jail-keeper. Among the friends are Cebes – colloquially translated as “Qibei” by Yang Jiang, so that by using fewer characters than usual in a classical translation, her readers won't find the Greek names alienating or obstructing.<sup>7</sup> Cebes opens the dialogue by expressing his fear that there is no life after death, and that the soul (*linghun*) does not exist.<sup>8</sup> Reasoning by analogy, Socrates replies that sleep leads to wakefulness, and so death should be like awaking, with the soul as that entity which exists and lives during both sleep and wakefulness. Socrates therefore looks forward to a death which will be like waking from a dream.<sup>9</sup>

Texts from many cultures present speakers who, facing the end of life, begin to see past life as a dream. For example, in the third of the *Six Records of a Floating Life*, a book Yang Jiang knew well, protagonist Shen Fu plays with the duality of sleep and wakefulness after the death of his wife, Chen Yun.<sup>10</sup> He finds that by thinking of the remainder of life as a dream, he could look forward to a "waking" which would mean rejoining his wife. Yang Jiang's choice to begin her 2003 memoir with dreams of loss, and her characterization of the memoir proper as a “ten-thousand mile dream” likely

---

<sup>6</sup> Duan Yinghong, "On *We Three* and *Phaedo*" (*Du Women sa yu Fei duo*), *Du shu* December, 2003: Chinese Academic Journals database (CAJ), retrieved November 27, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Collected Writings*, volume 8, 289-90.

<sup>8</sup> *Collected Writings*, volume 8, 297.

<sup>9</sup> *Collected Writings*, volume 8, 311-312

<sup>10</sup> Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, translated by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui, p. 97.

reflect some influence of both texts. She does not make the connection explicit, but her readers do, and their understanding of the emotional truths driving Yang Jiang to dwell on the soul, and the life-as-dream idea, constitutes a form of literary cosmopolitanism in them. Yang Jiang's new literary practice encourages readers to think abstractly, taking into account her own life experience. This combination of pedagogical and biographical practice is in natural conflict with the ongoing business of Qian Zhongshu's legacy. The conflict is, though, productive in the sense that it challenges Yang Jiang to develop a discourse of intimate self especially suited to opposing hagiography of her late husband.

### **A Battle of Biographers**

To herself and her readers, Yang Jiang's year of translation represents a stage of mourning, a period in which she needed to 'lose herself.' If so, it was only the first stage of a distinctly literary mourning, for in the years 1999 and 2000, she turned to what she called the "enormous duty" of managing her husband Qian Zhongshu's legacy.<sup>11</sup> This work is carefully documented in material placed just before *We Three* in the third volume of her *Collected Works*. Prefaces and letters make the case that Qian Zhongshu was not a 'cultural hero' (*wenhua yingxiong*), but merely an ordinary, if hardworking, scholar.<sup>12</sup> As a hint at the political stakes of this question, she mentions Qian's old opposition to having a "collected works," because his career was fragmented and inconsistent.<sup>13</sup> The subtext is that a 'collected works' speaks of a lifetime of production, but the state interrupted Qian's work more often than it allowed it – as with so many scholars of the era, Qian's voice was not heard between the late 1950s and 1976, when

---

<sup>11</sup> *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past*, p. 364 of the Taiwan edition.

<sup>12</sup> *Collected Writings*, volume 3, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Collected Writings*, volume 3, 26-7.



the Cultural Revolution ended. Yang Jiang's challenge, then, was to shape the story of her husband as the modern epic it truly was, defending his Chineseness while at the same time expressing his alienation from the revolution.

Since the rapid ascent of Qian's reputation following the reprint of his novel *Fortress Besieged* in 1980, a vast field of new biographies, reminiscences, interviews, and feature articles had emerged.<sup>14</sup> The controlling idea behind many of these works was that Qian's accomplishments provided a glimpse into the Republican-era project of producing intellectuals equal to their Western counterparts. High emphasis on the political stakes of Qian's cultural work, exemplified most monumentally in his five-volume magnum opus *Limited Views* quickly resulted in a monolithized life story for Qian – the title of one biography, *Wen hua kun lun*, “cultural Mount Kunlun,” is one example of this phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

In this context, Yang Jiang's 1984 essay “On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*,” with its portrait of a “foolish” man, was only the first in a series of efforts to create a counter narrative to the official Qian biography. Volume three of Yang Jiang's *Collected Works* documents how, in 2001, she fought successfully to remove exhibitions dedicated to Qian Zhongshu in the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature.<sup>16</sup> Starting later in the year, though, she waged an unsuccessful battle to

---

<sup>14</sup> Yang Jiang was mindful of her husband's public dislike for literary biography, recorded most famously in his 1934 essay “The Devil Pays a Visit to Qian Zhongshu.” See Christopher Rea, ed., *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts: Stories and Essays* by Qian Zhongshu, 33-38. That Qian assails biography implies in Yang Jiang's project a tension between what her husband would have wanted her to do and what literary publics she wished to cultivate.

<sup>15</sup> *Biography of Qian Zhongshu* (Qian Zhongshu zhuan, 1992), *Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang* (Qian Zhongshu yu Yang Jiang, 1997), *A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang* (Yang Jiang ping zhuan, 1998), and *Before Cassia Hall: A Cultural History of the Qian Zhongshu Clan* (Dan gui tang qian: Qian Zhongshu jia zu wen hua shi, 2000). In the 1990s, he also published biographies of Zhang Ailing, Lin Shu and the statesman and man of letters Gu Hongming (1857-1928).

<sup>16</sup> “Letter to Comrade Shu Yi, care of Xu Weifeng” (*Zhi Xu Weifeng zhuan Shi Yi Tongzhi xin*),

prevent the Wuxi municipal government from turning her husband's childhood home into a museum. A short essay dated January 15, 2002, laments the construction of the museum against her husband's wishes.<sup>17</sup> People ought to have a basic right to privacy, she reasoned, such that if their last wishes at their death were absolutely not to be made the theme of a municipal museum in their hometown, then those wishes should be respected.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3: Interior of the Qian Zhongshu Historic Home, a museum operated by the Wuxi Municipal Government**

*Collected Works*, volume 3, 110-111.

<sup>17</sup> On the Wuxi museum, see "To Express My Thoughts Regarding the Reconstruction of the Old Qian Home" (Wei Wuxi Xiufu Qian Shi gu ju shi, xiang ling dao chen qing), *Collected Works*, volume 3, 49-51.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50

"His life was ordinary (*pingchang*)," Yang Jiang pleads. "There was nothing worth exhibiting here."<sup>19</sup> And yet, she continues he was a man 'whose words and actions were in accord (*yan xing yi zhi*), and who took no joy in fame or profit.'" By invoking the Confucian virtue of 'Words and actions in accord,' what Yang Jiang proposes is not that her husband is not worthy of biography, but rather that his life story is one of conflict with the corrupt and the dishonest. No political institution needs to be named because the phrase is already associated with heroic opponents of corrupt states, like Wen Tianxiang and Qu Yuan.

At least one biographer understood that Qian's life story could be an exile narrative; his work would come to have Yang Jiang's grudging approval. Tang Yan, who had been corresponding with both Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang since the former's 1979 trip to New York City, sent her his manuscript of a new, definitive biography, along with a request for a preface. In reply Yang Jiang published an open letter, which she duly includes in her *Collected Works*.<sup>20</sup> Dated October 28, 2001, the letter politely refuses to contribute a preface to Tang's biography, emphasizing that while she generally agrees with Tang's interpretation of Qian's life as a tragic failure to live up to his own potential, but still finds that Tang makes Qian into something he wasn't – a "romantic" figure.

The conflict we witness in these letters and prefaces is a useful profile of Yang Jiang's renewed discourse of personhood. To shape her husband's legacy, she opposes the term "hero" (*yingxiong*) with the term "ordinary person." This indirectly signifies the break with the state that is the biggest political stake in telling Qian's story. It also

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 50-1.

<sup>20</sup> "Letter to Mister Tang Yan" (*Zhi Tang Yan Xiansheng xin*), *Collected Works*, volume 3, 113-114.

aligns discourses of the personal – Qian’s foolishness, sense of humor and other personal habits – with the exile narrative dimension, and so against the monolithizing cultural hero version of his story. In this sense Yang Jiang’s intimate portrait of her husband as a family man retains some ember of political resistance.

### **An Aging Dreamcatcher**

The problem of controlling Qian Zhongshu’s public image was all the while embedded in a continuing exploration of her own self-representation that seems to have built on the life-as-dream idea. “On What Seem Like Dreams But are Not Dreams,” for example, is a short autobiographical piece that reviews five experiences of extra-dreaming perception, each from a different moment of her life.<sup>21</sup> “I hypothesize that when I’m half awake, my sense organs do not stay firmly in place, but rather float on all sides.”<sup>22</sup> The piece comes attached with the note “while sick” – evidence that Yang Jiang is publicizing her aging body’s condition, and that her literary practice and life course are now more connected than ever. The term “sense organs” also suggests her turn towards a use of scientific language to theorize the person – this new vocabulary will flourish in her 2007 essay collection, though it does not appear at all in *We Three*.

“I Start School at Qiming,” dated March 23, 2002, returns to the image of Yang Jiang in mourning, transferring the intimacy of memory from a marriage relation into an autobiographical practice.<sup>23</sup> Talking about childhood memories, Yang Jiang tells us, was what she always used to do with Qian Zhongshu.

---

<sup>21</sup> “On What Seem Like Dreams But are Not Dreams” (*Ji si meng fei meng*), *Collected Works*, volume 3, 3-7. The piece is dated 1993, but was first published in 2004.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> “I start school at Qiming” (*Wo zai Qiming shang xue*), *Collected Works*, volume 3, 74-105.

“I Start School” is the most significant of the pre-*We Three* autobiographical writings in that the author’s memories come to life to evoke iconic, precise portraits charged with social and cultural value just below the surface. Yang Jiang appears as a little girl in pigtails, full of innocence and wonder, making friends and feeling alienated by turns as she attends a Catholic school in Wuxi from 1920 to 1923. Confucianism as a both set of classic texts and a system of family values takes the stage for the first time in Yang Jiang’s writing in the form of Teacher Zou, who explained the *Mencius* to the young Yang Jiang. When Teacher Zou has a big fight with his son and so comes to school injured and distracted, he is promptly dismissed. Yang Jiang only sees him one more time, but the image was so moving that she never forgot it: she had always seen him in the classroom before, but now he was “standing beside the street hawker quickly eating *shajiaomai*.”<sup>24</sup>

The image of the old Confucian, alone and unwelcome in the world, never to be seen again except in the author’s memory, resonates strongly with the simulated context of a widow recording for her readers what she once spoke of with Qian Zhongshu. Subtexts abound, but the image of Teacher Zou serves first and foremost to reinstate a Confucian value of veneration, revealing yet another new layer of political content to Yang Jiang’s autobiographical practice, though this time the righteous exile is replaced by the pitiful old teacher. The iconicity of the prose image translates visually in the hands of illustrator Gao Mang, whose line art cartoons are included in the *Collected Works* edition.<sup>25</sup> Washed of the specificity of a photograph, the line art cartoon enables

---

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 104-5.

<sup>25</sup> Gao Mang (b. 1926) comments on his portraits of famous people, including Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu, in an interview on Beijing Art Web; “Gao Mang: Portraitist for Many” (*Gao*

the reader to identify closely with both Teacher Zou and with the child Yang Jiang; the art also highlights the complementarity of the faces, and reminds us that the writing Yang Jiang is effectively a combination of the child and the elder.



**Figure 4:** "I saw Mister Zou standing beside the street hawker quickly eating *shajiaomai*." "I start school at Qimeng," illustration by Gao Mang

### ***We Three: Launching Intimate Publicity***

---

*Mang hua ren duo yi*, [<http://zx.findart.com.cn/9864766-zx.html>] (last accessed January 18, 2012)

Yang Jiang's translation of *Phaedo* began the project of self-representation that shares the mourning and aging process with publics; her work on Qian Zhongshu's reputation is a closely related secondary project. "I Start School at Qiming" embeds an image of Qian Zhongshu into an autobiographical text to help build a simulated context of Yang Jiang speaking memory to her readers the way she once did with Qian. In a rare telephone interview, Yang Jiang refused outright to talk about the book's memorial function, and also refused to speak about Qian Zhongshu's place among major writers of China.<sup>26</sup> She warmed to questions on her health, though: "I'm keeping it together. When you're over ninety, you're never *not* sick, are you?" She asks her interviewer send a message to her readers: don't call, and don't visit. "Think about it," she tells us. "If you all came, and all spoke with me for one day, so what? We couldn't possibly become friends on the strength of one day's conversation, right? So please, let me have the time to myself. That way, I'll write a little. And when you all see it, you have every right to treat it as a letter from me, addressed to you all."<sup>27</sup>

A crucial feature of the *We Three* context is its formal innovation, as Yang Jiang told her interviewer: "One part of it is memoir (*huiyilu*), and one part of it is not," she told one journalist.<sup>28</sup> *We Three* opens with the part that is "not memoir," in the sense that it applies a surreal mode of writing known as *xubi* to narrate loss. First, Yang Jiang explores the details of the domestic space, establishing the setting as an idyllic home

---

<sup>26</sup> Li Bing, "Interview with Yang Jiang: Out with a book on the story of *We Three*" (*Zhuan fang Yang Jiang: Chu shu jiang Women sa de gu shi*), [<http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42223/114516/114519/6782582.html>] (last accessed January 18, 2012)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

with a nuclear family. One striking image occurs when she relates how Qian Zhongshu would go into his daughter's room and stack her things into the shape of an animal:

There was a big pile of dictionaries on the pillow at the head of the bed, and on top of that there was a small bench with the legs facing upwards, and on the legs were Ah Yuan's dirty shoes – obviously the ones she had just taken off. In one of the shoes was stuffed a pen holder, filled with Ah Yuan's brushes, pencils and pens, and in the other shoe was stuffed a small broom. . . . Behind, there was the long shoe horn that I had given Ah Yuan, which I supposed served as the 'tail.'<sup>29</sup>

Here, Qian Zhongshu is teasing Qian Yuan as if she were a little girl, but the creature that he builds is also an effective metaphor for the assemblage of memories Yang Jiang is constructing. Lists, and asides about personal habits, accumulate in a pile to reflect the density of interrelations while at once marking the family as a cultured and intellectual one. Suddenly, the phone rings, and Yang Jiang picks it up:

I didn't quite catch who was calling, only that they were summoning Qian Zhongshu to a meeting. I answered hastily, "Qian Zhongshu is still ill. I'm his wife, and I request leave on his behalf." The person on the other end ignored me, and instead only ordered: "Report tomorrow. Don't bring any bags or notebooks. A car will pick him up at 9:00 AM."<sup>30</sup>

Here, the text has erupted into allegory, or else the logic of dreams: the family had answered such phone calls from the state, but in this instance the call represents the illness that necessitated a hospital stay in 1994; Qian would remain in the hospital until his death four years later. To convey the emotional sense of the experience, Yang Jiang figures Qian's last days a very slow boat ride. Yang Jiang follows the boat, staying at a series of inns along "Old Post Road" by night and visiting Qian in his cabin by day. When Qian Yuan grows ill herself and takes up residence in a suburban hospital, a new

---

<sup>29</sup> *We Three (Women sa), Collected Works*, volume 3, 132.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



layer of surreal opens up: at night, Yang Jiang's spirit leaps nimbly out of her body, quickly traverses the distance to Qian Yuan's hospital to visit Qian Yuan's deathbed.

The use of *xubi* renders an end-of-life experience in iconic fashion to move Chinese readers in a complex way that can only be gestured at here. The motif of "Old Post Road," the series of inns, and the theme of the soul traveling outside the body in dreams are all well-known conceits in Chinese poetic language, which gives Yang Jiang's prose a deeply lyrical dimension.<sup>31</sup> The context also calls to mind the life-as-dream idea featured in *Phaedo*, and so functions also as an example of Yang Jiang's nascent thinking on the nature of the soul, developments in which would appear in her next book. Thus Yang Jiang's *xubi* generates empathy while performing literary cosmopolitanism.<sup>32</sup>

### **Exemplary and Ordinary Before 'Liberation'**

Having established her voice as an elderly widow, Yang Jiang abruptly switches styles in part three of *We Three*, "Alone, I think of we three."<sup>33</sup> Here, Yang Jiang's more familiar calm, collected and entirely realist style returns in sixteen linked essays, arranged in chronological order to cover the years between 1935, when Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu traveled to Oxford, England to study abroad, and the early 1990s, when the couple retired from public life to the quiet solitude of their Beijing home, Sanlihe. The sixteen pieces fall very neatly into two sets of eight, with part eight taking the

<sup>31</sup> On this topic, see Monika Motsch (Mo zhi yi jia), "Two Or Three Notes on Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang" (Qian Zhongshu yu Yang Jiang er san shi," *Du Shu* 10 (2006) (Retrieved from CAJ November 23, 2010) and C.T. Hsia.'s review in *Min guo ri bao*, September 30, 2003; [<http://www.douban.com/group/topic/10842322/>] (last accessed January 18, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> On *xubi*, see especially Ling Xiaolei, "Trickling Back into the Sea, Sighting Truth in the Ordinary: On Yang Jiang's *We Three*" (*Juan juan xi liu zhong gui hai; ping fan dang zhong jian zhen qing -- du Yang Jiang Women sa*); Yang Jiang previously employed this rhetorical mode in the preface to her essay collection *Toward Oblivion* (*Jiang yin cha*).

<sup>33</sup> *Collected Works*, volume 3, 175-261

reader to the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, and part nine beginning with life in the "new China" after "liberation." Such marked contrast between xubi and realism conveys the boundary between life and death as life and dream; further, Yang Jiang considers the realist memoir part of a "ten-thousand mile dream," yet another recurrence of the life-as-dream idea.

Calling to mind the chapter on homemaking from *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, the first and second *sanwen* are devoted to the couple's two years at Oxford, describing with great satisfaction incidents related to their adaptation to life and work in a foreign country.<sup>34</sup> It was in England that Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu picked up many of the everyday habits that they were to keep for the rest of their lives, such as cooking, reading together, taking walks, and maintaining a circle of friends. *Sanwen* three and four describe the birth of Qian Yuan and the couple's move to France for a year of study at the Sorbonne, again emphasizing their ability to adapt to their circumstances as needed. Brief sketches of friends such as the archaeologist Xiang Da, then a graduate student himself, are sprinkled throughout.

As if contrast to Shen Fu's failure to build a life despite (perhaps because) the great refinement that he and his wife Chen Yun brought to the world, Yang Jiang emphasizes that her nuclear family of three was "actually, most ordinary." What she means is that they were never arrogant or elitist, which is paradoxically a most extraordinary achievement given the challenges to personal and social value that life abroad inevitably presents. The adventure of the couple's years in Europe proved that the principles and virtues the two had learned as talented children of the Jiangnan region

---

<sup>34</sup> Shen Fu, *Six Records of a Floating Life*, translated by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui, p. 97.

were suited life in England and France as well. By paying their English grocer on time, for example, they got special recommendations against goods that were less than fresh. Bonds of trust with members of the working class gave them a sense of community, and also aided the construction of their first home. Frugality and trustworthiness are translatable virtues.

A basic message is that the family remained steadfastly Chinese. The couple came to England with a suitcase full of Chinese classics, which Yang Jiang often claims was her primary reading, even in England. At Oxford, Qian Zhongshu at first assisted Sinologists, but rejected their offers to serve as assistant because, he maintained, he wanted to write his own work. When the English public gushed over the infant Qian Yuan, calling her a "China baby," the young couple was not offended, but proud.<sup>35</sup> The goal of study abroad was to adapt to the demands of life in accordance with Chinese principles of living, a vision suggested most powerfully by the couple's shared penchant for translating everything into Chinese, as in the following scene on the subject of food preparation and homemaking:

I sometimes thought, if only we didn't have to eat food, life would be so much easier. But Zhongshu did not agree. He said he liked eating. Immortals might cook up some white stones to fill their hunger permanently, but as white stones weren't interesting in the least, he didn't much admire that method. He wrote a poem, though, that had the lines,

My worried wife's face  
is blackened by smoke and fire  
I wish I could find the immortals' secret art of escape.

Yet our electric stove didn't make any smoke! Nor did he ever wish to escape. In another poem he wrote,

We look for four-footed geese

---

<sup>35</sup> *Collected Works*, volume 3, ca. 194.

and turtles wearing two skirts.

But we never ate geese or turtles. Zhongshu mocked my stubbornness, saying that a poem was just a poem, after all.<sup>36</sup>

Here Yang Jiang celebrates Qian Zhongshu's whimsical attitude to challenges, which complemented with Yang Jiang's more plainspeaking style: "stubbornness" (*si xin yan'er*) is the counter-weight to fancy. Moreover, these binaries, rooted in the gender framework of traditional Chinese exemplary lives, are proven adaptable to meet the demands of a new land.

Yang Jiang must negotiate a strategically essentialist approach to gender roles that builds up a new exemplary model. Back in China after 1938, the next few *sanwen* details the family's progress as part of two progressive Confucian clans struggling to get by in occupied Shanghai.<sup>37</sup> Occupation tests and strengthens bonds of filial devotion; extended family yields to the nuclear family, the new setting in which Yang Jiang seeks to be worthy wife and good mother. In great contrast to feminist writers like Su Xuelin (1897-1999), who aspired to be the equal of male intellectuals, Yang Jiang proudly frames her achievements as a playwright in this period as efforts to feed the family.<sup>38</sup> Didacticism at last takes a central place:

"We Three" were in truth most ordinary. What family does not have a husband, a wife, and children? At the very least there is the husband and the wife – add on the children, and it becomes 'we three' or 'four' or 'five,' and so on. It's just a matter of each family having its own way, that's all. This family of ours was very plain. We three were very pure. We weren't ambitious, and we weren't competitive. All we sought was to stay together, and to protect each other, each working according to his or her abilities. When we met with hard times, Zhongshu and I faced it together, and then hard times weren't hard times. And then there

---

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p. 186

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, numbers, pp. 199-221.

<sup>38</sup> On Su Xuelin, see Wang Jing, *When "I" Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China*, 120-143, esp. 133-5.

was Ah Yuan to be our help and our companion, and then no matter how terrible things got, they would be fine again.<sup>39</sup>

Here, the quality of “plainness” (*pusu*) in Yang Jiang’s prose operates in perfect opposition to the *xubi* of the previous section. If *xubi* represents experience abstractly, iconically, then the switch to *pusu* writing is a switch from icon to authentic person, the essence of which is “plainness.” In this way, Yang Jiang embeds one discourse of selfhood, familiar from her earlier work *Six Records of a Cadre School*, into the second one, which she had developed since her husband’s death.

### **Qian Yuan: Malleable Material**

Writing Qian Yuan, Yang Jiang’s daughter, presented a thorny problem: how iconic or realistic should she be? “Malleable Material” (*kezao zhi cai*) Qian Zhongshu’s catchphrase for his daughter described the father’s pride in the daughter’s potential.<sup>40</sup> But “malleable” also suggests the pitfalls of raising a child in a society that didn’t share the couple’s values. The Qian Yuan of *We Three* is thus a staging ground for the negotiation between the private and the public, between Confucian filiality and socialist sacrifice.

For the elderly Yang Jiang, the life of her daughter appears in brief flashes that collapse time. The sickly but obedient child of the war era, the “model soldier” of the 1950s and 60s, and the English professor of later years all merge. But a central tension of all the anecdotes surrounding Qian Yuan’s character is between two persona: “Ah Yuan” or “Yuan Yuan,” the devoted daughter, and “Qian Yuan,” the public servant and teacher. “Yuan Yuan” was the sickly little girl who grew up to care for her sickly old

---

<sup>39</sup> *Collected Works*, volume 3, 175

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

parents. "Qian Yuan" was the independent thinker who made attachments with other young people growing up in the early PRC, where she learned that the proper goal for a young lady of her age was to become a "model soldier." The tension between these two persona mounts during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Qian Yuan's success at fitting in contrasts sharply with the growing instability in her parents' political status. Finally, in 1966, Qian Yuan made the momentous decision to write a "big character" poster that would "draw a line" between her and her parents. Qian is the protagonist in this climactic moment:

In August, Zhongshu and I were "hailed in," one after the other, by the revolutionary masses. We were now "cow ghosts and snake demons." Ah Yuan hurried home to take care of us even though she was one of the "revolutionary masses." To get home, she had to walk past the hard stares of the entire compound. First, she drew up a big character poster drawing a clear line between herself and her "cow ghost, snake demon" parents, and put it on the wall of the building below. Then she came into the house and told us she had put up a poster "drawing a line" – she stressed that this was an "ideological line-drawing"! Without saying another word, she pressed close to me. Out of her bag she pulled some unfinished needlework and began to stitch. She had purchased a length of synthetic cotton and had cut and sewed it herself into a pair of pajamas for her mother. To make sure she fitted it correctly, she had left several parts of it unfinished. When she sewed these up, she folded the top and pants and placed them on me. Then she took out a large bag of the candies with chewy filling that Papa loved to eat. She found a glass vase and took the wrappers of the candy one by one. She put the candies in the glass and then neatly folded the wrappers together and put them back in her bag – this way the revolutionary masses would not find the wrappers in the trash. She said that she would save a portion of her salary every month to support our expenses. Since the two of us were both "cow spirits, and snake demons," we were only allowed a pittance for living expenses and our accounts were already frozen. Our living expenses were certainly tight. Even though Ah Yuan did not allow tears to fall, I could see she was crying on the inside. It really hurt us to see Ah Yuan like this.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> *Collected Works*, volume 3, 241-2.

C.T. Hsia reads the drama of the Qian daughter with particular interest, finding in it a political critique strengthened by intimate truth.<sup>42</sup> The Chinese Communist Party strangles institutions of intimacy, a fact attested to by Qian Yuan's crisis, Hsia says. Hsia also laments Qian Yuan's marriages as stunted in comparison to what her parents had: neither the first marriage, to a compatible factory worker who was "good and loyal," nor the second, to a son offered up in gratitude from a woman Qian Yuan had helped, show any signs of genuine romance. Unable to have the bourgeois family, education, and life experiences that her parents had, Yang Jiang's Qian Yuan is inevitably a symbol of regret. Hsia highlights Yang Jiang's concluding remark on the matter in full:

Ah Yuan was my life's master work, was Zhongshu's "malleable material," was old father-in-law's beloved "book seed" (*shu zhongzi*). Yet she started high school by carrying toilets, and in her university years she was sent down to work in factories and fields. After she graduated there were the "Four Clean-ups." These nine trials by steam and by fire left her, to the very end, only a seed, only ever able to sprout just a little. Being her parents meant never being able to have peace of mind about this.<sup>43</sup>

Stark as the implied condemnation of the revolutionary movements is, Hsia says, for him it can never be stark enough.

But even Hsia wants to know more about Qian Yuan – who was her second husband, for example? In this he is aligned with mainland readers who needed to have Qian Yuan mean something more than regret, drawing a collective response. One of Qian Yuan's former students, now wealthy, donated one million yuan to create the "Qian Yuan Education Foundation," which would be dedicated to the cultivation of top-

---

<sup>42</sup> C.T. Hsia., *Min guo ri bao*, September 30, 2003; [<http://www.douban.com/group/topic/10842322/>] (last accessed January 18, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> *Collected Works*, volume 3, 260.

notch teachers in China. At the same time, one of the former student's friends, an editor, suggested the idea of a sequel volume to *We Three* that would memorialize Qian Yuan with contributions from her students, classmates, and intimates such as her adopted daughter.

The resulting volume, *Our Qian Yuan*, is collective memorabilia dedicated to model citizen and educator. But amidst happy group photos and inspiring memories of Professor Qian, Yang Jiang's dedicatory preface remains a lament for an unfulfilled life, echoing her conflict with the popular and official biography of Qian Zhongshu. As with her open letter to Qian biographer Tang Yan, *Our Qian Yuan* represents a compromise for the sake of generating collective remembrance. As with her essays of the 1990s, Yang Jiang uses memory writing to cultivate relationships with readers, and these connections stand as important evidence of the intimacy shared in and around a public centered on her.

### **Yang Jiang the Cultural Icon**

"I Start School in Qiming," with its cartoon illustrations by Gao Mang, stand as a figure for the pattern of iconization in Yang Jiang's later works: memory and personality are treated in the *pusu* style that suggests the moral clarity and cultural pureness readers have come to associate with Yang Jiang, helping to make her into the kind of abstract image of Chinese values that Gao Mang supplies. *We Three* accelerated the process with its tremendous sales figures: over 200,000 copies, a startlingly successful entry into the intensely competitive 2003 Chinese book market.<sup>44</sup> Critical discussions in academia were also intimidating: CNKI Chinese academic journals

---

<sup>44</sup> Cao Wuwei, "On *We Three*" (*Du Women sa*), *Jiaoyu wenbao* 9 (2004) [Chinese Academic Journals database (CAJ)], retrieved November 27, 2010.



database had over 100 entries of critical literature about *We Three* by 2008. Popular mainstream interest reveals itself in new and extensive entries in online encyclopedias like *Wikipedia* and *Baidupedia*, and in group pages on online reading communities like Douban.com.

Soon, Yang Jiang's story of an ordinary family was officially exemplary. In a section of the *People's Daily* website called the "Hall of Famous Cultural Figures," Yang Jiang is included along with 41 other writers and artists represented with a photograph and a brief notice of their chief claims to importance.<sup>45</sup> Yang Jiang is sandwiched between Zhou Youguang, "the father of Hanyu Pinyin," and Huang Miaozi, who along with Yu Feng is called one of the "twin stars" of Chinese art. Yang Jiang thus becomes part of a set of icons, many of them from the older generation, and all presented with quick references to representative features.

---

<sup>45</sup> "Archive of Famous Cultural Figures" (*Wen hua ming ren ku*) <http://culture.people.com.cn/> (This version archived November 29, 2010)



Figure 5: Yang Jiang on the website of the *People's Daily*

All of the "cultural figures" have their own pages behind the link. These do not include original biographies, but rather archived news articles, reviews, and work excerpts bundled by rough topic; in Yang Jiang's case, there are three: "The Story of We Three," "Explorer of the End of Life," and a section on recent news. Attention is focused on Yang Jiang in her old age as a memoirist for her family, a philosopher of life, and as an embodiment of the cosmopolitanism of the pre-revolutionary past – most articles in the 'recent news' section champion the writers continuing career and good health.

The theme of articles in bundle one is the *pusu* style said to characterize *We Three* and Yang Jiang alike, advancing the values of "quietude, peace, wisdom, and

purity."<sup>46</sup> Critics identify an everyday-ness inhering to *pusu* writing suggests that the family was perfectly ordinary, which gives the writing even more power to serve as exemplary.<sup>47</sup> Not every reviewer even notes that the family suffered in the political storms of the Mao era; one comments only that pain strengthens the memory and clarifies the sense universal human feeling.<sup>48</sup>

### **Philosopher of Life**

Hints that Yang Jiang's life story could serve as grounding for a universal humanism appear in these earlier articles; Yang Jiang herself had taken up this task in full force by early 2005, when she agreed to an interview by correspondence with scholar Lin Meizhu:

Lin Meizhu: Do you have any religious beliefs?

Yang Jiang: I do not practice any religion, but I am not wholly an atheist. I believe in God and in Man, in his ability to do good.

Lin Meizhu: I have the impression that in your work you are mainly concerned with Man and human morality, rather than criticizing society, politics or the system. Is that so?

Yang Jiang: Yes.

Lin Meizhu: You do not take delight in heroism, or in idealism, but at the same time you believe in the power of Man. And that power does not lie in convincing others, or in changing the world, but rather in adapting oneself to people and to situations (in particular unfavourable situations), in order to live better and to serve society as best one can. Am I right?

Yang Jiang: Yes. But the most important thing is not to adapt to the demands of society, but to excel oneself. Difficulties are revelatory [of one's true character]; "adversity" makes one strong.

Lin Meizhu: In at least two of your essays, one comes across the expression "Western humanism." What in your opinion most distinguishes

---

<sup>46</sup> "Quietude, peace, wisdom, and purity: the beauty of Yang Jiang" (*Ning jing, ping he, zhi hui, qing jie ... Yang Jiang zhi mei*) by Yang Jianmin, posted January 1, 2003. [<http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42223/114516/114519/6782589.html>] (last accessed January 18)

<sup>47</sup> See the review by Wan Ling, "Bringing love along, sinking into memory: on *We Three*" (*Daizhe ai, chen ru hui yi*) [<http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42223/114516/114519/6782565.html>] (last accessed January 18)

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

“Western humanism” from “Eastern humanism?” Yang Jiang: They are identical.<sup>49</sup>

Here, the themes that would dominate Yang Jiang’s next book are already apparent: the distinction between moral content and political and social content, the basic equivalence of world humanistic thought, and the proposition that ‘character’ (*gexing*) does not change, and so adverse circumstances only reveal it. In the preface to the work, Yang Jiang describes how she faced illness and a hospital stay in 2005 fully prepared to “exit through the back door;” when instead she recovered, she decided to embark on an exploration of “ghosts and spirits, humanity, and other issues of civilization” that she senses have become endangered among the younger generations, who risk once again trying to refashion society without consideration of “the value of human life” (*rensheng de jiazhi*).

The new book would come in 2007 as *Walking Towards the End of Life: Questions Asked and Answered of Myself*. The work is comprised of short essays that combine an eclectic course of readings (probably from Qian Zhongshu’s library) – the Bible, the *Lotus Sutra*, Irving Babbit, Paul Bourget – with life stories. Both draw on a commentary framework that returns in each piece to *Lun yu* (the Analects), *Mengzi*, the *Zuo zhuan* (Zuo commentary) and other classics to develop a set of propositions about unchanging ‘character’ (*gexing*) and the need to develop a basic conscience (*liangxin*).

The embers of political content dwell in this latter term. In "The Spirit of the World," for example, Yang Jiang takes it that technological progress, such as advancements to our knowledge of the stars and planets, should be a source of hope,

---

<sup>49</sup> Liu Meizhu, "Interviews with Yang Jiang," *China perspectives [Online]*, 65: (2006), posted June 1, 2009, <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/636> (last accessed November 29, 2010)

because the basic drive towards knowledge is connected to the basic drive towards justice.<sup>50</sup> But the justice drive goes awry when deployed too radically – witness Robespierre, who opposed a tyrant only to become one.<sup>51</sup> Here, Yang Jiang’s opposition to radical change, will remind readers of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and other political movements.

The alternative to radical projection of basic drives is the gradual development of an independent, self-examining moral conscience (*lingxing liangxin*). The method of work leading to such a conscience is demonstrated by Zuo Qiuming (4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE?), who began the pattern of telling life stories that praise and blame.<sup>52</sup> Yang Jiang here refers to the purported author of the most densely narrative of the commentaries to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. She herself acts as a kind of contemporary Zuo Qiuming, commenting on her set of world literature readings with narratives from her own life, which now acts as an encyclopedia of lessons.

### **Moral Clarity For Sale**

In stark contrast to the direction of Yang Jiang’s work, in 2008 her friend Wu Xuezhao issued a new hybrid biography and oral history called *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past*. The deaths of Yang Jiang’s husband and daughter are reviewed in graphic detail, even including pictures of Qian Zhongshu on his deathbed and in state at his funeral.<sup>53</sup> “Why was the couple so much unlike other people?” asks the cover of the Taiwan edition of the work. Indeed, by stripping away Yang Jiang’s *pusu* prose, the

---

<sup>50</sup> *Arriving at the Margins of Life: Answering My Own Questions* (*Zou dao ren sheng bian shang - Zi wen zi da*), pp. 8-10 of the Taiwan edition.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past* (*Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi*), p. 359 of the Taiwan edition.

*xubi* features of *We Three*, and the worldly philosophical tone of *Walking Towards the Ends of Life*, the latest volume is less iconic. The work was assailed by some readers for its poor writing style, excessive graphic detail, and even the problematic politics of Wu Xuezhao, who served as a propagandist during politically turbulent times, despite being the daughter of Wu Mi (1894-1978), a beleaguered romanticist whose diary Wu had seen to publication beginning in 1978.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 6: Cover slip of the Taiwan edition of *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past*

### A Chinese Intimate Public

In her 2008 book *The Female Complaint*, Lauren Berlant examined many overtly “middlebrow” texts representing “women’s culture” in America since the 1840s to ask: why and how are readers so often co-opted into shared feelings of suffering that fail to provide any means for effective political critique?<sup>55</sup> For example, the most famous scene from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is the one in which the protagonist, Eliza, escapes from slavery by running across cold ice flows in a river. Eliza’s crossing is commodified by many retellings in film, a *Felix the Cat* cartoon, and even toys.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See for example, one Douban reviewer (<http://book.douban.com/review/1524586/> last visited January 18, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality*, vii-xii.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Americans consume Eliza's suffering; this act of consumption, says, Berlant, stands in place of suffering itself. The American consumerist attitude is that sentimentality itself is the vehicle for social change, and not the motivating impulse towards political critique that it was intended to be.<sup>57</sup>

Yang Jiang's persona since 1999 shows signs of becoming a similar fantasy. Where the textualized persona of her celebrated 1981 *Six Chapters of a Life in a Cadre School* exhibited the tension between expressing and repressing political grievance, the new moral exemplar of the 2000s has been stripped of all but embers of political content. These embers – the tragic dimension of Qian Zhongshu's career, the allegory of death as an official summons – are easily overlooked as anything more than emotional ornamentations to a portrait of an essentially successful person. Ranging between the most iconic, as in "I Start School at Qiming" to the most graphically realistic, as in *Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past*, the repetitions of the Yang Jiang story have rendered it a basic set of values easily agreed upon in the official and diasporic Chinese literary spheres: family harmony, frugality, talent, retirement, and humanistic wisdom attained by elders in a cosmopolitan literary sphere that is now imagined to have always existed in China.

From this perspective, Yang Jiang offers an addendum to the evolution of contemporary women's autobiographical discourse as described by Lingzhen Wang. In the 1990s, one consequence of rapid marketization of all media was sharp increases in the propensity of women's cultural products to proffer sensations and emotions, including especially sexually explicit confessional narratives. Wang investigates work

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 6-9.

from this period of “privacy fever” by Lin Bai, Chen Ran and Wang Anyi, all of whom write narratives of overcoming shame to achieve more direct expressions of women as bodily, sexual beings.<sup>58</sup>

Yang Jiang’s story opens up a new perspective on the “privacy fever” of the 1990s: women as bodily, aging beings holds as much interest to Chinese readers as sex does. There are ideological implications at work here too: where the generation of Lin Bai, Chen Ran and Wang Anyi combine memories of traumatic childhood during the Cultural Revolution with sexual maturation plots in the 1990s, Yang Jiang draws on a happy childhood in the late Republican period, maturation abroad and during the war, exile narrative during the Cultural Revolution, and packages them as memories during a time when she becomes concerned with death. In this analogy, Yang Jiang’s work succeeds if it finds in its new relationship with death new visions of human bonds, or sheds new light on subjectivity; the risk is that the repeated life story becomes only a simple answer to a consumerist “desire to be in proximity to okayness, without passing some test to prove it.”<sup>59</sup>

As with so much popular culture answering to market forces unleashed in the 1990s, and which Wang characterizes as a propulsion towards “total consumption,” challenges to the reader are either dampened in the work itself, or else readings that don’t include these challenges take center stage. This latter phenomenon was visible in a summer 2010 episode of the CCTV television show “Dialogue” (*Duihua*), which devoted its entire hour to *We Three*, inviting audiences to stand up and recite obviously

---

<sup>58</sup> Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters: Women’s Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth Century China*, Stanford, 2004, “Consumption, Shame, and the Imaginary in Contemporary Autobiographical Practice,” 167-200.

<sup>59</sup> *The Female Complaint*, 9.



prepared responses to the work.<sup>60</sup> Amidst lilting sentimental music, reader after reader admired the text for its representation of a comfortable domestic space and for making them feel good about themselves. Readers felt as if they were becoming intimate with Yang Jiang, but they were more distant than ever from the traumatic past that, but her own account, highlights her character.

### **We Three, Harmonized**

The *xubi* section of *We Three* narrates Qian Zhongshu's final illness as political power delivering a summons over the telephone; power is thus framed in opposition to family harmony. The challenge for political power is to overcome the opposition by adopting the terms of family structure and family harmony to convince audiences that power fosters harmony. And such propositions are, of course, major component of political discourse in the Hu Jintao government.

The art of representing family memory thus becomes a power struggle in China. Artist Zhang Xiaogang, for example, traps memory in his painting series *Bloodlines: The Big Family*, begun in 1993 and repeated in many variations through at least 2005. His artist statement avers that,

We all live 'in a big family.' The first lesson we have to learn is how to protect ourselves and keep our experiences locked up in an inner chamber away from the prying eyes of others, while at the same time living in harmony as a member of this big family. In this sense, the "family" is a unit for the continuity of life and an idealized mechanism for procreation. It embodies power, hope, life, envy, lies, duty and love. The 'family' becomes the standard model and the focus for the contradictions of life experiences. We interact and depend on each other for support and assurance.<sup>61</sup>

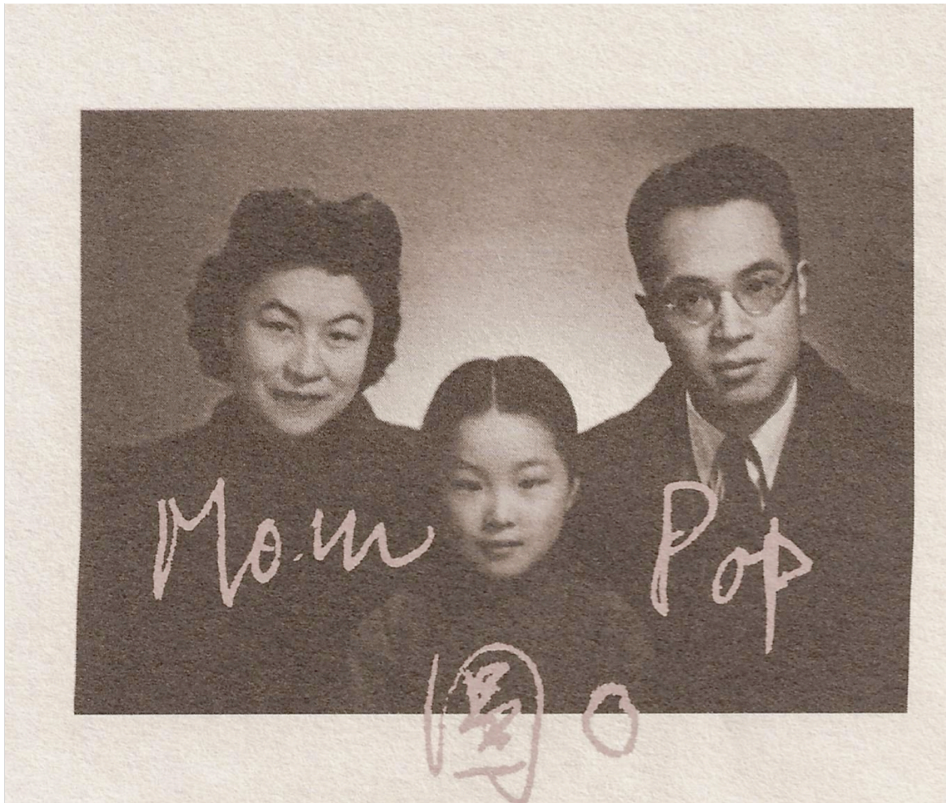
<sup>60</sup> The episode was broadcast July 2010 but is available streaming online; e.g. [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMjMyMDkyODA](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjMyMDkyODA) (last accessed January 20, 2012); also see the transcript of the program at <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/11995838/> (last accessed January 20, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Chang Tsong-Zung (curator), Graeme Murray et al., eds., *Reckoning with the Past: Contemporary Chinese Painting* [exhibit catalog], Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1996, p.95.

Zhang's statement envisions 'family' as the controlling figure for idealized sociability, foreshadowing the political discourse of the 2000s. Yet, Zhang remains conscious of the need to "protect ourselves." What is easily buried in his statement is more evident in his art, which presages the design concepts used in *We Three* and other Yang Jiang publications in the 2000s.



**Figure 7:** Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodlines: Big Family*, 2003 series



**Figure 8: Cover photo used for *We Three* (ca. 1946)**

Comparing one image from *Big Family* with the 1940s family photograph that graces the cover of *We Three*, for example, we see remarkable similarities in composition – the three person nuclear family is the face of the new harmony. Color scheme is also similar, with smooth black and white tones in Zhang’s work acting just as sepia tones in the old photograph to evoke a nostalgic past. Whimsical seal figures and child coloration schemes distinguish an otherwise homogenous presentation, representing the overlapping tensions between membership and individuality, and between social/cultural and political notions of family. What then can we say of the cover photo, which preserves whimsy – and so symbolizes individualism – in the form of Yuanyuan’s childlike markings on the photo? These design elements supply a contrasting political content in their lack of overt Communist-era clothing, or any use of

the color red to signify Chineseness. In this sense, the Yang Jiang photograph takes the family figure into a nostalgic and cosmopolitan zone of valuation beyond the political; the ability of the art to speak to power is thus removed.

As with Harriet Beecher Stowe's Eliza, the Yang Jiang figure is worth some consideration in the varieties of repetition. Eliza once stood for invalidating unjust law, but repetitions of the figure replaced opposition with a vague sense that someone some time in the past suffered, so that we don't have to. This diminishes what Berlant calls "the affect that wants new forms," a kind of presentist and transgressive subject. The Yang Jiang of *Six Chapters* achieved this level of urgency by means of testimonial literature that developed a plaintive self to highlight the urgency of remembrance. Repetitions of the figure in the 2000s has transformed this testimonial dimension to Yang Jiang's discourse, leaving readers with a story that has begun to look much more like a biography of an eminent lady, one that is equally appealing to the tradition-toting official and cultural spheres.

## Conclusion

This dissertation examined the writings of Yang Jiang from the inside out. Starting with her 2003 memoir *We Three*, I read with an eye focused on Yang Jiang's distinctive literary voice, especially her economy of prose, constrained but powerful representation of emotion, and her application of traditional Chinese poetry and poetics. All along, translation was an extremely valuable part of this exercise, as it gave me a space in which to discover and re-create these and many other rhetorical features on the level of scene, image and sentence. I was fascinated with the idea that Yang Jiang, like her husband Qian Zhongshu, was a scholar of Western literature as well as an avid reader of traditional Chinese literature. Many readers have noted this fact, and commented that Yang Jiang's writing manages to infuse itself with the flavor of classical Chinese poetry even though it was written in clear vernacular prose featuring modern characters with complex interior lives. How exactly does this sort of Chinese prose work? I hope that the close readings offered here help answer this question.

But to appreciate the full extent – and limitations – of Yang Jiang's contributions to Chinese literature, we must turn from this close-up, inside look to a wider perspective. We should compare her work to relevant other work, and we must place her writings into their proper historical context. As I worked towards these ends, I encountered many obstructions. Yang Jiang's deep engagement with European literature of the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, Chinese and Western popular literature of the 1930s and 40s, and traditional Chinese poetry and narrative, all combine to give her the semblance of a writer outside the context of modern Chinese

literature entirely. Further, the great length of Yang Jiang's career demands that a full accounting take notice of literary trends of the Republican era, the Communist years, and the postrevolutionary years since 1977. But Yang Jiang consciously works to develop an ahistorical, universal literary voice. As if imitating her favorite European writers of the 18th century, Yang Jiang believes in universal human nature and a universal theory of story adapted to conveying this human nature to any and all readers.

The temptation that such a writer presents is to consider her work outside of the politics of literary production in her time – to think of her as neither an influence on nor a product of the historical forces present all around her as she wrote. And I must confess that from the very beginning this is just the stance that I took. Working from the inside out, including especially translating Yang Jiang's work, had the unintended result of close, intimate identification. Looking back, I have very persistently taken up (and resisted contextualizing) her positions on art, politics and human nature. No doubt this is partly because I found them familiar in the first place, but also increasingly because my close study of her writing caused a kind of affective contagion – a wish to be the kind of intellectual that I perceived in the texts I was studying. In conclusion, I wish to make two brief notes on this experience as I understand it in the current moment.

First, the path towards a revision of this work is clear. Yang Jiang is only one example of Chinese liberal humanist thought, and I must show with greater clarity how she is a product of and an influence on humanistic values in China. In the Republican era, China had a diverse collection of humanists, many of whom had studied in Europe and America and worked in various ways to conjoin Confucian with Judeo-Christian philosophic humanism and urbane aestheticism: Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Liang Shiqiu

(1903-1987), Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948), and Su Xuelin (1897-1999), to name just a few. Following the founding of the PRC in 1949, liberal humanism became an endangered species in mainland China; most scholars interested in Western or Eastern humanist traditions either left China, changed their views to match the demands of the new regime, or were silenced by force. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, humanism was briefly a major force on the renewed Chinese public sphere, but declined in influence with accelerated marketization after 1992.<sup>62</sup> In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, pride in China's rapid rise in international standing has led to a concomitant rise in positive views of the Confucian tradition as a humanist political philosophy distinct from Western liberal humanism, but that can serve as a successful framework for China's cultural identity as it negotiates globalization.<sup>63</sup> **Yang Jiang is probably the only writer to have weathered all of these storms.** Her literary biography is thus an opportunity, a potential figure for the vicissitudes of humanism in modern Chinese intellectual history. As I move from the inside out, I hope to develop this figure.

My case of affective contagion should actually be useful for this project moving forward. Wang Lingzhen defined "the personal" as the intersection of historical, social, and "bodily and psychic" forces.<sup>64</sup> My readings of literary affect, which focus on the use of physical description moving outward from the eyes and facial expression to

---

<sup>62</sup> For an analysis of the imbrication between the end of wide consent towards liberal humanism and the growth of market populism, with a focus on early 1990s debates concerning the term "humanist spirit," see Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 25-59.

<sup>63</sup> Among the new titles to investigate this phenomenon from a historical and political science perspective are Daniel Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Peter R. Moody, *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007), and Zhidong Hao, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers* (New York: SUNY Press, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

indicate emotion, thought and action in Yang Jiang has the potential to serve as an aesthetic anchor. Elaborated with additional propositions about the development of interiority as a focus in literature, and about the larger historical forces at work, I think that a new version of my readings can better illustrate my thought that Yang Jiang figures an alternative tradition of modernity, one that sidesteps a more mainstream desire to break from the past. Like Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) before her, Yang Jiang articulates her challenge through her aesthetics.<sup>65</sup> Where Zhou had focused on locality, Yang Jiang focused on the personal. Her deep interest in the discourse of *qing* and in narrative structure based on character reveals a concept of ‘humanist spirit’ that deserves our attention for the way it bypassed the obsession with loss that characterized the early years of accelerated marketization in the 1990s. How should this trans-Chinese affirmation in narrative and autobiography shift our current notions of postsocialist modernity? Answering this question will be my task in the coming stage of revisions.

---

<sup>65</sup> Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 244. Daruvala’s work to craft a literary biography that also serves to elucidate an alternative modernity should be a model for the revision of this dissertation



## Appendix I: “On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*”

Ever since 1980, when *Fortress Besieged* was reprinted in China, I regularly saw Zhongshu express his regrets to readers who wrote letters or came to our door. Sometimes, he would advise them, in all honesty, not to make a study of *Fortress Besieged*. Other times, he put them off with a courteous, “I’ve nothing to say about it.” And sometimes, he would refuse in a way that was not only rude, but unreasonable. Once, I heard him say on the phone to an English woman who wanted to meet him, “Suppose you liked the taste of an egg; would you really need to get to know the hen that laid it?” I was always afraid of him giving offense. Comrade Hu Qiaomu once casually suggested I write a piece to be called “Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*.”<sup>1</sup> I certainly had the itch to do so, but because of who I was, it might easily have become one of those pieces Zhongshu liked to call “eulogies for late husbands.” But here I neither praise, nor criticize; I only record the facts as they happened. And after Zhongshu read it, he also certified its accuracy. This piece was originally published in the Camel books series, edited by Comrade Zhu Zheng.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it can serve as a reference for lovers of *Fortress Besieged*.

December, 1985

### 1. How Qian Zhongshu wrote *Fortress Besieged*

In the preface to *Fortress Besieged*, Qian Zhongshu says this book was written in “dribs and drabs.” In “dribs and drabs” was also how I read the book. Each evening, he would give me a look at what he’d written that day, watching anxiously to see how I would respond. When I chuckled, he’d chuckle. When I laughed out loud, he’d laugh

---

<sup>1</sup> Hu Qiaomu 胡喬木 (1912-1992) was director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and so Yang Jiang’s boss in the early 1980s. His obituary in the *New York Times* reflects, “In the early 1980s, Mr. Hu was the top party official in charge of ideological matters. He and his assistant, Deng Liqun, helped draft key party documents, including a 1983 decision that affirmed Mao as a hero while condemning the far-left Cultural Revolution he started.” “Hu Qiaomu, a Chinese Hard-Liner, Is Dead at 81,” *The New York Times* (September 29, 1992), <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/29/obituaries/hu-qiaomu-a-chinese-hard-liner-is-dead-at-81.html> (accessed May 26, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Zhu Zheng 朱正 (b. 1931) was a noted Lu Xun biographer and himself the subject of a biographical sketch by the journalist-historian Dai Qing. Geremie Barmé comments in his profile of Dai Qing’s work that the Camel book series was “one of the finest collections of essays by contemporary Chinese intellectuals. The series had run to twenty titles when it was brought to an end after June 1989.” Geremie Barmé, “Using the Past to Save the Present: Dai Qing’s Historiographical Dissent,” *East Asian History* 1, no. 1 (June 1991): 148, n. 32.

out loud too. Sometimes, I had to put the manuscript down and we'd laugh out loud together. It wasn't just the book that made us laugh, but also things outside it. I didn't need to explain what made me laugh; we were thinking the same thing and nothing more would need to be said. Afterward, he would say what he planned to write next, and I'd wait anxiously to see how it would come out. On average, he'd write approximately 500 characters each day. What he showed me was the final copy, which he never revised. Much later, this novel and his other "juvenalia" all left him unsatisfied and he wished he could revise them thoroughly. But that's another story.

When Qian Zhongshu was selecting and annotating Song poetry,<sup>3</sup> I once volunteered to stand in as Bai Juyi's "old peasant woman," — that is, I could serve as the basic standard: if I didn't understand, he needed to supply further annotation. But among readers of *Fortress Besieged*, I became the highest standard. Like the scholars and sages familiar with the origins of lines of classical poetry, I was familiar with the origins of the characters and plot of the story. Other than the author himself, the person most qualified to annotate and interpret *Fortress Besieged* ought to be me.

Why might a novel need annotation and interpretation? Well, many readers who become interested in a novel become interested in its author as well, and they take the novel's characters and plot to be real people and real events. Some simply take the protagonist to be the author himself. More sophisticated readers acknowledge the author can't be equated with characters in the book, but claim that the characters and story he creates are inextricable from his individual experiences, feelings, and opinions. And this is of course quite correct. But as I once pointed out in an essay: an important ingredient

---

3 Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuan zhu* (Poems of the Song: An Annotated Selection) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1958).

of creativity is imagination. Experience is like flame ignited in the dark; imagination is the light given off by this flame. Without flame there would be no light, but what the light illumines far, far exceeds the size of the flame.<sup>4</sup> Fictional stories usually exceed the author's experience in many respects. The wish to reconstruct the author's experience from his creative writing is backwards. The author's thoughts and sentiments undergo creation, just as liquor is brewed through fermentation; to distinguish the original brewing ingredients from the liquor is no easy task. I've had the good fortune to know the author's personal history, so I know what ingredients the liquor was brewed from. I want very much for readers to see how far the real person is from the fictional characters, and the true events from the fictional plot – and just how much they're mixed together. Many so-called 'realist' stories actually narrate personal experiences with the names changed, either to elevate or satisfy their own sentiments. This sort of autobiographical fiction or fictionalized autobiography is really just romanticized documentary, not realist fiction. *Fortress Besieged*, on the other hand, is a fictional realist novel. Even though it reads as if it were a true story with real people, in actuality, it is entirely made up.

*Fortress Besieged* says that Fang Hongjian's hometown is known for its blacksmithing and tofu-making industries, and that its best-known local product is clay dolls. Reading this, some people can't help but let out a self-satisfied, "Hm!" and say, "Isn't this Wuxi? Isn't Qian Zhongshu from Wuxi? Didn't he also study abroad? Didn't he also once live in Shanghai? Didn't he also teach in the interior?" One gentleman

---

<sup>4</sup> [Yang Jiang's note] See my essay, "Facts, Stories, Reality" ["Shishi, gushi, zhenshi," 1980]. [Trans. note: The essay is collected in: Yang Jiang, *Yang Jiang wen ji*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004), 293-307.]

loved textual criticism so much that he deduced that Qian Zhongshu's degree was suspect—all the more grounds for concluding that Fang Hongjian was none other than Qian Zhongshu.

Qian Zhongshu is from Wuxi, graduated from Tsinghua University in 1933, taught English for two years at Shanghai's Guanghai University, and in 1935 won a Boxer Indemnity Scholarship to study abroad at Oxford University, England, from which he earned a B.Litt. in 1937. Afterward, he went to France and did advanced studies at the University of Paris. He had originally intended to pursue a degree, but he later gave up on that idea. In 1938, Tsinghua offered him a full professorship. According to the letter he received from Feng Youlan,<sup>5</sup> who was then Tsinghua's Dean of the Humanities, this was an unprecedented event, because according to Tsinghua's old custom, a teacher just returning from studies abroad must first serve as lecturer, and be promoted through the ranks to associate professor and then full professor. Zhongshu returned to China between September and October, disembarked at Hong Kong, and went to Kunming to take up his teaching post. At the time, Tsinghua had been incorporated into Southwestern United University. His father had been a professor at National Zhejiang University, but in response to his old friend Professor Liao Maoru's 廖茂如 invitation, he had gone to Lantian, Hunan to help him establish a national teacher's college. Zhongshu's mother and younger siblings had gone with his older uncle's family to take refuge in Shanghai. In the fall of 1939, after Zhongshu returned to Shanghai from Kunming to visit his family, his father sent letters and telegrams

---

5 Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (Fung Yu-lan, 1895-1990) is best known today for his 1934 work, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. See: Fung Yu-Lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy, Volume 1: The Period of the Philosophers (from the Beginnings to Circa 100 B.C.)*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton University Press, 1983).

saying that due to his advanced age and ill health he wanted Zhongshu to go to Hunan as well, to take care of him. The president of the college, Professor Liao, came to Shanghai and repeatedly urged Zhongshu to serve as chairman of its English department, saying that he could also take care of his father, thus providing for both public and private interests simultaneously. And so, Zhongshu never returned to Kunming but went to Hunan instead. For summer vacation in 1940, he and a colleague set off together for Shanghai, to see their families, but the roads were impassable, so they turned back halfway into the trip. The summer of 1941, he went via Guangxi to the coastal defense lines to ride an ocean liner to Shanghai, hoping to stay for just a few months before returning again to the interior. The chairman of Southwestern United University's Department of Foreign Languages, Professor Chen Futian 陳福田,<sup>6</sup> paid him a visit in Shanghai after the opening of the fall semester and engaged him to return to the university, but Qian Zhongshu never took up the appointment. After Pearl Harbour, he was trapped in Shanghai. He wrote a seven-character regulated verse called "Ancient Thoughts," which contained the couplet:

The raft reaches the Milky Way,  
But few are its paths,<sup>7</sup>

---

6 Aka Ching Fook-tan (1897-?). Qian's departure from Southwestern United is controversial; rumors abound that Qian thought the school was beneath him. One biographer, for example, relates that Qian said, "The Southwestern United department of foreign languages simply wasn't satisfactory; Ye Shengtao was too lazy, Wu Mi, too stupid, and Chen Futian, too coarse." Ai Mo 愛默, *Qian Zhongshu zhuan gao* 錢鍾書傳稿 [Draft Biography of Qian Zhongshu] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1992), p. 126. .

7 This line is lifted whole from poem three of Gong Zizhen's 龔自珍 three-poem set "Autumn Heart" (Qiu xin 秋心), which figures the poet's extreme frustration with his circumstances as an appeal to call back the soul of his own hopes and dreams; this line alludes to the story of a man who observed a raft that regularly traversed the distance between the sea and the Milky Way, and managed to install a "flying gallery" onto the raft so that he could ride along, observing the stars and speaking with immortals on his trip. See Edward H. Schafer, "The Sky River," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 4 (1974): 404, issn: 00030279, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/600583> (accessed June 24, 2011).

In Red Chamber dreaming,  
But which floor?

and another poem of the same title that went,

My heart like an apricot flower  
Senses sounds of spring,  
My eyes like yellow plums  
Confuse the rain for sun.

Both couplets encapsulate the paralyzing frustration of living in the occupied areas during those times. *Fortress Besieged* was written during this period of being trapped in Shanghai.

Zhongshu and I first met in the spring of 1932 at Tsinghua, were engaged in 1933, and in 1935 got married and sailed together for England. (I paid my own way to study abroad.) In the fall of 1937, we went to France, and in the fall of 1938 we sailed back to China. My mother had passed away one year earlier, my home in Suzhou had been completely pillaged by the Japanese invaders, and my father had fled the war front into Shanghai, lodging at the home of my older sister and her husband. I was anxious to see my aging father, so when Zhongshu disembarked at Hong Kong for Kunming, I continued aboard the same ship to Shanghai. At that time, the principal of my old high school engaged me to establish a “branch campus” in the “orphan island” of Shanghai. Two years later Shanghai was occupied and the “branch campus” ceased operation, so I served for a while as a private tutor, and also as a substitute teacher in an elementary school; in my spare time, I wrote plays. Zhongshu was trapped in Shanghai without a job, so my father gave him all of his own teaching hours at Aurora Women’s College. In Shanghai we lived through hard times.

Once after watching a performance of a play I'd written, we came home and he announced, "I'd like to write a novel!" I was delighted, and pressed him to get started. At that time he had been stealing free moments to write short stories, and was worried that he wouldn't have the time to write a longer work. I told him not to worry; he could reduce his teaching hours, for our lives were very frugal and could be more frugal still. As luck would have it, our maid wanted to go home, because the situation in her home village had improved. I didn't persuade her to stay, nor did I seek another maid, and instead took on the work myself. I was a novice at cutting wood, starting fires, cooking meals, washing clothes and so forth and so coal smoke regularly blackened my face, or fumes filled my eyes with tears, or boiling oil scalded me, or I suffered sliced fingers. But I was so anxious to see Qian Zhongshu write *Fortress Besieged* (he had already told me the title and main contents) that it was a pleasure to serve as a scullery maid.

*Fortress Besieged* was begun in 1944 and finished in 1946. He was just as he wrote in his original "Preface": "Worried for the troubles of the world during those two years." Full of this dread, he was at the same time busy writing *On the Art of Poetry* [*Tan yi lu*]. A poem he wrote on his 35th birthday contained the couplet,

Book lust crawls through the cracks,  
                   No bee emerges;  
 Poetry engulfs the trees;  
                   The magpies find no piece!

Which captures just how it feels to have one project too many. At that time, we lived as one big family of refugees in the Qian's Shanghai home. The household included the entire families of both Zhongshu's father and his Uncle Jicheng. The two families shared quarters but divided the cooking. Zhongshu's father was always away,

and one after the other, Zhongshu's younger siblings left Shanghai, along with all his nieces and nephews, until only his mother remained, along with one unmarried younger brother. Thus the "big family" had become something of a small family.

I offer the above sketch of Zhongshu's personal history, family background, and his circumstances during the writing of *Fortress Besieged* as a brief authorial introduction. Below, I offer a few explanatory notes about *Fortress Besieged* to allow the reader to understand: the novel is only fiction; it is creative writing, not autobiography.

Zhongshu drew inspiration from times, places, and social classes he was familiar with. But the resulting characters and plot in the story are entirely made up. Even though certain roles bear the traces of real people, they are all fictitious, and though the plot possesses some hints of real events, the characters are entirely fabricated.

Fang Hongjian was modeled on two relatives: one had great ambition but lesser talents, plus a bellyfull of complaints; one was recklessly self-aggrandizing, with a great love of tooting his own horn. Both read *Fortress Besieged*, but neither recognized themselves in Fang Hongjian, because they'd never had Fang Hongjian's experiences. Since Zhongshu made Fang Hongjian the center of the story, he often saw matters from Fang's eyes, and experienced reality from Fang's perspective. Undiscerning readers mistake his understanding for sympathy, and sympathy for concern, to the point that they conflate self and other. Many readers take him to be the author himself. The author of the 19th-century French novel *Madame Bovary* once said, "Madame Bovary is me." Qian Zhongshu could just as well say, "Fang Hongjian is me." But there are also many more characters, male and female, each of whom could be said to be Qian Zhongshu,



not just Fang Hongjian. Fang Hongjian and Qian Zhongshu share only the hometown of Wuxi; their personal histories are in no way similar.

We rode the French liner *Athos II* back to China. The scene on the deck in *Fortress Besieged* is very similar to what we saw there, including the French police officer who flirted with the Jewish woman, as well as the Chinese students playing mahjong. Miss Bao, though, is purely fictional.<sup>8</sup> On our trip from China, also onboard was a voluptuous young woman from Southeast Asia, whom all the non-Chinese on the ship took a great interest in – they saw her as an Oriental beauty. And at Oxford, we knew a female student whose fiancé was paying her tuition, and we heard she took lovers. Also at Oxford was an Egyptian girl doing research on the English language who had dark skin, and whom we both thought very beautiful. Miss Bao is a composite of the Oriental beauty, the romantic young fiancée, and the Egyptian beauty. Zhongshu once heard a story about an illicit love affair involving a Chinese student on the ship, and so Fang Hongjian in the novel is seduced by Miss Bao. Since it “stinks in an abalone market,” the young lady was named “Bao” (abalone).<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. Su is also assembled out of spare parts: her facial features are a beautified version of a classmate’s, while her aims and emotions are like those of another person who was not beautiful in the least. The person making money on the black market was

---

8 In the following passage, Yang Jiang is referencing characters and events in *Fortress Besieged*, chapters 1, 3 and 5. Qian Zhongshu, *Fortress Besieged*, trans. Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 3-25, 74-79, 132-171.

9 The allusion is to a saying of Confucius recorded in the *Shuo yuan*, “Abiding with good men is like entering a hall filled with flowers: if you stay long you don’t smell the fragrance, because you’ve changed in accordance with them. Abiding with evil men is like entering a shop selling abalone fish, if you stay long you don’t smell the stink; again, you’ve changed in accordance with them.”

曰：“與善人居，如入蘭芷之室，久而不聞其香，則與之化矣；與惡人居，如入鮑魚之肆，久而不聞其臭，亦與之化矣。 Translation is mine; source of Chinese text: Donald Sturgeon, ed., *Shuo Yuan*, in *The Chinese Text Project*, <http://ctext.org/shuo-yuan> (accessed May 29, 2011).

yet another person. The poem that Miss Su wrote is one Zhongshu requested me to translate; he told me not put too much effort into the translation, that an ordinary job would do. Miss Su's husband is another classmate; in the novel she marries him rashly. The groom at the wedding wearing a black suit with a white collar so soaked in sweat that it turns yellow and limp was none other than Zhongshu himself. That was because the auspicious day for our wedding, chosen by the traditional almanac, was the hottest day of the year. In our wedding photo, the bride, bridesmaids, flower girl and the boy serving as ring bearer all look like hoodlums just nabbed by the police.

Zhao Xinmei<sup>10</sup> is a grown-up version of a five- or six-year old boy we liked; Zhongshu added over twenty years to his age. That child to this day has not grown into a Zhao Xinmei, and of course could not have shared Zhao Xinmei's personal history. If the author had said, "Fang Hongjian is me," he would certainly also say, "Zhao Xinmei is me."

Two minor characters bear traces of real people; the author simply described them as they were, not taking the trouble to mix in a thing.<sup>11</sup> As a result, those two both "got their numbers and took their seats." One of them didn't care at all; the other, I heard, was furious. Zhongshu exaggerated Dong Xiechuan in one respect only. But not a word of Dong's dialogue or verses were plagiarized from actual utterances; they are entirely fabricated. Chu Shenming does not match the man who inspired him. The real person was even more exaggerated. Once he and I were on the same train into Paris from the suburbs when he suddenly dug a piece of paper out of his pocket, on which

---

10 Introduced in chapter 3, and afterwards appearing throughout the book. Qian Zhongshu, *Fortress Besieged*, 53-55.

11 Yang Jiang refers to the dinner party scene at the center of chapter 3. *ibid.*, 80-92

were listed the criteria by which young ladies might choose husbands, including facial features, age, education, moral quality, family lineage, and others. There were some 17 or 18 items total, and he compelled me to assign a weighting to each and rank them in order. I knew what he wanted this for, and I also knew his object, so I took care with my answers, hoping to get the conversation over with. He asked me breathlessly, “Girls say he [meaning Zhongshu] is a ‘young dandy;’ so tell me, is he?” I ought to have been more earnest in my response, and told him honestly that when I first knew Zhongshu, he wore an old blue Chinese cloth gown, a pair of cloth-bottomed shoes, and set of large, old-fashioned glasses — not dandyish in the least. But I could see he thought I ought to take the same position as he, and so I couldn’t help but say mischievously, “Of course. I consider him more ‘dandyish’ than anyone.” This response angered him, and he didn’t speak again for a long while. Later when I complimented him on how starched and crisp his western suit was, he was surprised and delighted. “Really? I’ve always thought my clothes were wrinkled. I wash and iron them every week, but they’ve never been as crisp as other people’s.” Only when I affirmed that his clothes were indeed crisp did he cheer up. Actually, Chu Shenming is also a composite; it was someone else who drank that cup of milk in the novel. That person was also a friend of ours in Paris. He was still unmarried then and once told us he loved, “heavenly immortal beauties,” and not “demon temptresses.” A friend of his, though, appreciated “demon temptresses,” and even had taken a great interest in a dog-walking prostitute, whom he hoped to “call for a party,” which meant to invite a prostitute over for drinks and conversation. One evening, a group of us we were sitting in a café when we saw the dog-walking prostitute enter a different café. The admirer of “heavenly beauties” volunteered to the admirer of

“demon temptresses,” “I’ll go over there and fetch her for you.” He left without returning for a long time. Zhongshu said, “Best not to leave him to the spider lady in the cave of the silken web; I’ll go rescue him.” Zhongshu ran into that café, only to see the admirer of “heavenly beauties” sitting alone at a table, drinking a cup of steamed milk, surrounded by prostitutes who were surreptitiously laughing at him. Zhongshu “rescued” him and brought him back. Because of this, people often teased him about that cup of milk, saying that to hire a prostitute, one should at least drink a glass of beer, and not milk. That cup of milk must have haunted Zhongshu, so he had Chu Shenming drink milk in the restaurant; all those medicines were also improvised and must have sprung to life out of that cup of milk.

Fang Dunweng is also a composite.<sup>12</sup> Because he is Fang Hongjian’s father, readers are convinced that he is Zhongshu’s father; in actuality, Fang Dunweng and Zhongshu’s father share only a few similarities. Around the time that Zhongshu and I got engaged, Zhongshu’s father opened and read, without permission, a letter I had sent to Zhongshu. He praised it greatly, and wrote back to me to formally entrust Zhongshu to me. This is very much Fang Dunweng’s style. When we were in occupied Shanghai, a letter from him said I was “content in poverty, and happy in my morality;” this is also very similar to Fang Dunweng’s manner of speaking. But if one says Fang Dunweng had two or three points of resemblance to Zhongshu’s father, well, there were four or five points more that resembled Uncle Sunqing, and still others that were fabrications, as this kind of old-fashioned patriarch was common among his family and friends. Zhongshu’s father and uncle both read *Fortress Besieged*. His father smiled; we never

saw Uncle Sunqing's reaction. The two of us often wondered privately whether either of them ever felt that they had anything in common with Fang Dunweng.

Tang Xiaofu was clearly a character the author liked and didn't wish to marry off to Fang Hongjian. Actually, if the author had allowed them to become husband and wife, and to fight and spurn each other as husband and wife, then, well, the idea of marriage as entrapment in a fortress besieged would have been elucidated even more transparently. If, after Fang Hongjian was jilted, Zhao Xinmei had married Miss Su and it did not work out for them either, we might say that after marriage one discovers that the person one has married is never quite the person one had in mind. And that of course is quite correct. But even though he hadn't married the person he had in mind, these words of his could serve as some consolation.

As for the manager of "Golden Touch Bank,"<sup>13</sup> Miss "Wo-ni-ta's" father,<sup>14</sup> and others, these were all Wuxi businessmen often seen in Shanghai; I won't identify them one by one.

I love to read the section about Fang Hongjian and his five-person traveling party on their journey from Shanghai to Sanlü University.<sup>15</sup> I did not go with Zhongshu to Hunan, but the five people he went with were all acquaintances of mine, and not one of them resembled the five people in the novel, not even the barest hint. Wang Meiyu's bedroom, however, I had seen before: the large red cotton blanket piled up on the bed, the large round mirror on the table, the woman with her shoes off sitting on the side of

---

13 Mister Zhou, the father of Fang Hongjian's deceased betrothed. Qian Zhongshu, *Fortress Besieged*, 9.

14 Mister Zhang, a friend of the Zhou family whose daughter all parties wished to have introduced to Fang Hongjian; *ibid.*, 41-44.

15 Chapter 5, *ibid.*, 132-191.

the bed roasting a painful of opium.<sup>16</sup> That was something I'd seen while searching for lodging in Shanghai and described to Zhongshu. During my student years at Tsinghua, for one spring break I traveled with a group that spent the night in a remote village. Sleeping on a bed of dry grass on the muddy ground, I had nightmares. I dreamt a little baby under me was screaming at me, "You're crushing my red silk jacket!" As it said this it pushed me with its hands, but couldn't budge me. That nightmare I once related to Zhongshu. That maggots are called "meat sprouts" was also a strange fact I once told Zhongshu. When Zhongshu went to Hunan, he sent me poems all along the way. When he and his companions passed Xuedou Mountain, he composed four travel poems in the heptasyllabic ancient style. I really liked the second and third, so I might as well copy them out to illustrate the contrast between the novel and the reality:

Winds from the sky blow the ocean waters,  
 Standing peaks form shapes of mountains.  
 The wave crests cast off droplets of white,  
 Accumulating snow for some years.  
 Often I've observed in the mountains,  
 Rising and falling, the states of water,  
 Undulating as if 'missing bones';<sup>17</sup>  
 Rolling, the image of breakers and surf.  
 Then I understand: in water and mountain,  
 Thoughts each emerge from their station,  
 Just as they do in great, heroic men,  
 Each set up with unique abilities.  
 Ah, how stubborn! The Old Man of Lu,  
 Saying wisdom can't be benevolence.<sup>18</sup>

The mountain's face, so ancient, so still, ,

---

16 Wang Meiyu is a prostitute the group of travelers encounters on the road, *ibid.*, 161-171, esp. p. 166.

17 A term in Chinese landscape (*shan shui*) painting

18 Qian plays against Confucius' proposition that "The wise love the water; the benevolent love the mountain;" see David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 53-4.

And yet hidden there, a waterfall.  
 It never quits; it flows day and night,  
 And when it gets rain has more power still.  
 Bitter, sour, and even shedding tears,  
 Standing fast, ready to disgorge;  
 Not unlike this stretch of mountain,  
 Magnitude unchanged by externals.  
 Theirs was a tacit meeting of minds,  
 Drawn from afar, one encounter is joy,  
 But I resent the many miles to go,  
 The hiding there, yet never to stay.  
 Emotions sincere, don't toss in the waves,  
 So long, so slow is the journey.

The novel only mentions that they pass Xuedou Mountain, with nary a word describing scenes of mountain travel. The lyric subject was the self-same man who actually traveled through mountains; Fang Hongjian and Li Meiting were too busy getting to know Wang Meiyu. Suffice to say the novel's fabricated events are rich and numerous, while the real events can be cast aside completely; moreover, real events just didn't fit into the fabricated world.

Li Meiting's encounter with a widow on the journey also bears traces of reality. Zhongshu had a friend who was honest to a fault, and who, while traveling, bumped into a widow who said she had fallen on hard times. The friend gave her some money, but later realized that he'd been had. I had a classmate nicknamed "the merry widow" and once described to Zhongshu how when she washed away her make-up before going to bed, her eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and nose all disappeared from her face. Probably these two unrelated events combined to produce a Suzhou widow who, on her second encounter with Li Meiting, had come up with such honeyed words as "Aren't you the nicest man!" and so on.

Wang Chuhou's wife reminds me of a female employee we saw in a Shanghai post office. Her hair was brittle and yellow, her face pale white, her eyes upward-slanting, and she wore a light purple linen *qipao*. I once discussed her with Zhongshu, saying that if her skin were a little shinier, hair softer and jet-black, and the light purple cotton *qipao* swapped for a deep purple silk one, she'd be transformed into a beautiful woman. Mrs. Wang was just that sort of beauty—when I encountered her, it was like we'd met before.

Miss Fan, Miss Liu and their ilk, I think, are familiar to everyone, so there's no need to re-introduce them. As for Sun Roujia, despite her following Fang Hongjian to Hunan, and then back again to Shanghai, I've never met her. Among the women I know (myself included), there isn't anyone who resembles her at all. But with a little more contact with her, I discovered that the whole time she was one of the most visible people in our circle. She had a good education, was neither especially bright nor dim, was neither beautiful nor ugly, and had no interests, though she had her own agenda. If Fang Hongjian "had broad interests, but was utterly unreflective," then she was utterly without interests, and yet very much with plans of her own. Her world was miniscule, limited to the inside and the outside of the "fortress besieged." The freedoms she enjoyed were also very limited: she could force her way inside the fortress from without, and she could force her way out again from within. Her greatest success was to marry a Fang Hongjian, and her greatest failure, too, was to marry a Fang Hongjian. She and Fang Hongjian were a typical middling intellectual couple. One respect in which Sun Roujia's intelligence was to be admired was that she could draw Mrs. Wang's "essential character:" ten red fingernails and a pair of red lips. A young lady



will be cutting about a woman she views with such envy, jealousy and contempt. But even this degree of intelligence was one Zhongshu bestowed on her. He had an uncanny ability to capture the “essential character;” for example he could capture the essential character of each person’s voice, and so distinguish the speaker by their voice, even someone he didn’t know by face.

Maybe I’m just like Don Quixote, tilting at windmills, chopping up the characters of *Fortress Besieged* into tiny pieces, till the floor is all covered with the dismembered remains of cardboard cutouts. However, when I was closely reading passages of the novel, what made me put down the manuscript and laugh was not discovering real people and actual events, but rather finding bits and pieces that had been recombined and touched up to create people I’d never met and fabricated events I’d never imagined. I laugh out loud out of a surplus of surprise and delight, and couldn’t help saying, “I see right through your tricks.” Zhongshu laughed along because he understood what I found so funny and acknowledged that I was getting the jokes. It showed that he was pleased with himself too.

Perhaps Don Quixote and I are the same, attempting a most dispiriting task. Still, I believe the foregoing shows why *Fortress Besieged* is absolutely not real people or real events.

### *1. The Qian Zhongshu who wrote Fortress Besieged*

To know an author, one must know him as a person: best to begin from his childhood.

When Zhongshu was born, he was taken at once to be raised by his eldest uncle, because that uncle had no sons. The Qian clan's "gravesite *fengshui*" favored the younger sons' households over the eldest's, for the house of the latter tended not to have sons, and those that were born never amounted to anything. Uncle Jicheng was the eldest of the sons who "never amounted to anything." He was fourteen years older than Zhongshu's father; a second uncle had died early; Zhongshu's father was third in line; and Uncle Sunqing was fourth<sup>19</sup> — the two were twins — and Zhongshu was the eldest grandson, meaning that he'd inherit the eldest son's estate. Uncle Jicheng had, for Zhongshu's sake, braved a night of driving rain to go to the countryside to seek out a stout and hearty peasant woman; she was a widow whose own fatherless child had died in childbirth, so she was a readymade wet nurse (Zhongshu called her "Muma"). Muma spent her whole life helping at the Qian home; once past her prime, every year there would be a period when she would fall into a stupor, so the family members called her "Muma the fool" behind her back. Just before Zhongshu's wedding, she purchased a gold ring set with jade, to present to me as a special gift at our first meeting. Somebody convinced her the ring was a forgery and tricked her into giving it up, which made her mad with anger; not long after, she passed away. In the end, I never met her.

Zhongshu from an early age grew up in a big family, with no less affection for his cousins than for his brothers. His brothers and cousins altogether numbered ten, with Zhongshu the eldest. Among all these boys, he was the most immature and dull-witted.

---

19 Zhongshu's father is Qian Jibo 錢基博 (1887-1957). From here forward, Yang Jiang employs the Chinese terms *bofu*, "eldest uncle," to refer to Qian Jicheng 錢基成 (d. 1920), and *shufu*, "younger uncle," to refer to Qian Sunqing 錢孫卿 (aka Qian Jihou 錢基厚, aka "The Old Man of Sun'an" 孫安老人, 1887-1975). To reproduce the intimacy of reference, I have replaced these separate terms for "uncle" with the men's first names.

Whenever he was studying intently, he had no cares for anything else, but when he put his books down, he became positively impertinent, as if he contained a great surplus of moods that he didn't know what to do with, so made a specialty of speaking nonsense. The Qians all loved to say he'd grown "foolish" from nursing on the milk of "Muma the Fool." What we people of Wuxi call "foolishness" encompasses many meanings: craziness, stupidity, naïvete, immaturity, foolhardiness, and mischievousness. His parents sometimes said he was "too dumb to stand," or "under a dummy spell," or "'m'zau'm'laai'" (meaning "at sixes and sevens" — I don't know the exact orthography, so I write according to the regional pronunciation). He certainly was not like his mother, who was taciturn, solemn and prudent; neither was he like his father, who was so by the book he practically wrote it. His mother often complained of his father's "naïveté." Perhaps Zhongshu's "foolishness" was inherited from his father's straightforwardness. I once saw an old photo of their family. His younger brothers were all strong and healthy, while only he was thin and weak, with a comely and winning face, an endearing picture of simple honesty. I've come to think that his "foolishness" of those years was only childishness and foolhardiness, not yet mischievousness, surely.

On Zhongshu's first birthday, for his "birthday grab," he grabbed a book, and for this reason was given the name "Zhongshu" ("Values books"). The day he was born, someone had just sent over the volume *Writings by Past Philosophers of Changzhou*, so Uncle Jicheng chose as his name, "Yangxian" ("Esteems the Past"), along with the courtesy name "Zheliang" ("Philosophical and Good"). With "Zhongshu" his school name since his first birthday, "Yangxian" became a diminutive, and they called him "Ah Xian." But "Xian'er" ("Son Xian") and "Xiange" ("Elder Brother Xian") closely

resembled “Wang’er” (“Dead son”) and “Wangxiong” [ibid] (“Dead elder brother”), so the character “Xian” was exchanged for “Xuan,” though his father still called him “Ah Xian.” (Zhongshu’s father would paste every page of his letters home into an album. There was a thick stack of albums, each carrying the handwritten inscription “Son Xian’s Letters Home (1), (2), (3) ...;” I’ve seen these albums and the letters pasted therein.) After Uncle Jicheng died, Zhongshu’s father, observing how Zhongshu liked to speak nonsense, changed his courtesy name to “Mocun” (“Keep quiet”), with the intention of making him speak less. Zhongshu tells me: “Actually I preferred ‘Zheliang,’ which is both philosophical and good — when I shut my eyes, I can still see Uncle writing ‘Zheliang’ in my exercise book.” This is probably because he misses his Uncle Jicheng so much. I feel he certainly is both philosophical and good, but his “foolishness” and intense nonsense talk often make him neither philosophical nor good — if mischievousness be not counted good. The label “Mocun” clearly has never functioned as an effective restraint.

Uncle Jicheng, who “would never amount to anything,” never did make his parents happy. Half the reason for this lies with Auntie. Auntie was from a wealthy gentry family from Jiangyin that had made its fortune in the dye business and owned seven or eight big cargo ships. The natal family of Zhongshu’s grandmother was an old family of Shitangwan Town, officials and landlords with great influence over the region. Wife and mother-in-law looked down on each other, which also affected relations between father and son. Uncle Jicheng returned home after attaining the first-level *xiuca*i degree; upon entering the gate, he suffered a beating from his father, who said he was “going to kill off his snobbery—kill it!” The reason was that although

Zhongshu's grandfather had two older brothers who had passed the second-level *juren* exams, he was no more than a *xiuca* himself. Zhongshu was not yet one year old before his grandmother passed away. His grandfather never liked his eldest son, so Zhongshu never became a favoured grandson.

In Zhongshu's fourth year (for his age, I write down the "empty year" *xusui*, because that's all Zhongshu remembers, but he was born in the second half of November according to the Western calendar, so his age in years ought to be decreased by one or two years) his Uncle Jicheng taught him to read. Uncle Jicheng was as loving as a mother; Zhongshu followed him around all day long. When Uncle Jicheng went to teahouses and listened to storytellers, Zhongshu always went with him. His father didn't wish to interfere, but he was afraid the child would be spoiled, so his only recourse was to suggest the child be put into school as soon as possible. At age 6, Zhongshu entered Master Qin's Primary School. Nowadays, when he sees people expound on "comparative literature," he remembers primary school sentence composition: "A dog is bigger than a cat; a cow is bigger than a sheep;" one classmate got carried away with comparisons and ended up with, "A dog is bigger than a dog; a dog is smaller than a dog," for which he suffered a scolding from the teacher. He had been in school for less than six months when he fell ill, and Uncle Jicheng couldn't bear to let him continue, and so took the opportunity to let him stop going to school and stay at home. At age seven, he joined his cousin Zhonghan, who was half a year younger, to audit classes at a private academy run by relatives. He studied the *Book of Songs*, while Zhonghan read the *Erya*. But auditing classes was inconvenient, so a year later he and Zhonghan both began studying at home under Uncle Jicheng. Uncle Jicheng said to Zhongshu's father

and Uncle Sunqing, “I was the first teacher for both of you, so shouldn’t I be able to teach them?” Father and Uncle of course did not dare protest.

Actually, Zhongshu’s father was first schooled by a clan elder. Grandfather believed Zhongshu’s father to be dim and Uncle Sunqing bright, but that Uncle Jicheng’s writing was less than top-notch. Uncle Sunqing being bright, it was no harm having him study under Uncle Jicheng, but Father being dim, a clan elder with better literary skills had to be engaged. That clan elder was as strict as could be, and Zhongshu’s father suffered any number of painful beatings. Uncle Jicheng’s heart went out to his younger brother, so he pleaded with Grandfather to allow the two younger brothers both to study under him. Zhongshu’s father accepted the clan elder’s painful beatings without the least complaint; quite the contrary, he had an epiphany. He told Zhongshu, “I’m not sure how it happened, but one day I was beaten so much that suddenly, all became clear.”

Zhongshu and Zhonghan’s lessons with Uncle Jicheng were only in the afternoons. His father and Uncle Sunqing both had jobs, so Uncle Jicheng managed the household affairs. Each morning, Uncle Jicheng went to the teahouse to drink tea and take care of various tasks or chat with acquaintances. Zhongshu always went with him. Uncle Jicheng spent a copper piece to buy him a large crispy cake to eat. (Zhongshu indicated to me that the crispy cake was the size of the mouth of a rice bowl, but I don’t know if it was really that big, or if just looked that way to a little boy.) He spent two more coppers at the little bookstores or book stalls to rent a novel for Zhongshu to read. At home, the only novels were *Journey to the West* 西遊記, *The Water Margin* 水滸傳, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 三國演義, *The Water Margin*, and other canonical

works. Zhongshu had already begun to chew through these novels, though he only half-digested them, reading the word *daizi* 貳子 (“dimwit”) as *qizi* 豈子, and also did not know that the dimwit in *Journey to the West* was Pigsy. The kind rented at the bookstalls, like *The Story of the Tang* 說唐, *The Biography of Crazy Ji* 濟公傳, and *The Seven Knights and the Five Worthies* 七俠五義 were considered unworthy of inclusion in a household library. Zhongshu would eat his crispy cake and read intently until Uncle Jicheng called him for the trip home. When he got back to the house, he would perform the stories he’d just read to his younger brothers with great gusto, telling how Li Yuanba or Pei Yuanqing or Yang Lin (I don’t remember who, exactly) used a single hammer to render all the spears in his opponents’ hands bent and useless. But it always puzzled him that each man of true grit could only serve as the hero of a single book. If Lord Guan [from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*] were to show up in *The Story of the Tang* with his “Green Dragon on the Moon” sword, which only weighed 80 kilograms, how could he hope to defeat Li Yuanba’s pair of 800-kilogram hammers? And if Li Yuanba were to enter *Journey to the West*, how could he hope to defeat Pilgrim Sun’s 13,000-kilogram gold-banded staff? (When we were at Oxford, he told me which weapons were used by which hero, along with their weights, with the clarity of one enumerating family heirlooms.) It was marvelous how he had committed to memory each weapon’s weight down to the ounce, even though he hadn’t even known Arabic numerals. When Zhonghan went home after school, his own father was there to teach him, but Uncle Jicheng and Zhongshu were the “Rat Brothers.” Uncle Jicheng would use rope to hang a cotton roll from someplace high-up and teach Zhongshu to hit it: up, down, left, right. He said that by doing this “cotton ball punch” one could learn soft

kungfu. Uncle Jicheng enjoyed taking a nip of liquor. He never had much cash on hand, and could only purchase cheap hot dishes like stewed pig's tongue to go with his drinks, though he convinced Zhongshu this was "dragon's liver in phoenix marrow;" Zhongshu thought the taste was sublime. To this day he likes to use these kinds of names; for example, in our house we call Western-style ham "tiger meat." His father didn't dare to offend his elder brother, and could only pull Zhongshu aside when the chance arose to teach him mathematics. When his son didn't learn he would get mad and want to give him a beating, but balk for fear that his brother would hear, so he could only pinch Zhongshu but not allow him to cry. Zhongshu's whole body turned blue and purple with bruises, and in the evening when he took off his clothes, Uncle Jicheng discovered them, and couldn't help feeling distressed and angry. Telling me this old story, Zhongshu sympathized deeply with his father's impatience, sympathized with Uncle Jicheng's anger, and of course he sympathized with his own suffering of pain without crying. While reminiscing, though, he could only find it at once comical and affecting. I joked, if he'd beat you, maybe it would have made "all become clear," but those pinches probably only pinched closed the gates of knowledge. When Zhongshu took the university examinations, in math he only scored 15 percent.

When Zhongshu was little, his favorite thing was to go with his Auntie back to her family in Jiangyin. Uncle Jicheng would go with them. (Their elder daughter, Zhongshu's cousin, had already married and left home.) They usually stayed one or two months at a time. Auntie's home had a large agricultural estate, and Zhongshu would spend the whole day following the tenant farmers roaming about all over the fields. He often described scenes to me. Once, after a big rain, a large green snake was found



hanging from a tree by the river, and people said it had been killed by lightning. Auntie's whole family, young and old, all smoked opium, and later on, so did Uncle Jicheng. Zhongshu usually woke up in the middle of the night to have a midnight snack with Auntie and Uncle Jicheng. Those times were as happy as could be, and he'd return to Wuxi having eaten and played his fill, and even wearing new clothes his grandmother had given him. But as soon as he returned home he would get scared, knowing his father would quiz him on his studies and that he'd be unable to avoid a beating. Father dared not act in his brother's place to discipline Zhongshu, but he'd snatch any opportunity to do so, because Zhongshu not only neglected his homework, but also cultivated more than a few bad habits, like staying up late and sleeping late, and eating and playing to excess.

In the fall of 1919, my family returned from Beijing to Wuxi. My parents didn't wish to live at the family home, and so sought different quarters. A family friend introduced one place, so my parents went to see it, bringing me with them. Zhongshu's family was just then renting that house. That was the first time I crossed the threshold of the Qian home, but back then the two families didn't know each other. I remember mother said that one of the women of the household told her that she'd been stuck to her medicine bottles since she had moved in. The house turned out not to be what to my family was looking for, and the Qian family had still not moved out, though they disliked how dark and dim it was. Only five years later did they move into a new house they'd built themselves at Qichichang. I don't remember what the house or the people I met back then were like, only that the place at the front gate where we got out of our car was very spacious, and that there were two large trees. High up on the very tall

whitewashed wall, stones were arranged into a checkered alcoves design. Zhongshu said my memory is accurate, and added that in front of the gate was a large screen wall, beyond which a river flowed past the front gate. He says the person who spoke to my parents was probably Uncle Sunqing's wife, because they lived in the outermost apartments, while Auntie and Uncle Jicheng and he lived further inside, and his parents, who attended on grandfather, lived further towards the rear.

My daughter teased, saying, "Back then Papa was up to who-knows-what sort of mischief, I bet. If back then Papa saw a girl like Mama, he'd probably dig boogers out of his nose to flick at her." This reminded Zhongshu of a past event: a seamstress often brought her daughter to the house to work. The daughter, Baobao, was a pretty girl two or three years older than he was. He and Zhonghan once grabbed Baobao and pushed her against the partition in the main hall, and then Zhonghan pricked her with a small pencil-sharpening knife. Baobao wailed her head off, until a grown-up arrived to save her. The two brothers felt this victory should be commemorated with a plaque, and so up on the partition etched the four characters "Where Baobao Was Pricked." Zhonghan had a skilled hand for etching characters, but back then those four didn't yet have simplified versions, so the etching took a fierce amount of trouble. This was probably a typical expression of naughty boys' budding "desire for pretty girls."<sup>20</sup> Later, when they stopped renting that house, the landlord tallied up compensation owed for damaged items, and on his list were the four incomplete characters etched on the partition.

Another item was a bad thing Zhongshu did by himself: out in the rear garden "digging

---

20 Yang Jiang employs a four-character phrase from a passage in the *Mencius*: "The desire of the child is towards his father and mother. When he becomes conscious of the attractions of beauty, his desire is towards young and beautiful women." Donald Sturgeon, ed., *Mengzi*, in *The Chinese Text Project*, trans. James Legge, <http://ctext.org/mengzi> (accessed May 29, 2011).

for ginseng,” he had cut and injured the roots of a magnolia tree, and half the tree withered away.

At age eleven, Zhongshu and Zhonghan were both admitted to first form at Donglin Primary School, an upper-level primary school offering four years of schooling. In the fall of the same year, Uncle Jicheng passed away. Zhongshu’s term hadn’t ended, but he was called back home by his family. He cried the whole way back as they hurried home, screaming “Uncle!,” but by then Uncle Jicheng was already unconscious. This was Zhongshu’s first encounter with grief.

After Uncle Jicheng passed away, all Auntie’s expenses, excepting the monthly allowance due to the eldest son’s household, became Zhongshu’s father’s responsibility. Auntie’s natal family declined rapidly, as the brothers passed away one after the other, and the family’s big cargo ships were gradually sold off. Zhongshu’s tuition and fees of course became his father’s responsibility, but many times during the semester he needed additional new textbooks, and Zhongshu had no money to buy them and had to go without. What’s more, his love of reading those small-print books that Uncle Jicheng had rented for him from the bookstalls when he was little had strained his eyes, such that seated in the last row of the classroom he couldn’t see the words the teacher wrote on the blackboard and would have no clue what the teacher was lecturing about. Unable to afford exercise books, he just used a notebook his late Uncle Jicheng had bound for him out of bamboo paper and paper strips; the teacher raised a brow at this. To practice English handwriting, fountain pens were used. When school started he had one pen barrel and one nib, but before long the tip of the nib snapped off. His classmates all had many nibs; he had only one, and with it broken he had no way to write. However,

necessity being the mother of invention, he simply sharpened bamboo chopsticks, dipped the tips in ink, and wrote; of course his writing was a complete mess, and the teacher very nearly didn't accept his exercise book.

I asked Zhongshu why he didn't ask his father for money. He said the thought had never occurred to him. Sometimes his Auntie told him to ask his father for money, but he still didn't speak out. Auntie smoked opium, and woke late in the morning, so Zhongshu would eat some sour porridge heated up by the old maid who had been with Auntie since her wedding, and then go to school. His classmates and little brother both wore Western socks, while he still wore cloth socks. He felt that the designs on his feet looked ugly, and dearly wished that wearing cotton shoes could cover them from sight. On rainy days, his classmates and little brother wore leather shoes, but he wore "nailed shoes," and moreover they were his Uncle Jicheng's nailed shoes, and too large, so into the fronts of the shoes he stuffed rolled-up paper. One rainy day while going to school, he saw on the road many little frogs hopping all over the ground, which amused him, so he took off his shoes, caught some, and put them into his shoes. Then he went to school barefoot carrying his shoes, and when he reached school, he put the frog-filled nailed shoes under his desk. When school started, the little frogs all came out of the shoe and started hopping on the floor. His classmates all rushed over to look at the frogs, giggling surreptitiously. His teacher demanded the reason for this, and, learning that the frogs had come from Zhongshu's shoes, told him come stand in the front of the class. Another time he brought a slingshot to class, which he used to shoot little mud balls at people. When the classmates he shot shouted out, the teacher told him to go stand in the corner again. And yet he was such a complete clod that he never felt ashamed. When he told

me about his past, he would often say he felt fortunate to have been so silly, and that it never gave him any anxiety.

Zhongshu said to me that when he was little, adults tricked him into believing falsehoods. One was that Auntie had brought back a single pumpkin that had become a pixie—him. Zhongshu really did become a little afraid that he was a pumpkin pixie. By then his Uncle Jicheng had already passed away. His Auntie's sisters would tease him about being a "pumpkin pixie" as they chatted on the edge of her opium couch, at the same time sternly urging him not to tell his mother. Zhongshu suspected they were having him on, but he really did worry, a little. He told himself he was being a dolt but was afraid it was true. This could be one example of what his relatives called his "foolishness."

Some symptoms of his doltishness to this day are as bad as ever. For example, he can never remember his own birthday. When he was little, he couldn't tell left from right, though fortunately back then he wore cloth shoes, which don't come in left and right. Later, when he and Zhonghan went together to Suzhou to attend the American Missionary Middle School, he wore leather shoes, but he still didn't distinguish left and right, and would put them on incorrectly. At this American-run school, in P.E. class one had to do the yells in English. Since his English was good, he served as a class monitor. But despite having a mouth that could yell in English, his feet still couldn't tell left from right. For this reason he only served as class monitor for two weeks before giving the teacher his resignation, which was a great relief to him. He often put his undershirts and turtlenecks on backwards too. He would try to turn them back round the right way with the shirt still on his neck, but the result would be that they'd still be on backwards.

Possibly this was yet another example of what the Qian family meant when they said he was a “fool.”

What little Zhongshu liked to play the most was “The Monk in the Stone House.” I’d hear him speak about it with such obvious excitement that I thought it would be some fun game. In fact, it turned out one just sat, alone, inside the bed-curtain with legs crossed, then lowered the canopy and tucked oneself into a sheet: that’s all there was to “The Monk in the Stone House.” I didn’t understand what was so fun about it. He said it was fun all right, and that on evenings when Auntie and Uncle Jicheng told him to go to sleep early and he didn’t want to, he’d play “The Monk in the Stone House” to his heart’s content. This so-called “play” was nothing more than sitting alone with legs crossed, talking to himself. When children talk to themselves, actually they are giving voice to their imaginations. I asked him whether he was coming up with stories to amuse himself, but he couldn’t remember. I’d say this probably also counts as “foolishness.”

Zhongshu made it to fourth year of upper-level primary school, and even managed to graduate. Zhonghan’s grades were fabulous, and his name ranked at the top of the class; Zhongshu was merely a foolish idiot, an impertinent child. While Uncle Jicheng was still alive, he was ashamed that he’d never amounted to anything and was mortified by the thought that the “gravesite *fengshui*” would accumulate and be inherited by Zhongshu, the heir of the eldest son. Of old, the first few rows of trees in front of the ancestral tomb were healthy and flourishing, while those behind were tiny and weak. The trees behind the tomb of course represented the elder son’s household. Uncle Jicheng once spent money behind closed doors at a barbershop to purchase

several kilograms of hair and, with one of his tenants in tow, secretly brought Zhongshu to visit the ancestral tomb together, to bury the hair at the roots of the first few rows of trees behind the tomb. He told Zhongshu that he wanted to make the trees behind the tomb flourish, so “in the future, you’ll become President.” At the time, Zhongshu was only seven or eight and still didn’t understand things, but he somehow sensed that this was a private matter that Uncle Jicheng had undertaken behind people’s backs, and so he never told anyone at home about it. When he told me, the tone of his voice still called to mind his Uncle Jicheng’s great love for him, as well as some marvel at his own tact in keeping his uncle’s secret.

At fourteen, Zhongshu was admitted, along with Zhonghan, to Suzhou Taowu Middle School (a school run by American Episcopalians). His parents paid for all that he needed for the journey, and besides the tuition and fees, they also gave him some spending money. Then he went with Zhonghan to Suzhou, where his schoolwork was decent, with only arithmetic unsatisfactory.

That year,<sup>21</sup> his father went to Tsinghua University in Beijing to take a teaching position, and did not return home for winter vacation. That winter vacation, Zhongshu was especially delighted to return home and find no strict father to restrain him. He borrowed a big stack of magazines like *The Story World* [*Xiaoshuo shijie*], *Red Rose* [*Hong meigui*], and *Violet* [*Ziluolan*] and read them intently. During summer vacation, his father was held up on his return journey, switching to a steamer at Tianjin and arduously making his way home, by which point summer vacation was already half

---

<sup>21</sup> [Yang Jiang’s note] “That year” refers to 1925. Cf. *Qinghua zhoukan* (Tsinghua Weekly), issue 3577 (September 11, 1925). The “winter vacation” below was the winter of 1925-1926, and the “summer vacation,” the summer of 1926.

over. His father's first task upon his return was to command Zhongshu and Zhonghan to each write a composition; Zhonghan's received quite a bit of praise; Zhongshu's was in neither classical nor vernacular style, and replete with vulgarisms; furious, his father gave Zhongshu a painful beating. Zhongshu couldn't help but laugh as he described for me his plight at the time: his family members were all out in the courtyard, enjoying the cool, while he remained in the main hall, wincing from the pain and embarrassment of the beating and sobbing piteously.

This beating, while not serving to make "all become clear," did stimulate in him the ambition to study industriously. From this point forward, Zhongshu studied hard, and his compositions showed great improvement. He sometimes didn't follow his father's guidelines for ancient prose composition, embedding some parallelisms, and yet still elicited praise from his father. He also began studying poetry composition, though he never asked for his father's help with this. In 1927, Taowu Middle School closed down, and he and Zhonghan both tested into the American Episcopalian-run Furen Middle School in Wuxi. Thenceforth, Zhongshu regularly took instruction from his father, often writing letters for him, first transcribing them from oral dictation and later writing them himself; eventually, he was writing not only letters for his father but also essays. Before Zhongshu was admitted to Tsinghua, he was not beaten anymore, but now a son that made his father proud. Once, he submitted an epitaph for an important rural gentry family in his father's name. At lunch that day, Zhongshu's Muma heard his father praise the piece to his mother, and was so happy she couldn't contain herself, and immediately went to relay the news, saying to him in front of his Auntie, "*Ah Da*, ah! Your *Diedie* gave you a compliment. Yes! He said your writing was good!" It was



Zhongshu's first time hearing a compliment from his father, which made him as happy as Muma, so he remembers it clearly to this day. Back then, Commercial Press was just printing a book by Qian Mu with a preface by Zhongshu's father.<sup>22</sup> According to what Zhongshu tells me, it was he who wrote it, and not one word was changed.

I've often seen Zhongshu write correspondence without any drafting. He just picks up the pen and writes out eight lines onto the page with several nods of his head — eight lines exactly, no more, no less. Zhongshu says this is entirely the result of his father's training, and that his forehead had suffered no few “exploding chestnuts” for it.

When Zhongshu was 20 years old, his Auntie passed away. That year, he was admitted to Tsinghua University, and that fall he went to Beijing to start school. The “Son Xian's Letters Home” that his father archived dates from this time. Only after his father's death did Zhongshu learn that he had pasted each letter into an album for safekeeping. The letters were all extremely amusing, with lively descriptions of all his teachers and classmates. It's a pity that all of Zhongshu's family correspondence (include those written to me) were collected and taken away by Huilu, the god of fire.

Zhongshu's classmate at Tsinghua, Rao Yuwei 饒余威, in 1968, in either Singapore or Taiwan wrote a *Tsinghua Memoir*,<sup>23</sup> one passage in which mentions Zhongshu: “Among our classmates, Zhongshu exerted the greatest influence on all of us. He had a profound knowledge of Chinese and English, and he also excelled in

---

22 Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895-1990) was an educator, philosopher and historian known for his cultural conservatism. The work in question was *Guoxue gailun* (1927, Outline of 'National Studies') – see Kong Qingmao, *Qian Zhongshu zhuan* [Biography of Qian Zhongshu] (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 32; also see Jerry Dennerline, *Qian Mu and the World of Seven Mansions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> [Yang Jiang's note] *Qinghua daxue di wu ji biye wushi zhounian jinian ce*, (Tsinghua University Class-Five Graduates Fiftieth Commemorative Yearbook, published 1948), carries this text; Professor Rao is now deceased.

philosophy and psychology. All day he pored over books, old and new, Chinese and Western, but strangest of all was how during class he never took notes. Instead he just brought some pleasure reading unrelated to the class. Nevertheless, even though he would listen to lecture while reading his own book, he always got the top mark at exam time. He loved to read and encouraged others to read too....” According to what Zhongshu told me, he did bring his notebook to class but instead of taking notes he’d just doodle idly in it. Mr. Xu Zhende 許振德, now in America, was in the same year and the same major as Zhongshu. The first time that Zhongshu snatched first ranking in the class, Zhende had been so frustrated he wanted to give Zhongshu a beating, because before Zhongshu had become his classmate, he himself had usually ranked first. Once he happened to be stumped by a problem, which Zhongshu explained for him. He was very grateful, and the two of them became friends, sitting together in the back row of the classroom. Mr. Xu’s attentions were caught by a girl in their class, so Zhongshu drew in his notebook the series *The Transformations of Xu’s Eyes, Illustrated*, which was widely circulated among classmates in their year. Zhongshu once proudly drew one to show me. Just last year, Mr. Xu returned from America and when he heard Zhongshu mention *The Transformations of Xu’s Eyes, Illustrated*, he couldn’t help bursting out laughing.

When Zhongshu was young, all kinds of herbal remedies sold in traditional Chinese pharmacies came in two layers of paper: a sheet of white paper on the outside, and a sheet printed with the drug’s name and properties on the inside. After taking each dose of medicine, one could accumulate a pile of paper wrappers. As this paper was clean and absorbent, when Zhongshu was about eight or nine he would often use it to

trace his Uncle Jicheng's copy of *The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* or to print the "paintings in the poems" of the *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. He thought up a nickname for himself, "Xiang Angzhi" ("Xiang thinks it's precious") — this because he admired Xiang Yu, whose attitude had been to "think things precious," at least in Zhongshu's imagination. On each drawing he made, with a flourish of a his pen he put down the great name of "Xiang Angzhi," most proud of his work. He probably often had "Xiang Anzghi" ambitions, and just lamented that he was not good at painting. He once asked a girl who went to his middle school to copy out several famous pieces of naughty Western art, among which was "The Devil Leaves a Stink" (that's the name I came up with for the painting). It had the devil running away, emitting gas from his posterior as if playing the trumpet — quite the marvel. Come to think of it, drawing *The Transformations of Xu's Eyes, Illustrated* in class and asking that girl to help him copy *The Devil Leaves a Stink* are both examples of "foolishness."

Under his father's tutelage, Zhongshu may have been "industrious out of indignation," but actually he still read out of joy, the way a glutton savors food, his vast appetite not distinguishing fine and coarse, and consuming sweet and salty alike. He'd read the most vulgar of books and burst out laughing. Comic routines in operas he not only read laughing, but would perform, again and again, laughing till he fell over. Massive works of subtle and profound philosophy, aesthetics and literary theory, he'd gobble up the way a small boy eats snacks, steadily consuming volume after volume of the thickest books. Poetry was an even more favored reading material. Character dictionaries, word dictionaries, and encyclopedias too heavy to lift — not only did he put up with tiny characters to scrutinize each entry, but when he saw new editions, he

never spared any trouble to append new entries onto the older version. When he read, he often took notes.

Only once did I ever see him struggle with his studies. This was at Oxford when, before he developed his thesis topic, he had to study paleography, which required him to know various kinds of ancient English scripts since the eleventh century. He was absolutely uninterested in this, and before the exam had to rely on brute memorization. For this reason, each day he read a mystery novel “to let his brains recuperate”—“recuperating” so well that in his dreams he waved his arms and kicked his feet. I don’t know if he had caught a criminal, or if he himself had committed a crime and was fighting with the police. As a result, he failed the exam and had to take a make-up exam after the summer break. This incident of the make-up test is also related in the “Introduction” of the English translation of *Fortress Besieged* (see p. xiv). On Zhongshu’s 1979 America trip, the publisher of this translation gave him the “Introduction” to look over, and when he came to that part he was surprised and delighted, but couldn’t imagine how they had investigated him so thoroughly. Only later, when Professor Theodore Hutters came to meet him, did he realize it was he who heard it from Donald Stuart, Zhongshu’s friend and schoolmate from Oxford days. Hutters’s 1992 book *Qian Zhongshu*, though, deleted this incident.<sup>24</sup>

Zhongshu’s “foolishness” could not be contained in books, but just had to gush forth. Once during our time at Oxford, while he was taking an afternoon nap while I was practicing calligraphy, but writing and writing characters tired me out, so I fell asleep. Waking up and seeing me asleep, he prepared thick ink and started painting my

---

<sup>24</sup> [Yang Jiang’s note] Zhongshu misremembered; I flipped through this book, and the incident was not in fact deleted.

face. But his brush no sooner touched my face than I woke up. He hadn't anticipated that my face would absorb more ink than calligraphy paper, or that in washing it off my skin would wear through just like paper. After that he didn't play any more practical jokes, and instead only drew portraits of me, to which he added glasses and a beard to get his jollies off. Back in China, on one very hot day the summer he returned to Shanghai, his daughter was sound asleep (she was just a baby still), so he painted a large face on her tummy, which earned him a thorough scolding from his mother, so that he didn't dare do that again. While we were in occupied Shanghai, he frequently gave vent to his surplus of "foolishness" with Uncle Sunqing's little son and daughter, grandson and granddaughter, and his own daughter Ah Yuan. This string of children had come one after the other, and were all within two years of age, so they often played together. There was some language verging on the "uncivilized" or "ugly" which the children were conscientious about avoiding. Zhongshu came up with ways – sometimes with gestures, other times using some milder obscenities – to entice them to speak out, and would then accuse them of saying "bad words." And then all the children would surround him, arguing, hitting, and making no end of ruckus. But despite this besiegement, he would maintain a victor's poise. He would tease his daughter each day at bedtime by laying a "minefield," with one layer buried below another. He'd stuff objects of all sizes—toys, mirrors, brushes, and even ink stones and large calligraphy brushes—under the covers. When his daughter yelped, he'd be most pleased with himself. Before bed, our daughter had to make a careful search of the area, taking things out of her blankets one by one. Zhongshu only wished he could stuff a broom or a

dustpan under her covers, and so enjoy an outsized victory. This sort of everyday playfulness may not have been terribly significant, but Zhongshu never tired of it.

He also told his daughter that *Fortress Besieged* had an ugly child in it, and it was she. Ah Yuan believed it to be true but was never bothered by it. He wrote an opening for Heart of the Artichoke 百合心 with a little girl who wore a purple sweater and told Ah Yuan that this was a most annoying child—she again. Ah Yuan grew most concerned, afraid that her father had wronged her, and so every day searched for his manuscript to sneak a peek, but Zhongshu hid it in a different place each day. He hid, she searched, and it turned into a game of hide- and-seek. Later, even I had no idea where the manuscript had been hidden away.

Zhongshu's "foolishness" could be most eccentric. He said to me in all seriousness, "If we had another child, it might very well be better than Ah Yuan, and we'd prefer that child; in that case how could we do right by Ah Yuan?" This was the first time an advocate of the 'two-parent-one-child' theory had suggested that parents have only one child so that they could place all their affection on one alone.

After Liberation, at Tsinghua we kept a very intelligent cat. The first time the kitten climbed a tree, it was afraid to come down, so Zhongshu figured out how to rescue him. After the kitten was down, his little claws patted Zhongshu softly on the wrist to express its gratitude. We often made use of the Western proverb, "Hell is full of the ungrateful." Since the kitten knew gratitude, Zhongshu said it had a soul, and was especially fond of it. When the cat grew up, it fought with other cats in the middle of the night. Zhongshu custom-made a long bamboo pole, leaned it against the doorway, and no matter how cold it was that day, when he heard cats yowling, he would rush from out

under warm covers, take the bamboo pole and hurry out to help his own cat fight. One of our cat's rivals in love was the prized cat of our next-door neighbor Miss Lin Wheiyin 林徽因; the cat was known as her entire family's "hotspot of love." I often feared that Zhongshu would damage the two families' amiable relations over the cats, so I quoted his own words back to him, saying, "Don't beat a dog without considering its master's face, they say, so don't beat the cat without considering its mistress's face!" (The first line in "Cat.") He laughed and said, "Theories are always formulated by people with no practical experience."

Members of the Qian family often said Zhongshu was a "fool with a fool's fortune." As a fool for books, he certainly did enjoy a bit of fool's fortune. The books supplied to him were as abundant as a rich man's "dream salary." They arrived from various sources in a steady stream (except during the period he was sent down, when all he could do was mull over his own notes and the character dictionaries he brought with him). New books would always reach his hands via unexpected paths. As long as he had books to read, he lacked for nothing. This is yet another example of what his family called "foolishness."

Zhongshu and my father had a shared love of poetry and prose, which gave them a common language. Zhongshu often said something mischievous to my father using fine and elegant words, and they would smile at each other. Once my father asked me, "Is Zhongshu always so happy?" His "happiness" was just another expression of what the Qian clan called "foolishness."

I believe that the author of *Limited Views* 管錐編 and *On the Art of Poetry* was a Zhongshu who loved to learn, and thought deeply, while the author of *Poetic Remains*

*of an Ephemeral Life* was a Zhongshu who “worried for the troubles of the world.” As for the author of *Fortress Besieged*, this was the abundantly “foolish” Zhongshu. In our daily interactions, he loved to say foolish or silly things, and then make them even more creative, more associative, and more exaggerated. From these I could often perceive the style of *Fortress Besieged* at work. I think this foolishness of his was what breathed the life and believability into the characters and plot of *Fortress Besieged*. But even so, he was not the sort of fool who is ignorant of world events; nor was he the sort who is indifferent to social reality. So, though the details of the story leave people in stitches, the atmosphere of the whole book is precisely as it says in its conclusion, “containing a satire of, and disappointment with humanity that runs deeper than any language, than any tears or laughter.” It hits the reader right in the gut.

After completing *Fortress Besieged*, Zhongshu’s “foolishness” was still in full flourish, but it never manifested in a second novel. In the spring of 1957, when the “great airing of views” was just reaching its climax, and his *Poems of the Song: An Annotated Selection* had been sent to the printer, Zhongshu traveled to Hubei to care for his ailing father, and on the road composed the five quatrains “On the Road to E,” of which I now draw on three:

Dawns spent writing, dusks, still writing  
 A fine criticism,  
 Can a poetics so painfully strict  
 Purchase me dismissal?  
 Forget about catching whales,  
 In the deep blue sea,  
 Only teach the tunneler  
 To tell turbid from clear.

The chessboard’s laid, the candles flickr’ing,



World events in motion,  
 Drink the water to begin to learn,  
     Whether it's hot or cold.  
 Membranous deluded minds,  
     In return will fade.<sup>25</sup>  
 Night is coming, but I won't dream  
     As I pass Handan.<sup>26</sup>

Stopping my carriage out in the light,  
     I went for a little walk,  
 Up in the skies, gray and overcast,  
     Light thunder rolls.  
 Falling leaves seem to fly,  
     The wind is now changing.  
 The dove cries all stop,  
 To face the coming storm.

The later two quatrains contain his reaction to the circumstances of the times, and the first one speaks in reference to the *Poems of the Song: An Annotated Selection*, playing on the famous couplets of Du Fu and Yuan Haowen, respectively:

Some see only a kingfisher,  
     On an orchid flower,  
 And never catch the whale  
     In the deep blue sea.<sup>27</sup>

Who is there, in poetry,  
     Can act as Tunneler?  
 To part awhile the Jing and Wei,  
     One, clear, the other, turbid.<sup>28</sup>

---

25 A play on Su Shi's famous couplet, "Wonderful words like pearls, strung one by one, / Deluded minds like membranes, peeled back layer after layer." 好语如珠串一一，妄心如膜退重重。 Thanks to Wang Yugen and Hao Ji for pointing this out.

26 'The Handan Dream' is the story of Lu Sheng, who experiences an entire life of wealth, power and corruption in one magical dream, and so learns to repudiate worldly ambition.

27 See Geoffrey Waters, trans., "Du Fu as Literary Critic: 'Six Quatrains Written in Jest'," [http://www.cipherjournal.com/html/waters\\_xiwei.html](http://www.cipherjournal.com/html/waters_xiwei.html) (accessed May 23, 2011), for a translation of the couplet in its proper context, a set of rare examples of Du Fu speaking out on poetry writing itself.

28 This couplet concludes the first of "Thirty Poems on Poetry" by Yuan, then just 27 but already pessimistic about his own career prospects and the decline of the tradition, prompting him to take a syncretic view of literary history, which emerges in the image of one who 'dredges and bores' through the tradition as the great Yu did through the gorges of the upper Yangtze. John Timothy Wixted, *Poems*

As I understand it, he believed he still had the talent to write, but could only work on research or criticism, and from that point forward not only was his mouth “stopped,” but he never even entertained the notion. After *Fortress Besieged* was reprinted, I asked him if he was interested in writing fiction again. He said, “The interest might still be there, but the talent’s been lost with age. To wish to write but not be able to leaves a lingering desire; to have the ability to write and yet come up with something imperfect, though, can only lead to regret. In lingering desire there is space to deceive oneself, while in regret there is what is called, in the Spanish you studied, ‘*El momento de la verdad*,’ which makes it impossible to allow oneself even the slightest bit of deception, absolution, or lenience. It’s a bitter pill that’s hard to swallow. I’ll take desire over regret.” These words can perhaps serve as a footnote to the “Preface to the Reprinted Edition” of *Fortress Besieged*.

I have been feeling that the years have caught up with me, and that some things were unknown to anyone besides the two of us. I wished to avail myself of our continued good health to write them down, one by one. If there were mistakes, he could point them out, and I could correct them. Everything written in *Fortress Besieged* is made up, but what I have recorded here is all fact.

## Thoughts Appended Fifteen Years Later

When I finished “On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*, I gave it to Qian Zhongshu to look over. He took up his brush, loaded it with his accustomed light ink, and wrote a few words on the reverse side of the last page of my manuscript. I took them to be compliments meant for my eyes only, and so stored them away. They’ve been put away for fifteen years.

Recently I again came across this page of “Qian Zhongshu thoughts,” and it dawned on me that these words were written for other people to see. Why hadn’t this occurred to me before? Truly, this is “modesty” taken to an idiotic level. Still, my idiocy worked out well enough. If it had appeared together with the text at the time of publishing, how could readers not have laughed at Qian Zhongshu endorsing his own spouse! Readers nowadays will see that his comments weren’t intended as a compliment to me. He was only thinking of the high-flown talk mocking biographical writing that appeared forty years earlier when the Devil paid him a nighttime visit.<sup>29</sup> Though the goal of “On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*” was to explain that *Fortress Besieged* is in no way biographical, the essay itself was not meant to be his biography either. Still, I did after all write of his past. So he made a special testimony that what I wrote was the truth, and not the sort of biographical writing the Devil was referring to.

October 9, 1997

Below are his “appended thoughts”:

---

29 See “The Devil Pays a Nighttime Visit to Mr. Qian Zhongshu,” *Qian Zhongshu, Humans, Beasts and Ghosts: Stories and Essays*, ed. Christopher G. Rea (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 34.

The contents of this document are not only factual, they are “the inside scoop.” If it weren’t that the author had extracted them from me drop by drop, and then assiduously written them down, there would have been a great many events even I, myself, would quickly have forgotten. As for the quality of the writing, that speaks for itself!

Qian Zhongshu  
July 4, 1982<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> [Yang Jiang’s note] This was the date of composition, but the text was not published until May 1986, the reason being that Zhongshu began to think it shouldn’t come out. He said, “A wife writing of her husband will be seen as aggrandizement.” See “My reply to Comrade Hu Qiaomu’s Letter,” (Letter Archive).

## **Appendix II: *We Three*, Parts I and II**

### **Part I: We Two Grow Old**

One night, I had a dream. Zhongshu and I were out on a walk together, talking and laughing, when we came to a place we did not know. The sun had set behind the mountains, and dusk was approaching. Then Zhongshu disappeared into the void. I searched everywhere, but could find no trace of him. I called to him, but there was no answer. It was just me, alone, standing there in the wasteland and I didn't know where Zhongshu had gone. I cried out to him, calling his full name, but my cries just fell into the wilderness without the faintest echo, as if they'd been swallowed. Complete silence added to the blackness of the night, deepening my loneliness and sense of desolation. In the distance, I saw only layer upon layer of dusky dark. I was on a sandy road with a forest to one side. There was a murmuring brook; I couldn't see how wide it was. When I turned to look back, I saw what appeared to be a cluster of houses. It was an inhabited place, but since I couldn't see any lights, I thought they must be quite far away. Had Zhongshu gone home on his own? Then I'd better go home too! Just as I was looking for the way back, an old man appeared, pulling an empty rickshaw. I hurried over to bar his way, and sure enough he stopped, but I couldn't tell him where I wanted to go. In the midst of my desperation, I woke up. Zhongshu lay next to me in bed, sound asleep.

I tossed and turned for the rest of the night, waiting for Zhongshu to wake up, when I told him about what happened in my dream. I reproached him: How could you have abandoned me like that, leaving on your own without a word to me? Zhongshu

didn't try to defend the Zhongshu of my dream. He only consoled me by saying: this is an old person's dream. He often had it too.

Yes, I've had this sort of dream many times. The setting may differ, but the feeling is the same. Most often the two of us emerge from some place, then, in the blink of an eye, he's gone. I ask after him everywhere, but nobody pays any attention to me. Sometimes I search for him everywhere but end up in a succession of alleys, all with dead ends. Sometimes I am alone in a dimly lit station, waiting for the last train, but the train never comes. In every dream I am lonely and desperate. If only I could find him, I think, we could go home together.

Zhongshu probably remembered my reproach, and caused this dream to be ten thousand miles long.

## **Part II: We Three Are Parted**

This is a "dream ten thousand miles long." In this dream, everything seems real and when I wake up, it's as if I'm still in the dream. But a dream is after all just a dream, from beginning to end.

### **2. Down the Old Post Road**

We had just finished dinner and the two of them, father and daughter, were playing in high spirits. Zhongshu called for rescue with a pitiful wail. "Ma! Ma! Ah Yuan's being mean to me!"

But Ah Yuan called out righteously: "Mummy! Papa's making mischief. I've caught him red-handed!" (Each of us had several "tags", which we used at random.)

“Making mischief” meant making a mess in her room.

I went into her room to see what was up. Several large dictionaries were stacked on the pillows at the head of the bed and on top of those was a little stool with its four legs pointing upward. Two dusty shoes – apparently the shoes Ah Yuan had just taken off after returning home – were carefully placed on the legs. One shoe was stuffed with a pen jar, filled with Ah Yuan’s calligraphy brushes, paintbrushes, pencils, and ball-point pens. The other was stuffed with a little broom for brushing the bed clean. Alongside the pillow rested the large book bag Ah Yuan had brought home, next to which were strewn several books of varying sizes. In the back was the long shoehorn I had given Ah Yuan—this must be the tail. Ah Yuan stood in the narrow space between the bed and the desk, trapping Papa between the desk and the piano. “Caught red-handed!” she declared, smugly.

Zhongshu tried to shrink as much as he could. “I’m not here,” he said, his eyes shut tight. He was laughing so hard he couldn’t stand up straight. I could even see the waves of laughter boiling up from within his belly.

“You think that counts as an *alibi*?” said Qian Yuan.

I couldn’t help but laugh too. All three of us laughed. The telephone in the living room rang several times before we heard it.

Answering the telephone was my job (answering letters was Zhongshu’s). I hurried to answer it, but I didn’t quite catch who was calling, only that they were summoning Qian Zhongshu to a meeting. I answered hastily, “Qian Zhongshu is still ill. I’m his wife, and I request leave on his behalf.” The person on the other end ignored

me, and instead only ordered: “Report tomorrow. Don’t bring any bags or notebooks. A car will pick him up at 9:00 AM.”

I tried again, “Where is he to report? I can have our driver request leave for him.”

The other end said, “The place is in the mountains and your driver wouldn’t be able to find it. Tomorrow morning at nine o’clock a car will come for him. No bags, no notebooks. Nine o’clock.” The line went dead.

Zhongshu and Ah Yuan had both heard my reply, and Zhongshu had snuck over to sit next to me on the sofa; now Ah Yuan followed her father over as well. She sat on the arm of the sofa next to her father. Since she had learned several rhymes to console children, each time Papa “requested sick leave” and was feeling as guilty as a schoolboy skipping school, she would use these to console him:

*dile dile erduo, hulu hulu mao,  
Women de Baba  
xia bu zhao.*

*Rub, rub your ear,  
Scratch, scratch your hair;  
Our Papa  
can’t be scared!*

(“Papa” (*Baba*) here replaced “Child” (*haizi*.)

I explained what I had been told on the phone and apologized for not having asked what kind of meeting it was. But Zhongshu was 84 years old, had just gotten over a major illness, and had no job that required him to attend meetings, so he shouldn’t be required to go in person. “When that car comes tomorrow,” I said to Zhongshu, “I will report in your place.”



Zhongshu didn't blame me for not getting the details. Without a word, he got up, went into our room, opened the wardrobe, and began to take out his clothes for going out. Hanging them on a clothes-rack, he then took out a clean handkerchief and put it in one of the pockets. He was prepared to go himself, and didn't need me to go for him – perhaps he knew I couldn't go for him.

Ah Yuan and I just kept wondering what sort of meeting it was. Zhongshu listlessly went about his evening routine (washing up, changing), and then went to sleep, like a well-behaved child. As a rule, he was early to bed and early to rise; I was late to bed and late to rise; and Ah Yuan was late to bed and early to rise.

The next morning, Ah Yuan had fixed herself breakfast and long since gone off to school. Breakfast for the two of us was always made by Zhongshu. He boiled water for strong black tea and warmed some milk (we drank milk tea). After cooking the soft-boiled eggs, just right, he toasted bread in our toaster and got butter and jam from the fridge for the table. I got up and we had breakfast together, after which, I cleared the table and washed the dishes. Once he was dressed, we went downstairs for a stroll, and then waited for the car to come pick him up.

As nine o'clock arrived, we stood waiting together by our building's main door. A large black car arrived, and a uniformed driver got out. Having established Qian Zhongshu's identity, he opened the car door and let Zhongshu in. He shut the door again immediately, as if to prevent me from getting in with him. I stood in the doorway and watched as the car drove smoothly away. I don't know what kind of car it was, nor did I note the license plate number.

I went back upstairs to our apartment by myself. Last spring, when Zhongshu had fallen seriously ill, I had gone with him to the hospital to look after him. After he had gotten better and come home, I myself became dizzy and unsteady on my feet, as if a light breeze would be enough to topple me. Only recently had I begun to feel strong enough to walk on my own again, without supporting myself against the wall. Still, I often felt the truth of the saying: age spares no one. I now lacked the strength to do as I wished.

Our maid worked for us on a part-time basis. She'd been with us for over ten years, and as her own circumstances had gradually improved, she had quit working for other families and now served only ours. I trusted her, giving her one of the house keys to tie at her waist. With us staying at the hospital and Ah Yuan off teaching, the house was empty, but she still came to clean as usual. She came in every day or every other day as she saw fit; I left it up to her. That day she left right after she was done cleaning. I cooked rice and covered it to keep it warm, then cut vegetables to stir-fry once Zhongshu got home. I also made a soup, and kept it covered as well.

The wait was vexing. I told myself not to wait, and buried my head in my work. But this was easier said than done: I became more anxious, couldn't focus on my books, and ended up pacing about the house. It was nearly two o'clock and Zhongshu still hadn't returned. I ladled myself half a bowl of soup and put in two scoops of rice. I ate these in a hurry and then lay down, my thoughts running wild. I thought and thought, until something frightening occurred to me. How could I have let Zhongshu get in a car sent by God-knows-who, heading for who-knows-where?

It was late by the time Ah Yuan came home. I hadn't eaten dinner, hadn't even thought to make it. The maid had bought a large, tender piece of beef, which Ah Yuan knew how to roast but I didn't. I had planned to slow-cook it in a pot to make good stock for borscht—a favourite of theirs. But I had been in such a state that I completely forgot everything and was simply waiting for Ah Yuan to come home and ease my mind.

I don't have much of an appetite to begin with, and I wasn't hungry. Zhongshu also ate little now that he was old, so on days when Ah Yuan wasn't home we tried to avoid bother in the kitchen and ate simply. When Ah Yuan was coming to dinner, I'd just increase the quantity a bit. But after a hard day at work, she would come home to prepare lessons and grade papers, always working deep into the night, so she often said, "Mama, I'm hungry." I would then feel sorry and remind myself to cook her a nice big dinner. This past year, though, I'd become decrepit. It was Ah Yuan who now devoted the care and energy to making us good meals, always coaxing us to eat a few more bites. She often said, "I read cookbooks the way I use dictionaries: just as I look up each character in three dictionaries, I consult three recipes for each dish." By that time she had already taught herself to be quite an able cook. She bought a simple oven, and then a more complicated one, and painstakingly roasted all kinds of meat for us, each time watching us anxiously to see if we liked them or not. I made myself eat, and it was quite tasty, but because I was sick I had no appetite. (Zhongshu might have felt the same after he fell ill.) Afraid of disappointing her, I always said, "Delicious!" "Thanks, Mom," she'd reply, grateful but somewhat doubtful. Sometimes, watching her father eat, she'd say, "Thank you, Papa." We both teased her for being so silly. She did it for our

nutrition and if we had trouble eating, then she would also lose interest. Many times there was lots of food left over, but she didn't have the heart to eat it.

That whole day I could only fidget; I hadn't even made dinner. The few vegetables, mushrooms and thin slices of pork loin that I had prepared for making lunch were not enough to fill one up. I had already eaten half the small pot of rice so Ah Yuan would go hungry again. What's more, she also had to talk some sense into her mother, and stop my imagination from running wild with fear and worry.

"A meeting in the mountains might well take three days," she said.

"But where will he stay? He didn't even bring a towel or a toothbrush."

"The host location will have all of those things," she said. In jest, she added, "Want to make a report at the police station, Mama?"

I did indeed. But how?

I had Ah Yuan so worried that she couldn't enjoy her meal. She didn't have school the next day, but there were still endless papers to grade and classes to prepare. That night I pretended to sleep so that she could at least work in peace. It was a good thing I'd have her by my side the next morning for moral support. Still, I didn't sleep at all that night.

We awoke early and made breakfast together. After breakfast she told me to go for a walk, but I didn't want to go out walking all by myself. She washed the dishes; I boiled water and filled each of the thermoses, which was customarily Zhongshu's job. I couldn't settle my feelings; I could only remain in a daze, pacing the room in circles. I didn't even hear the phone ring.

It was Ah Yuan who answered. "Papa!" she yelled out happily.

I hurried over and stood next to her.

She said, “Um-hm...mm-hm.....mm-hm.....mm-hm.” It was all, “mm–hm.” Then she hung up.

Agitated, I asked, “What did he say?”

But she waved me aside, snatched up a piece of paper and began scribbling hurriedly, as if she was running out of time. Her characters looked cryptic.

“I’ve found Papa! But I have to take care of something.” She tapped her temples with both fingers. “Don’t allow me to forget. I’ll tell you more when I return.”

She grabbed her purse and headed briskly out the door. On her way out she paused. “Mom, don’t worry. If I’m not back in time for lunch, start without me.”

I was glad Ah Yuan had answered the phone because she had a good memory. I tried forcing myself not to worry, but I worried nonetheless. I wasn’t thinking nonsense any more – I concentrated on waiting for Ah Yuan to come home, so I just put my work aside, and devoted myself to making a good lunch.

Before I had retired, I had made a pledge to them: “Once I’m retired, and I’ll make it up to you and pay back my debt by cooking great dishes for you two every meal.” I spent most of my life apologizing – I was never much of a housewife, because I never devoted myself to it. The two of them both laughed off my pledge. “Just forget it.” Ah Yuan was less than courteous, saying “Mama can’t even use knives properly; sharp ones frighten her, and she’s also too impatient to wait for the pot to boil.” And Zhongshu said, “Why should all the cooking fall to you? You’ve ‘retired’, so why ‘retire’ yourself?”

To be honest, they'd never complained about my cooking. So long as I made it, they always sang its praises. But this time I set my mind on making a truly delicious meal that would take them by surprise. At the same time I thought that I was sure to ruin it, or that if I cooked well, they wouldn't be home on time. Because – because things more often than not have a way of getting twisted around. They always differ from what we hope or imagine.

The meal I made was great - I shouldn't have cooked so well - so I was of course as disappointed as could be, and as agitated as could be, too. Ah Yuan had told me not to wait, but how could I not? I waited and waited and it was almost four o'clock when Ah Yuan returned, alone. As soon as she got home she took off her shoes and put on slippers—clearly she had done a lot of walking and was exhausted—and poured herself a drink of water. My heart sank.

Ah Yuan, though, sounded pleased. “Found him at last! I had the address right, transferred buses twice, and I found it on the first try. But I stood twice in wrong queues, one of which was really long, a complete waste of time. When it was my turn, the man at the window said, ‘Don't queue here; in the back.’ Then he wouldn't pay any more attention to me. But where was ‘the back?’ I asked around everywhere about the place Papa mentioned, but they all said they hadn't heard of it. I was afraid that I wouldn't find it before business hours were over, when suddenly I saw a small room way in the back with a man standing at a window, just about to shut it. I hurried over and asked him, ‘Where is the Old Post Road?’ He said, ‘Right here.’ Whew! What a relief that was! I was afraid I had forgotten the directions, and where else could I look?”

“The Old Post Road?” I frowned in thought, but it didn't ring a bell.

“Yes, Mama. Let me tell you from the beginning. After Papa reported in, he stole a moment to make the phone call. He said they all had to go to some big meeting hall, and they could pick their means of transportation: there were planes, and trains, and cars, and motor coaches. Tickets for the air and land routes had all been snapped up, Papa said, by people who wanted to get there early and sit in the front row, so he let them grab them; he didn’t care. He chose a way to go that nobody else wanted: by boat. He gave very specific directions, and that it was ‘the Old Post Road.’ The worker at the office window said to me, “We’re closing – come back in the afternoon.” Actually, it was still five minutes before the lunch break; he said they would re-open at two o’clock. I didn’t dare go far, though there wasn’t any place to eat nearby. I just found a place to sit beneath the window. I waited until seventeen or eighteen minutes past two before the man opened the window again, but at least when he saw me standing in exactly the same place as before he was somewhat apologetic. He asked, ‘Are you a family member? Only immediate family count.’ ‘Immediate family’ means just us two, you and me. He gave me the address of a nearby inn and said we should go there to take care of the procedure. He explained everything to me in detail.”

“It’s too late to go today,” Ah Yuan continued. “They’ll certainly be closed by now. Mama, it’s no good worrying – we’ll just have to wait till tomorrow.”

I heated some beef broth to take the edge off Ah Yuan’s hunger and had a couple of spoonfuls myself. I asked, “Where’s ‘there?’”

Ah Yuan said, “I wrote it all down. There’s still lots of red tape to be taken care of, but I’ve got it all written down here.” She showed me the notebook she kept in her purse. She said, “We need to take both cash and bank deposit slips with us, because we

have to take care of the procedure all at once, and if there is extra they will return the money, but if there isn't enough, we won't be able to complete the procedure on the road.”

I thought this sounded more like a kidnapping case, but I didn't dare say so, because Ah Yuan always got her facts straight. I reheated the rice, and we ate our dinner and lunch in one sitting, though we didn't taste anything.

I asked doubtfully, “How long will all these procedures take? How much luggage should we bring?”

Ah Yuan said, “We'll need two changes of clothes. All daily necessities will be supplied by the inn, and all we need is money; everything we'll need is there.” She gave me an overview of the details, but I could only listen half-heartedly.

“Mom, don't be distressed,” Ah Yuan kept repeating. “I'm here for you. Tomorrow we'll see Papa.”

I felt helpless. “I'm afraid it will be too much for Papa. But he did at least know to give us a phone call. And it was lucky that you answered. I'd never have remembered everything. When I go out nowadays, I don't know my way or which bus to take—I've become a good-for-nothing old rice bucket.”

Ah Yuan cocked her head and made a face. “But my rice-bucket of a mother can only hold a few grains of rice, and maybe a spoonful of soup.” I had to laugh at that. “Anyhow, don't worry,” she consoled, “I'll get you safely to the inn, and you won't need to know the roads or ride the bus. But I'll have to commute back and forth, because I have to go to class.”



Ah Yuan pored over her notebook. I packed a small handbag, sorted out the bank deposit slips, and left the cash for Ah Yuan.

The next day after breakfast Ah Yuan carried my bag for me and slung her own purse over her shoulder. The two of us caught a cab to a distant bus stop. Carrying both bags and, shielding me, she squeezed us onto the bus. It was a long ride. We got off the bus in a wild and remote area, and then walked a short way, until we came to a large roadside sign made out of an old plank of wood. On the sign were three characters written in ancient seal script: “Old Post Road”. Below this were many lines of smaller characters, but since I hadn’t brought my glasses, I could only vaguely make out several place names which looked familiar, like Baling Road and Xianyang Road. Ah Yuan’s eyes were sharper: pointing, she said, “We’re here – this is it. Mama, all you have to do is find number ‘311.’ That’s Papa’s number.”

She led me around a bend towards an entryway. She pressed at a certain inconspicuous spot on the gate, which turned out to be the doorbell. A window immediately opened in the gate. Ah Yuan showed her ID; the window closed, and then the gate opened. We were entering the inn through the back gate; which shut behind us.

The inn was a small building facing south, with the back door on the north end. Immediately inside was the front desk.

“Are you tired, Mama?” Ah Yuan asked. She found me a place to sit near the front desk, bid me sit, and put the luggage down beside me; then she summoned the person behind the counter to take care of the procedures. First there was the examination of all manner of credentials, each of which Ah Yuan had brought. After the innkeeper had examined all of these closely, he took out several forms and had her fill

them out, one by one. She filled them out one after another, and then paid the fee. I thought to myself, if this is a ransom payment, they're certainly being bureaucratic about it! The innkeeper recorded each of the deposit receipts one by one, explaining as he did so, "The rooms here are a bit crude, but we have new-style management. All of the pavilions along this road, large and small, have been converted into inns, which are all linked together into a single chain. Once you've collected your disk, you don't have to pay again. Each inn provides food, shelter and all other conveniences. Clothing and everyday items for travelers can all be picked up and billed at each inn. When you leave the room, put all your things together and present them at the front desk. Boat passengers are taken care of by the onboard staff, so there's nothing you have to do. All guests of the inn must respect our regulations." He pulled out one sheet printed with warnings, and another with regulations.

The warnings were in black characters on a red placard. The characters were enormous:

Stay on the Post Road. Do not walk where there is no road.

Do not go to places you cannot see.

Do not ask about things you do not know.

The regulations were in black characters on white paper. These characters were also enormous:

1. When the sun descends to the ship's front deck, return to the inn immediately. As

the post road is in a remote and wild area, once the gates are locked, they will not be opened even if knocked upon.

2. Each inn provides opportunities for rest, toilet and meals; do not miss them.
3. After disembarking, return to the inn whence you came.

The innkeeper gave us each a disk with a number on it, and had us make a fingerprint on the reverse side. At the same time, he admonished us always to carry our disks when we went out, to adhere to regulations, and not to forget the warnings, especially the third, because the mouth is the most difficult thing to control.

Inside the inn, lunch was just being served for us, so they asked us to eat before setting out again. I felt puzzled, especially about the third warning. There were so many things we didn't know. Why couldn't we ask about them? What would happen if we did ask?

I pointed at the third entry on the red placard and spoke to the innkeeper deliberately using an affirmative tone: "I can't use a question mark or any interrogative pronouns." Saying it like this shouldn't count as a question. But the innkeeper glared at me and warned, "You're already on the edge with these words. Careful!" "Thank you, I understand," I hastened to reply.

Ah Yuan quietly gave my hand a squeeze, which was also intended as a warning. After our meal I took a small pin out of my bag and pinned it to my sleeve. I often put a pin on my sleeve when I wanted to remember something – it is a most useful reminder.

To the side of the front desk was a large double door, half of which was open; this was the front gate of the inn. The front gate faced north. We exited from the front gate, and were suddenly awakened to a whole new realm.

## 2. Reunion on the Old Post Road

There was a thick, enveloping fog; beyond five hundred paces one couldn't see clearly, and the air was dense and stifling. Outside the gate was a long road on an embankment running east to west, constructed of earth, and wide enough to accommodate two large vehicles. The north and south sides of the road were paved with stones. The inn was south of the road; the canal, north of the road. Above the front gate hung a freshly-painted sign with the word "Inn" inscribed in large characters. On both sides of the road were ancient willow trees. To the south wall of the post road, below the embankment, began the wilderness that lies behind the city, with an assortment of trees growing in clusters, wild grasses running rampant, and ivy that climbed all the way up to the roadside trees. In the distance, one could make out a few bluish-green pines and cypresses, perhaps marking some family's tomb grounds. A forest seemed to stretch away from the east end of the post road. The inn also seemed to be surrounded by woods. We approached the bank of the canal. The embankment was very high and steep; the water below was quiet and still, with not a single ripple visible. The water was bright and clear, but the clouds and fog were reflected in it, giving the effect of heaven and earth facing each other, about to come together. Perhaps this was one reason it felt so stifling. Following the canal winding westward with one's gaze, one felt only

that the road ahead was so far, so far, so boundless and so mystifying and indistinct. By the side of the river was a stretch of green grass, leading toward the unbroken expanse of distant road.

The ancient roots of the willow trees had burst up from under the post road, which rose and fell with the shape of the land. The paving stones at its edges were filled with potholes, which made for hard going. And on the river I had yet to see a boat.

Ah Yuan supported me by the arm. “Be careful, Mama. Keep your eyes on the ground.”

I knew to be careful, because I had only just begun to walk on my own again since my illness. I placed each of my steps on firm ground so as to save Ah Yuan the trouble of steadying me; she was tired enough already. We walked and walked — but we didn’t go very far before we spotted a small skiff moored by the bank, which we then hurried towards.

The bank next to the bow had a bamboo punting-pole planted into it, and the boat was roped to this pole. The boat was very small, but it had a front cabin, rear cabin, bow and stern, though it lacked a rudder or oars. A gangplank had been placed between the stern and the sandy river bank. A very long bank that met up with the gangplank stretched down from the edge of the post road.

Ah Yuan stopped short. “Look, Mama, the number at the end of the boat is 311; it’s Papa’s boat.”

I saw it too. Ah Yuan started down the bank and I followed, saying, “Don’t worry, I have good balance.” But Ah Yuan had never seen a gangplank before, and was

scared to go on. I went first, holding her hand and drawing her across; with great care, she shuffled across sideways. The two of us were on the boat.

The boat was very clean, the rear cabin completely empty, and installed in the front cabin was a clean and neatly-made bed, with snowy white sheets and a snowy white pillow — just like a hospital room — and Zhongshu lay there on his side, his chest rising and falling evenly, sleeping peacefully.

We took off our shoes in the rear cabin and quietly approached the bed. We could see his lips were tightly shut, his eyes brimming with tears, and on his face were traces of tears. Next to the pillow was a clean handkerchief, the very one he had taken with him; it had clearly been washed, because there weren't any creases. On the boat there was no one else to be seen.

There must have been a boatman who managed the boat, and perhaps also his wife who had washed the handkerchief. Had they both gone ashore? (I could only conjecture.)

I felt his forehead and found his temperature normal, then used his handkerchief to wipe away his tears as I called softly in his ear, “Zhongshu, Zhongshu.” Ah Yuan stood obediently beside me.

He opened his eyes immediately, opened them very wide. Without his glasses, the double-folds of his eyelids were beautiful, but his face seemed quite haggard. “Jikang, Ah Yuan,” he called, his mind at ease. His voice was weak and his expression sorrowful as he began to tell us of his travails, stopping now and again, “They brought me to some place very, very high up – I didn't know where! Then they brought me down again, going round and round; it made me so tired I couldn't keep my eyes open,

yet I didn't dare sleep. I heard the sound of a boat traveling on water — am I on a boat? I was so afraid you would never find me.”

Ah Yuan said, “Papa, we're here now. Don't worry!”

I said, “Ah Yuan got me here in one piece with never a wrong turn. If you can't keep your eyes open, just close them — relax and sleep for a moment.”

He was so exhausted he couldn't go on and immediately shut his eyes.

There was no place for us to sit, so we just sat cross-legged on the floor. He extended half a hand out from under the sheet and moved his fingers, beckoning us to hold them. Ah Yuan sat at the foot of the bed holding his feet, and he moved them in response. We three were back together again. There was no need to speak; all of us felt at ease. I held his hand and lay my head against the side of the bed. Ah Yuan held his feet and rested her head on the foot of the bed. Even though it was on the Old Post Road, it was still a family reunion.

Ah Yuan and I looked around. Zhongshu's glasses had disappeared, as had his shoes. All four walls of the front cabin seemed to be storage cabinets, but we didn't dare open them to look in. Just off the bow of the ship was a large stone block. This probably served as an anchor.

“Oh no!” exclaimed Ah Yuan, suddenly. “Mama, I have class today and I completely forgot! Tomorrow I'll definitely have to go to school.”

“You won't make it even if you leave now,” I said.

“I've never skipped class before. They'll certainly phone. Argh! — I'll have to set up a make-up class! I'll have to go home tonight to phone the department.”

If Ah Yuan went home, I would be left all alone at the inn. I normally thought of myself as very independent, but just now I felt like a clinging vine. Still, I couldn't stop Ah Yuan from going. At least the procedures were all taken care of, and the inn was not far from the boat.

I sighed. "You should take early retirement. Just say your father is old, and your mother is muddled, and it's become too much for you. And you've only published the first volume of the textbook you're editing; you still need to write volume two."

"Mama, you don't understand," said Ah Yuan. "I have to teach to make new discoveries; only then can I revise and add to my work. Even the volume already published requires substantial revisions – Mama, you're always hoping I'll retire, but I'm afraid it'll still be unlikely even after another three to five years."

I felt ashamed, like I was the only one without anything meaningful to do. I was silent. The sun had now dipped below the hull of the boat. I said softly, "The sun is shining into the front cabin, so we must return to the inn, but if Papa still hasn't woken up..." I rubbed the pin on my sleeve, and stopped short of asking a question.

"Wake him." Ah Yuan made decisions quickly, just like her father.

Zhongshu still seemed to be fast asleep. Behind the clouds, the blood-red sun had not yet angled towards the head of the bed when Zhongshu suddenly opened his eyes. Looking at us, he recited our names as if to console himself: Jikang, Yuan Yuan. We quickly explained that the sun shining into the front cabin meant we had to return to the inn. Ah Yuan said, "I'll come see you every week. Mama will be by your side every day. It's nice and quiet here."



“I heard everything,” Zhongshu said. He had sharp ears, and remained half awake when he slept. He suddenly widened his tightly shut lips into a thin, mischievous smile and then asked knowingly, “Jiang, still having dreams?”

I paused for a moment, dumbfounded. “It’s like I’m dreaming right at this moment.” That was the answer that came out of my mouth, but I knew I hadn’t answered his question. For a moment, I was at a loss.

Ah Yuan stood up and said, “We should go. Papa, I’ll be back to see you on Sunday. Mama will be back tomorrow.”

“Go on then,” Zhongshu said.

I said to him, “See you tomorrow. Sleep well.” We hurried to the rear cabin to put on our shoes. I went onto the gangplank first, leading Ah Yuan along. She could only go sideways, one step at a time. We disembarked and returned to the post road. The two of us tried to hurry back to the inn, but the road was bad, and I couldn’t walk fast.

Once back at the inn, Ah Yuan said, “Mama, I wish I could stay here with you, but I need to hurry home to make a phone call. I also need to schedule a make-up class....Mama, you’ll be here all by yourself....” She hadn’t the heart to leave me behind.

I thought how the inn wasn’t far from the boat, and though I wasn’t entirely comfortable with being alone, I couldn’t stand to be a burden to Ah Yuan. “Don’t worry,” I said, “I can walk steadily now. You’ll never make it in time for dinner as it is, so you’d better leave now; if you wait any longer you’ll get stuck in traffic.”

No sooner had we entered the inn than the front gate was bolted.

Ah Yuan said, “Mom, you be careful on the road. Best to go slow.” I said, “Don’t worry. Get plenty of sleep!” She agreed, then hurried out the back door, which was again immediately closed behind her. Both the front and back doors were closely watched.

As before, I sat downstairs at the little dining table, waiting for dinner to be served. I ordered something light and bland, then sat down to look around. There was a counter inside the inn, as well as a large stove, one innkeeper, and several employees, one of whom was a woman with a genial disposition. We smiled softly in greeting. I discovered a window facing the counter, beside which was a large turntable, upon which rotated out tea, dim sum, and entrées. The window was obscured by something, so I hadn’t noticed it at lunch. I said to the woman, “It’s busy over there — no need to hurry, I can wait.” The woman explained to me that outside the inn was a little dim sum store, soliciting customers on the road running north and south, and this store also supplied entrées and tea. I gestured with my fingers upstairs, not daring to open my mouth. She said that upstairs was for storage, and the innkeeper also lived there. There weren’t any other guests.

Upstairs, my room had an en suite bathroom, which was very clean. My bag was already in the room. Exhausted from all the walking, I fell asleep as soon as I went to bed.

In my sleep I was transformed into a dream — a light and nimble one. I wanted to go someplace high up where I could look at the boat on the river. In a flash, I am atop a streetlamp outside the inn. The river on the other side of the post road is not visible; neither, of course, is the boat next to the riverbank; it has no lamp. On the south of the

inn, though, visibility is good, with the flashing of lights in a variety of colors: red, green, yellow, blue – these are the myriad lights of the city without night, Beijing. Where is Sanlihe? In a flash, I am on the top of the cypress tree that grows in front of our bedroom window at home; the whole house is dark, with Ah Yuan on some unknown street, on some unknown bus. Tomorrow our son-in-law will come over for breakfast – does he know what has happened to our family? In another flash, I am at the Xishicao, home of Ah Yuan’s mother-in-law. Several rooms of the house are lit up. Ah! Ah Yuan has just put down the telephone receiver, and come to sit at the dinner table. Her mother-in-law sits by her side. My son-in-law ladles her a bowl of soup and tells her to drink some as he asks,

“Can I go see them?”

“You can’t, they only allow the two of us, Mama and me.”

“You should move back in with us,” says her mother-in-law.

“But all my books are there,” replies Ah Yuan, “and it’s closer to school. I have to go back right after dinner.”

I stay next to Ah Yuan, listening to their conversation; later I follow Ah Yuan as she boards the bus again to return to Sanlihe. After she bathes she still doesn’t go to sleep but prepares for class deep into the night. Although I am nimble in my dream, I am utterly helpless, with no way to persuade Yuan Yuan to go to sleep earlier. A dream can also be fatiguing. I stop for a rest at the head of my bed, in a corner near my wardrobe, and feel myself begin to fade away. Fade into nothingness.

I opened my eyes. I was on the bed at the inn, and my limbs actually felt well rested. I ate my breakfast and hurried on my way, wanting to board the boat early and

be with Zhongshu. I could more or less remember the route I had travelled the previous day, but the boat beneath the bank had disappeared.

I panicked. It hadn't occurred to me that since the boat was in the water, of course it could move. How far had it gone? There was no one around to ask. All alone, and apprehensive, I was mortally afraid of what would happen if I went too fast and fell down, but I also feared that I would miss the boat, and I feared even more that if I went too slowly I'd never catch up with it. I carefully minded each step, while carefully searching for the boat. Then, on the left side of the Post Road, another inn appeared. Not daring to miss the opportunity, I went in to eat and rest. The inn was exactly the same as the other one – only the innkeeper and his employees were different people. I entered with my disk out, like a familiar customer. I washed my hands and set out on the road again, full of trepidation. Fortunately, after just a short way I could see the sloping embankment on the right side of the Post Road. Boat no. 311 was moored there, exactly as before. I crossed the gangplank and boarded the boat, then took off my shoes in the rear cabin. Zhongshu, half sitting, half lying down, leaned against the pillow, waiting for me.

“Where's Ah Yuan?” he asked.

“She went to school.”

As before, I sat cross-legged before his bed. I felt his forehead. His temperature was normal, his neck soft and smooth. His handkerchief was draped over his pillow, apparently washed once again. His expression was composed, but his face was so wan and sallow, he suddenly seemed much thinner.

“I've been waiting for you all this time,” he said.

I told him that I had been worried about falling down, so I had walked slowly.

I told him about how I had become a dream and about all the things I had seen of Ah Yuan, as if they had really happened. He listened intently but didn't ask me how I could know these things. Having gotten tired from waiting for me, he closed his eyes out of sheer exhaustion. I had been tired in my dream, I had tired myself out walking, and I had tired myself with anxiety, so I too closed my eyes, and lay my head on the side of his bed. Keeping him company like that, my heart felt completely assured. When it was time to leave the boat, I got up and said I had to head back. He replied, "See you tomorrow. Take your time! Take care on the road." I walked step by step back to the inn.

Still, my heart was in a knot. Would Ah Yuan be as confused as I had been in assuming the boat would stay moored in its original place? The boat had probably travelled all night. Come Sunday, which inn would Ah Yuan find me in?

The inns were indeed "all one chain," and my bag had already been moved to a room in another inn. Just as before, I spent a night there; just as before, I became a dream, following Ah Yuan around; just as before, I passed yet another inn and again found Zhongshu's boat. He was waiting for me just as he had before, and I kept him company just as I had before.

One day led to another, and every day I waited for Sunday to arrive, though I had lost track of time. One day after I'd had my meal and washed up I was just about to go when suddenly, I heard Ah Yuan call out, "Mom." She hadn't even brought the bag she usually carried around on her shoulder, though in my dream I had seen her

arranging the bag before she slept. Not daring to ask a question, I could only say, “You didn’t bring your book bag.”

She said she didn’t need a book bag and merely pulled a small purse from her pocket for me to see, taking me by the arm as we set off. I was surprised and full of admiration, for I had no idea how Ah Yuan had found me; again I didn’t dare ask, but only said “I was afraid you wouldn’t find us.” Ah Yuan said, “I was able to figure it all out.” Workers at the Old Post Road Office had given her the boat’s travelling schedule and she could find our location according to the daily itinerary. Knowing this was a big load off my mind.

We boarded the boat together. When Zhongshu saw Ah Yuan he was very happy, so even though he was exhausted, he didn’t shut his eyes; and though I was weary, I was also excited, because we were having another reunion on the boat.

Only when it was time to part with Ah Yuan did I seriously implore her to get to sleep a little earlier, and not to dilly-dally so late into the evening. Ah Yuan said, “Mama, you’ve been tiring yourself even when you dream; an exhausted mind will have nightmares.” Last year when Papa had had surgery, she had suffered spinal cord pain in her neck, and had often had nightmares. Now she was better. She said, “You’re so impatient, Mama. We can only take the road as it is.”

Still, how often I wished that Ah Yuan and I could think of some way to carry Zhongshu off the boat and sneak him back to our house. As if that could ever happen!

My dreams were no longer light and nimble; dreaming wearied me, and my dreams were now all terribly heavy. I turned into a dream and saw Ah Yuan busying herself here and there, saw her eating dinner, the telephone disturbing her, and once two

students even coming to look for her late at night. I saw my son-in-law in our kitchen heating water to warm up a medicinal plaster placed on the kettle, which he then opened and stuck onto Ah Yuan's neck. Was all of this real? Was her neck in pain again? I didn't dare tell these things to Zhongshu as if they were true. Luckily he never asked.

The willows on the embankment began to turn yellow and shed their leaves, until each tree was bare. Every day, I went down the post road, step after step, trailed by my own shadow, treading on fallen leaves.

One Sunday, the three of us were together on the boat. Zhongshu no longer had the energy to sit up even half-way, so he was lying flat. I discovered that at some unknown point his dentures had disappeared. He was losing weight by the day, as if he wasn't eating. I felt his forehead and found it a little feverish. I felt Ah Yuan's forehead too; they were both feverish. I tried my own forehead – it was they that were hot. Ah Yuan said with a smile, "Mama is a bit cool is all, it's not that we're warm."

But the next day I noticed a purple welt on the back of Zhongshu's hand, as if an IV had caused him to bleed under the skin. And his eyes would not open, so he just gave my hand a little squeeze. I held his hand, and he slept soundly until the sun shone into the front cabin. He had an exceptionally strong sense of time, and he always opened his eyes just when our time was about up. He nodded his head in my direction. I said, "Sleep well; see you tomorrow."

"Go on, then," was all he'd say.

Ah Yuan's calculations were accurate; she always came to find me at the inn nearest the boat. She came every week to see her father, except for a few times when she was away on business: to Xiamen, to Kunming, to Chongqing. I always

remembered the departure and arrival times of her flights. When she was away on business, I didn't dream either, taking the opportunity to rest. Zhongshu was on the IV a few more times, his temperature returned to normal, and his spirits improved a little too. On the boat together we talked about Ah Yuan.

I said, "Well she certainly 'outshines her parents, and surpasses her ancestors.' When you had to speak at conferences you could always manage. Every time I had to speak at a conference, I was so frightened it set my heart pounding—I couldn't say a word. But Ah Yuan's always has her own opinions, and she dares to express them. She even chaired those last few conferences."

Zhongshu said with a sigh, "Our Yuan Yuan is 'moldable material,' but....."

Each time Ah Yuan returned, she had lots of interesting things to tell us. These filled in the gaps left by my lack of dreams. Often during our reunions on the boat, her forehead was as roasting hot as Zhongshu's. She also had a dry, hacking cough. I was worried. "You should go see a doctor. And take a taxi when you go, and on the way back, too." She said she had seen a doctor, and that it was chronic bronchitis.

Laughing, she explained how when jostling aboard the bus with her big book bag, one fellow passenger said to her: "Come on, Granny! Why haven't you retired?" I said, "Taking the crowded bus here and back is a waste of time, and time isn't money; it's life – remember that. Take a taxi both ways." Ah Yuan said, "Taxis often get so stuck in traffic, and you can't go forward or back. The buses are faster."

My dreams were now very heavy, but when Ah Yuan came back from her work trips, I would follow her around every night. I saw my son-in-law on the phone at our house scheduling an MRI and a CT-scan for her. I had nightmares several nights in a



row. One night, my son-in-law made call after call from our house, trying one person after another, endeavouring to get Ah Yuan transferred to a specialist. Finally he found one.

I was dazed and confused walking along the old post road, step by step. The willow trees are the heartiest adaptors to the four seasons. With the first wisps of the autumn winds, they yellowed and began to shed, and in each strong wind they shed pile after pile of leaves, until in winter the trees were completely bare. Then, even before the spring breezes arrived, the willow buds would already have sprouted, already offering a hint of green when seen from afar. In the spring winds, the long leaves, soft and green, swayed back and forth. Soon after, the willow floss would cast forth like mist, staying in flight for a month or two. Before the floss's flight was over, the willow trees, now green, offered shade. After that, patch after patch would yellow again and began to fall, leaving each tree again bare and cold. Step by step, I walked along that old post road for over a year.

### 3. Parting on the Old Post Road

A frigid day. After my meal I was once again carefully making my way up the stairs, to get the mittens that Ah Yuan had knit for me. Downstairs, I suddenly caught sight of Ah Yuan leaning against the front desk. Then she said the word, "Mom," and it was warmer, softer and more intimate than usual. She had just come two days earlier, so I did not know why she was here again. She said, "Mom, I've requested an extended leave. The doctor says my old illness is back." She wiggled the index finger of her right

hand – when she was little, she had developed bone tuberculosis in the finger joints, which had required almost a year’s recuperation. “This time it’s in my lumbar vertebrae. I’ll have to stay in hospital.” She inched up to me and leaned against me. “I wish I could go see Papa, but my back hurts so much that I can’t bend over, and I can’t walk, I can only stand. Wei [my son-in-law] is about to take me to the hospital. The hospital is at the foot of the Western Hills, where the air is particularly good. The doctor says treatment will take six months to a year, but then I’ll be completely recovered. I came specially to tell you in person, and to tell Papa not to worry. Wei’s waiting for me now at the back door. He wants to see you too.” She also reminded me, “Mama, don’t go out the back gate. Our car’s waiting right outside.” The innkeeper opened the back door for us. With me supporting her, we proceeded slowly. Outside, my son-in-law and I exchanged a few words, and he told me not to worry. I stood in the back gate, watching as he put his arms around Yuan Yuan’s waist and they got into a car waiting by the side of the road. Yuan Yuan rolled down the window, took off her glove, and then reached out her tiny, pale hand, just to wave goodbye. I watched the car drive off until it was far away, then turned back to the inn. The back gate closed behind me. Alone and disoriented, I went out the front gate and on to the post road.

The post road was now covered with fallen leaves, so that I couldn’t see its surface clearly and had to tread carefully. I pondered whether to tell Zhongshu, or to hide the truth from him. I could never hide it even if I tried, so I had to tell him. Yuan Yuan had come especially to tell me to tell Papa.

Zhongshu was waiting for me, and perhaps he was a little angry, because he deliberately shut his eyes and paid me no heed. As always, I sat down cross-legged at

the end of his bed. I spoke slowly. "Ah Yuan was here just now, to ask me to relay a few things to you." Immediately, his eyes were wide open. I conveyed what Ah Yuan had told me in the most indirect way I could, emphasizing that the doctor said in just six months to a year she'd be completely recovered. I said, "There used to be no medicine to treat this, but now there is. All she has to do is rest six months to a year, and she'll make a complete recovery. Ah Yuan asks you not to worry."

Zhongshu listened, and for a long time did not speak. Then, he said something I never could have predicted: "Bad things can turn out to be good things; now she can finally rest up. And when she's all better, she needn't shoulder so much responsibility."

These words were a great consolation to me. Ah Yuan was a stout woman with rosy red cheeks, whom no one could ever get to rest, but now that she was sick even she would have to spare herself the whip. If she took the opportunity to rest up, it would be a good thing.

Silently, we remembered the past: Ah Yuan's intermittent illnesses when she was little, past fatigues, past worries, past hopes ... I squeezed Zhongshu's hand and he squeezed back, as if to tell me not to worry.

On the road back to the inn, so many things weighed on my mind. If Ah Yuan was going to be hospitalized, how would I be able to find her? And I needed to find her. I needed to have another exhausting dream. I barely swallowed a few mouthfuls of dinner before going up to bed to sleep. I turned into a very heavy dream.

My dream ran to the back gate of the inn, where that tiny, pale hand seemed to be still calling me. Dazed as I was, I could always see that tiny hand before my eyes. The Western Hills were visible in the distance, even in the darkness. I looked for her the

entire the way there. The Tsinghua campus, the Summer Palace—this was familiar territory to me. As I chanted ‘Ah Yuan,’ ‘Ah Yuan,’ that tiny, pale hand kept beckoning me. I finally found her hospital amidst a grove of dark pines.

Entering the gate to the grounds, I saw under the lamplight a ceremonial arch—I had actually entered a tiny, pale hand beckoned. I passed through a gate, through a window, and entered Ah Yuan’s sickroom. She was lying flat on a bed fitted with white sheets, covered by a thick comforter, but no pillow. The bed looked hard. The room had two beds. The other, empty one, was a little smaller, and didn’t look like a sickbed; probably it was there for whoever accompanied the patient. A doctor and a nurse were working at her side, and my son-in-law had left. There were two vases full of flowers in the room, as well as one bouquet that had not yet been untied. The doctor and the nurse conversed quietly, then left the room together and went into an office. I wanted to go with them to hear what they were saying, but I couldn’t get in. I went back to Ah Yuan’s room. Ah Yuan, eyes closed, was sleeping tranquilly. I pressed against her, and patted her, but she didn’t sense my presence.

Ignoring my fatigue, I hurried to Xishicao, where I heard my son-in-law speaking to his mother, saying that it was a good thing he had brought the thick comforter for the bed, and that he wanted to install a telephone by the head of her bed, as well as a refrigerator. Her living and nursing needs for that day had been entrusted to a service worker and he had already hired a maid named Auntie Liu. I returned again to Ah Yuan; she was now fast asleep, and I was too worn out to move, so I stopped by the side of her bed, and disappeared.

I opened my eyes to find myself in my bed at the inn. Could I really have become a dream, following Ah Yuan's beckoning hand to find the Ah Yuan in the hospital? Could there be such a thing? I thought that Ah Yuan must be only a dream of mine. When, in pain, she took little steps to be at Mama's side, leaning on Mama, I could feel the pain in her waist; I could also sense how she couldn't bear to leave Mama for the hospital, couldn't bear to abandon me to make my way alone back and forth on the old post road. But I only supported her by the waist and walked with slow steps to the back gate, and handed her over to my son-in-law. She bent down to sit in the car, which must have been very painful indeed—yet she still rolled down the car window, removed her glove, and reached out one hand to wave at Mama; how she wished she could stay. My Ah Yuan, my only daughter, always tugging at my heartstrings—I could never put her out of my mind even in my dreams, and so I created this dreamscape, and I did see her. It was a dream of mine, wasn't it? I really cannot ascertain whether my dream was fiction or reality. I don't believe I could really find her hospital.

I went to Zhongshu's boat as usual; he was waiting for me. I grasped his hand; his palm was scalding hot. I felt his forehead, which was also roasting. Zhongshu was running a fever, Ah Yuan was also running a fever – this was the one thing I knew for certain.

Before, each day I would tell Zhongshu all about Ah Yuan's life at home. Now, I described for him how I had dreamt of Ah Yuan's sickroom, and I told him how our son-in-law was installing a phone at her bedside, and wanted a refrigerator for her too, and so on. Zhongshu never asked me how I knew all this. He was stuck on a boat by the side of the old post road, so of course I would know what was happening beyond the

post road, at home. It was as if I were still at home, but he had now left it. Everything I told him was news from home. He listened attentively.

He never said as much, but in his heart he was as concerned about Ah Yuan as I. Every day I told him about the Ah Yuan I saw in my dreams. Even though he was running a fever and in very weak spirits, he always listened with solicitude.

I dreamt every night, and every night I was in Ah Yuan's sickroom. The telephone had been installed right next to the bed. The flowers in her room multiplied. The extra bed was taken by Auntie Liu, who cared for Ah Yuan, calling her "Professor Qian," but Ah Yuan wouldn't let her call her professor, so she called her "Teacher Qian." Auntie Liu and Teacher Qian got along well. The doctors and nurses were all good to her. They called her Qian Yuan.

Standards at the hospital were not high; it couldn't compare with the hospital where Zhongshu had had his surgery. But this little hospital, with its lax management and relative disorder, could also be said to offer more freedom. Since I always came to Ah Yuan's hospital in the evening after my son-in-law had already left, when I turned into a dream I would speed back and forth with no fear of exhaustion, seeing Yuan Yuan over here, and then listening to what my son-in-law had to say over there. I knew Ah Yuan's condition well enough. Though, I could never be sure whether I was really transforming into a dream or seeing the real Ah Yuan; perhaps I was only in a dream, and what I saw was only the Ah Yuan of my dreams. But I always remembered the post road warning. I didn't dare ask Zhongshu any questions; I could only tell him the things that he was concerned about, so one by one, I told him all that I had seen in my dreams.

I told him that Ah Yuan's room had a large fridge, because they didn't have any small ones. When the neighbouring patients wanted to use the fridge, Ah Yuan would let them use it as much as they liked, and in this way she made a few friends. Her next door neighbour was a "Big Shot," the manager of some hotel. Before he had come to stay at the hospital, his room had been refurbished and installed with a microwave and an electric cooker. His wife was called 'Xiao Ma,' and she brought in fresh vegetables every day to make dinner for her husband. Xiao Ma was probably a native of Shanxi, for Yuan Yuan often spoke with her about the events of the 'Four Clean-ups' in Shanxi, and the two quickly bonded. Xiao Ma often borrowed space in Ah Yuan's large fridge, and shared her handmade dumplings. The hospital canteen manager was also wonderful to Ah Yuan, once even cooking a fresh fish especially for her, and delivering it to her room personally. Ah Yuan ate half the fish, then asked Auntie Liu to help her finish it. Ah Yuan's mother-in-law sent along with her son her special 'Mommy's chicken'; Ah Yuan offered these to Xiao Ma, but she and her husband only liked dumplings. The dumplings Xiao Ma made were huge, and Ah Yuan could only eat two. The hospital made chicken soup for her specially, and every day they gave her American ginseng soup. My son-in-law also bought her a tiny electric cooker, big enough to heat a cup of milk....

As I talked about all these things to eat, I kept an eye on whether Zhongshu wanted to eat anything. He didn't have the slightest interest.

I also told him how, since being hospitalized, Ah Yuan had examined new curriculum plans for her school. And every day she read half a detective novel, so all the detective novels in our house had been collected and brought to the hospital, and

even her friends sent her their own detective novels. But, and I wasn't sure if it was because her energy was waning, Ah Yuan had switched to reading cookbooks. I was afraid that her energy was waning, but I didn't say anything. Maybe it was all in my head. I felt that her face had gradually become paler.

I also told Zhongshu that Ah Yuan had so very many friends coming to visit that every day her sickroom was filled with fresh flowers. A never-ending stream of colleagues and students came to visit. Friends and relatives all visited, and many old classmates from middle school as well. I thought perhaps she would get tired out, that she shouldn't see so many visitors. But in the conversations at Xishicao I heard that Ah Yuan felt it wasn't easy for people to come from afar, and she didn't want them to have come all that way for nothing.

When I touched on the topics of family and friends, I watched to see if Zhongshu was interested, but he was completely expressionless. Before, every time Ah Yuan came to the boat, he would make an effort to strengthen his spirits. But since Ah Yuan had been hospitalized, he seemed to have grown slack. He was listless and not in a mood to speak, only listening as I spoke, opening his eyes, and then shutting them again. Even though I was seeing him every day, I felt like he was very far away from me.

And Ah Yuan? Had my dream found her, or was she merely in my dreams? I don't know. She took off her glove and waved at me so that I would see her hand, not the glove. But now, all there is to connect us is the glove she knitted for me.

Half a year sped by, and then I heard her on the phone with my son-in-law, saying brightly that the hospital made a special protective girdle for her that was fitted



to her body; she had tried it on, and it fit snugly. The doctor said that after she finished her CT scan the next day, he would let her sleep in a soft bed, and if she wore the girdle, she could turn over in bed.

But Ah Yuan was thin and weak and the big refrigerator in the room was stuffed with leftovers she hadn't been able to finish. Her hair was coming out in handfuls. Over at Xishicao, I heard that she wanted a hat. I didn't dare tell any of this to Zhongshu. He had just been through another high fever that was still gradually abating and he was exhausted. I kept him company quietly, saying nothing that didn't need to be said. All my worries I kept to myself, never making him share the burden.

The next night I went back to the hospital. Ah Yuan, now wearing a hat, was still on the hard bed, her eyes wide open; I couldn't tell what she was thinking. Auntie Liu answered the phone, said it was the school calling, and handed it to Ah Yuan. Ah Yuan spoke into the handset, "Yes, mm-hmm.... I'm okay. Today the nurses and doctors hauled me out for a CT. It's done, and they say it's still no good. Wei was here. They took apart the hard bed and switched me to a soft one, but after I finished the CT, they took me off the soft bed and set up the hard bed again." With a forced laugh, she went on, "This girdle I'm wearing is a pain. I'd prefer not to wear it and to rest easy on the hard bed instead. I don't want to roll over."

The doctor came to ask her whether she wanted to go through another course of treatment. Ah Yuan replied steadfastly, "If it will do me any good, let's do another. I can take it. Hair can grow back after it falls out."

I heard the "Big Shot" next door speaking with Xiao Ma.

"Does she know what sort of sickness she has?" he asked.

She replied, “She said herself she got a particular type of tuberculosis that was in remission for decades, but then relapsed, and it’s so severe it requires heavy medication. She is very strong. Truly strong. All along her only worry has been her parents – whenever she speaks of her mother her eyes fill with tears.”

It felt like my heart had been stabbed, causing a blister filled with blood, like an eye full of hot tears.

After Zhongshu’s high fever, he’d been shaved bald, and Ah Yuan was bald, too, underneath her hat. The two of them were alike in the shape of their heads, and in their features, except for Ah Yuan’s eyes, which weren’t double-lidded.

As Zhongshu’s fever abated, he regained some of his strength. I told him about Ah Yuan’s condition: according to her doctor, bone tuberculosis that reappeared after decades of remission was even more dangerous than the first time and required a slow recuperation. Anyhow, if she followed the doctor’s orders and rested in bed, the rest would do her good. “I think you two are looking more and more alike,” I said. Same head, same face. And while she’s never had Papa’s double-fold eyelids, she’s got the exact same sparkle in her eyes. But since Ah Yuan got sick, she’s developed double eyelids.”

Zhongshu said proudly, “The first time Mother Thornton saw Ah Yuan, she said she had her father’s eyes. Thornton had a sharp eye.”<sup>31</sup>

My dream was wearing me out. It’s strange, but a wearying dream was also affecting my body. Day after day, it was with weary steps that I came and went on the old post road. When Ah Yuan had entered the hospital, the willows had all been bald

---

<sup>31</sup> Mother Thornton was the headmistress of Aurora Women’s College in occupied Shanghai. See *Women sa*, 112 (part 3, section 7)

and bare. Now, the shady summer leaves had already begun to yellow and fall. Day after day, trailed by my shadow, treading on the leaves, I walked carefully, step by step, walking with no end in sight.

Every evening I was in Ah Yuan's sickroom. Once, she was on the phone with Wei. With a forced laugh, she said to him, "I'll tell you a joke. Last night I had a dream that Mama was here, stroking my face. In my dream, I was afraid it wasn't real. I said to myself, if it's a demon, it will be perfumed, and if it's my mother, it won't. I didn't smell any scent, so I thought, this is my mother. But I couldn't open my eyes to see her. I tried extra hard to open them, and then they opened – I had been dreaming." She lowered the receiver, the corners of her mouth tugging downwards. She shut her eyes, and tears poured down from the corners of her eyes. She handed the receiver to Auntie Liu, who said, "Teacher Qian has to have fluid extracted from her lungs, and isn't allowed to talk too much." Then she reported further on Ah Yuan's condition.

A few more blood-filled blisters were formed, adding several more pairs of tear-filled eyes. I thought of how she'd awoken from her own dream to see herself lying all alone in her hospital sickbed, with even the mother in her dreams now gone. And yet my dream was completely useless, only a kind of shadow. I pressed against her, stroked her, but she couldn't feel me at all.

I knew that dreams are rich in imaginative power. When the yearning becomes too fierce, it makes nightmares. I had nightmares several nights in a row. Ah Yuan gradually lost her ability to eat. Over her head hung a bag of purplish red blood and a bag of some kind of whitish protein, which flowed into her body through IVs the doctor had installed. Auntie Liu continuously took small spoonfuls of water from a cup to

moisten Ah Yuan's lips. My heart began to spew forth eyes full of hot tears again, one after the other. One night, instead of going home, my son-in-law also took a turn using the small spoon, moistening Ah Yuan's lips, spoonful by spoonful, with the water. She slept the whole time, her eyes shut.

I didn't dare dream anymore, but I didn't dare stop dreaming. I was so exhausted that I couldn't move. I sat before Zhongshu's bed, holding his hand, resting my head down by his side. I said to myself again and again, "Dreams mean the opposite, dreams mean the opposite." Ah Yuan had been in the hospital for over a year now, and I was overwrought.

Suddenly, I looked up and saw Ah Yuan walking down the bank, light and agile. With perfect balance, she walked across the gangplank and into the cabin. "Mom." Her voice was warm, soft, and loving, and then, sitting down by my side called out, "Papa."

Zhongshu opened his eyes, opened his eyes wide, looking and looking at her, and then said to me, "Tell Ah Yuan to go back."

Ah Yuan smiled reassuringly, and said, "I'm better now. My illness is completely cured, Papa..."

Zhongshu said to me yet again, "Tell Ah Yuan to go back, to go home."

Embracing Ah Yuan with one arm, I replied with a smile, "I'll tell her to go back to Sanlihe to look after our home."

I thought to myself that my dreams had indeed meant the opposite of reality: now that Ah Yuan was back, she could come with me on my trips to see Papa again.

Zhongshu said, "Go back to her own home."

"Yes, back to Xishicao to celebrate with them."

“Xishicao isn’t her real home either. Tell her to go back to her own home.”

In Ah Yuan’s clear, bright eyes, I could see a smile blooming like a fresh flower. She said, “Yes, Papa, I’ll be going back now.”

The sun’s rays had entered the boat, so I stood up. Ah Yuan stood up too. I said, “We should be going. See you tomorrow!”

“Rest well, Papa,” Ah Yuan said.

She crossed the gangplank first, and I followed out onto the bank. I seemed to have awoken from a nightmare. Ah Yuan was well again! Ah Yuan had come back!

She helped me up onto the post road, then went with me for a few more steps. As she supported me, she said, “Mom, you once had a daughter; now she has to go back. Papa told me to go back to my own home. Mom ... Mom ...”

And just like that, with the smile like fresh flowers still right before my eyes, and the warm, soft, and loving sound of “Mom” still in my ears, in the bright light of the day, in an instant, she was gone. And in that instant, I understood everything.

I saved myself from falling with one hand supported by the willow tree beside me. I looked all around, calling in a whisper, “Yuan Yuan, Ah Yuan, take care. Go, with Mama and Papa’s blessing.” My heart was covered with eyes full of hot tears, and now they all gushed forth at once. With my hands propped against the tree, and my head against my hands, the hot tears in my bosom forced their way up, until they reached my throat. I swallowed hard, choking back the tears, but I forced them too hard, and my chest, filled with hot tears, ripped open. I heard a thud, and onto the stone-slab ground fell an indistinct lump of blood and flesh. Cold wind poured into the cavity of my chest. The pain was intolerable; quickly I squatted down and picked up that ball of blood and

flesh and squeezed it back in through the hole in my chest; it was good that there was so much blood to wash clean the dirt and filth. I clenched the wound tight with one hand, and pressed the other-protectively on top of it; I felt nauseated and dizzy. I was mortally afraid to fall on the post road, so I staggered forward, made it back to the inn, and crossed the threshold just as the innkeeper was setting the bolt.

As I stood under the lamp light, I discovered that there wasn't really any blood, and my body hadn't really ripped open. Nobody could have seen any abnormalities in me. My dinner, as usual, waited for me downstairs on the small table.

I went upstairs and fell into bed, pain tearing at my insides. I transformed into a dream of pain, and rushed toward the hospital at the foot of the Western Hills.

The lights in Ah Yuan's room were shining, but the two beds were both gone, and a service worker sweeping the floor was just sweeping a pile of trash out the door. I recognized a shoe of Ah Yuan's, one she had worn to the hospital.

I overheard Xiao Ma and her husband talking in the next room. "She's gone – she went in her sleep. With this illness, they all go in their sleep."

My dream rushed to Xishicao. Auntie Liu sat at the end of a long cabinet in my in-law's dining room, wiping away tears. My son-in-law sat in his room, staring blankly. His mother was with a relative speaking in detail about Ah Yuan's illness, and about how she had passed. She said that Qian Yuan had had no idea about her own illness, and her mother and father on the post road of course didn't know about it either. And now, she and her son didn't know how to inform us.

My dream didn't wish to remain there, and so though all my strength was sapped, I was determined to stop at my old place and rest for a while in peace and quiet.

My dream returned once again to our residence at Sanlihe, stopped at the head of my own bed, and then disappeared.

When I opened my eyes, I was in the inn. My heart was now in a hard, knotted clump, but to my surprise it still beat evenly. Each beat sent fresh pain through my insides. Ah Yuan was gone. Even if I turned into a dream, I'd have no way of finding her. And I was too exhausted to do that.

The post road was once again a length of scattered soft greens. Last year's fallen leaves had been swept clean by the north wind. I hurried onto Zhongshu's boat, and he was waiting for me. After a high fever abated, he would often experience a slight recuperation.

He asked me, "And Ah Yuan?"

Sitting cross-legged before his bed, and holding the bed, I said, "She went back!"

"She what??"

"You told her to go back to her own home, and now she has."

Zhongshu looked at me in amazement. "You saw her too?"

"You saw her too," I said. "You told me to tell her to go back."

Zhongshu said emphatically, "What I saw was not Ah Yuan, not the real Ah Yuan, but I knew it was Ah Yuan still. I told you to tell her to go back."

"When you told Ah Yuan to go back to her own home, she relaxed and smiled reassuringly. The smile in her eyes bloomed like a flower across her face. I've never seen her smile such a beautiful smile. When Papa told her to go back, she could go back. She could stop worrying."

Zhongshu looked at me mournfully and said, "I knew she was worried. Papa was always on her mind, and she couldn't bear leaving Mama. I could see her worrying and feeling apologetic."

Old people's eyes are dry and withered; they can only cry on the inside. Zhongshu's eyes were scorching with intense pain and bitterness. He looked sadly at me, and I knew that he, too, was crying inside. My heart, which I thought had already congealed into rock, opened a few new eyes, which wept, their moisture somewhat softening and smoothing the hard knots of my heart.

My hands were cold as ice. I felt his hand; the palm was scalding, and his pulse was racing. Zhongshu was running a fever again.

I hastened to tell him that Ah Yuan had died while sound asleep. I told him in detail about the circumstances of her illness. When she entered the hospital with pain in her waist, this was already the terminal stage of the illness, but fortunately once it moved into her vertebrae, only those small sections of bone hurt, and the nerves above and below were damaged so she wouldn't feel the pain anywhere else. She had been so intent on getting better quickly so that she could come help her mother look after her father that she endured multiple treatments. Now she needn't fear any illness or worry about anything. No more getting up early or staying up late into the night with never-ending work. I said, ever since we had Ah Yuan, she tugged at our heartstrings; now there would be no need for such concern.

That's what I said, but my heartstrings tugged so much they hurt. Zhongshu nodded and closed his eyes. I knew his heart was full not just of pain and regret about Yuan Yuan, but also pity for me.



When I had first gone to stay at the inn, I could very quickly turn into a dream. But now, my dreams are like muddied tufts of willow floss, unable to lift off. In the beginning, I had hoped for the three of us to return together to our home at Sanlihe. Since we'd lost Ah Yuan, I felt wounded on the inside, and my limbs lacked strength. Each day, walking step by step down the post road, I could always reach the boat and be with Zhongshu. He was now all skin and bone, and I was becoming decrepit as well. He lacked the energy to speak, but he forced his eyes open to keep me company. I suddenly thought back to the first time we met on the boat, when he asked me if I still had dreams. Now I understood. I had once had a little dream in which I had reproached him for suddenly leaving me without a word. Now he was leaving, purposefully slowly, to let me see him off each step of the way, to prolong our time together, to extend my little dream into a dream ten thousand miles long.

And I was willing. With each step I could say a goodbye, and then be able to see him one more time. Did prolonging our parting make it hurt more, or less? I couldn't be sure. But the further I went along with him, the more afraid I became of not seeing him again.

The willows again became a long strip of soft green, and again gradually yellowed and fell, covering the post road with fallen leaves, turning each willow tree bald and bare.

That day, as I left the inn, I suddenly saw a stone block behind the door that was exactly the same as the one on Zhongshu's boat. It gave me a start. Who had boarded the boat and stolen it? I rubbed the pin on my sleeve, not daring to ask.

I walked and walked, then came upon a man and woman coming from the other direction. I had never before encountered any other travellers on the post road. The woman was bearing a gangplank, and the man was carrying a long punting-pole – clearly from Zhongshu’s boat.

I stopped them and asked, “Who are you people? These belong with the boat!”

The man and woman didn’t pay me the slightest heed, but strode back towards the inn. They must have been the man and woman who worked on the boat, whom I had never encountered before.

Oh no, I realized with a start, I had violated the warnings. During my brief hesitation, those two had gotten far away. I wouldn’t be able to catch up, and even if I did I wouldn’t have the strength to wrest anything from them.

I continued on ahead, but I couldn’t find the bank I was accustomed to seeing. I looked all along the road, but there was no bank and no boat. The road came to an end before me. I climbed part way up a mountain slope, but my view was blocked by a rugged mountain. Behind it, the sun was setting.

I hurried on, climbing higher, hoping to find the boat in the river. In the twilight, I could see that there was a mountain on the other side of the river too, and that in the river drifted a small boat. Soon it was blocked by the mountain rocks and again disappeared from view.

A murky darkness was before my eyes, and my ears seemed to hear the sound of gurgling water. There were no roads on the mountain, so I climbed frantically up the jumbled rocks, hoping to reach a higher point, but not daring to get too far from the sound of the water. When I felt a rock, I would pull myself up a couple of steps using

both hands; feeling a tree trunk, I would clutch it and catch my breath. The wind was icy, but I was dressed warmly and was constantly exerting myself. Climbing alone in the dark on the jagged rocks of the mountain, time seemed endless. Had I sat in this depression in the mountain rocks? Had I rested leaning against that tree? I could not remember. I only remembered that when I left the boat the night before, Zhongshu had forced open his eyes to keep me company. I had said, “You’re tired, close your eyes, sleep.”

He said, “Jiang, *hoho lei* (‘Enjoy life, look after yourself’).”

Had I said, “See you tomorrow”?

Dawn glimmered, then, behind me in the distance, the sun came out again. I stood at the summit of the jagged mountain, a misty sea of clouds before me. The mountains on the other shore were higher still than the one I was standing on. The river’s current, locked in by the two mountains, surged out like a waterfall, producing the gurgling sound.

I saw a tiny boat emerge from the rapids, and, like a ray of light, plunge into the vast sea of clouds, turning into a small dot; I watched and watched, until even that small dot disappeared.

I wished only that I could turn into a stone, standing high on the mountaintop, keeping watch over that small dot. I asked myself: are all of the rocks atop the mountains women who have turned into “husband-gazing stones?” I really didn’t wish to move, and would rather have become a stone, keeping watch over the little boat I could no longer see.

But instead I became a yellow leaf, blown from that rocky mountain by the first puff of wind. I exhausted myself climbing to the mountaintop, but in an instant, I was swept down by the wind back onto the old post road. Once on the road, I was blown and buffeted back the way I had come. Feeling my way along, step by step, down the post road, the whole way was paved by the sorrow of parting.

Before I reached the inn, a whirlwind lifted me up into the sky. Swirling in the air, I became so dizzy I had to shut my eyes. When I opened them again, I was where I had so often passed the night as a dream – my bed in Sanlihe. But my home at Sanlihe was no longer a home. It was only an inn.

## **Appendix III: Arriving at the Margins of Life: Answering My Own Questions: Excerpt**

### 11. The Value of Life

What does a life amount to?

Christian doctrine holds that life in this world is a test. When people die, the souls of the good go to Heaven. For those who are neither good nor bad, or who are both good and bad, after their souls are duly punished or washed fully clean, as when undergoing the purifying fires of Purgatory, they too can go to Heaven. Those guilty of great crimes and unpardonable evils descend to Hell to burn forever. I think this sort of test isn't fair. People born into this world have different experiences and are differently endowed. Some are born into rich families and blessed with gentle natures—for those so lucky in life, being a good person is a given. Had they experienced poverty or been of a callous nature leading a difficult life, it would be easier for them to fall. If life is a test, then it ought to be like a school entrance exam, the level the same for everyone, the topics the same for everyone—only then would it be fair and reasonable.

The Buddhist theory of reincarnation also sounds reasonable. If one test is not enough, another follows. But the notion of karma still perplexes me. Causes and effects follow in cycles, but what then was the original cause? A lifetime inevitably involves relying on the mercies of others or showing kindness towards others, both of which create new causes and effects. Each has to be repaid, without end. Those who lack any conscience and only accept the kindness of others claim that they are owed a karmic debt from a previous life. The reckless, when they are thinking of doing mischief, say

that they will be punished in the next life, so they get while the getting's good. Even such cruel punishments as 'climbing blade mountain' or 'boiling in oil' are all but tortures of the flesh. Of course, I don't fully understand the various doctrines of every religion. Still, I do respect all religions. It's just that religion speaks of the world to come, whereas I am but a tiny, benighted person with no means to investigate worlds after this one. All I seek to know is: for a person in this world, one who has lived a lifetime, what might the value of that life be?

Heaven and earth give birth to people, and human beings are the epitome of all things. In the divine natural world, it's people that deserve to be stressed, not things; not the civilization that mankind created, but the people that created human civilization. Only humans can ever understand how to cultivate themselves, to seek self-improvement. Surely, this is also the purpose of life!

Clever friends who maintain that "When a person dies, there is nothing left" are asserting with their "nothing left" that after death, the soul is gone too. Yet they by no means deny the value of life. Don't they say, "Leave behind a good name"? That is to say, what can be left behind after the body disappears is one's name. But name and reality are not in accord. "What millions died that Caesar might be great?" Still, the "nameless heroes" who sacrifice their lives in war gain even more honour and veneration from the general public. Is there not, right in the centre of Tiananmen Square, in our nation's capital, a "Monument to the People's Heroes?" And in many European countries, the eternal flame for the "unknown soldier" is always centred right at the gate of the largest churches, inspiring deep reflection among admirers, who stop to pay their respects. Those who achieve merit in our human world all rely on

innumerable silent and anonymous people, and the contributions they make. Can it be that the lives of these silent and anonymous common folk are utterly lacking in value? Seen from an individual perspective, they reap no harvest themselves, but from the perspective of the social collective of mankind, their contribution is the accumulated experience and wisdom of the ages. Human civilization is created in common by the social collective. Besides, what value does posthumous fame really have anyway? Fabulously famous people are not dead for long before they fade, forgotten by others. And not just forgotten, but gossiped about by people they didn't know and who didn't know them, even made fun of and mocked without cease. If the dead are capable of knowledge, they would certainly feel uncomfortable. Fame is perhaps useful to one while one is alive, but after death it can only be used by others.

Clever young friends maintain that after death there is nothing, or that at most we leave behind some fame. But then the life of an honest person who sacrifices in silence and those who leave behind no posthumous reputation would have no value! The famous are a small minority, the fameless the vast majority. No wonder the living compete so hard for posthumous fame! Then the generations upon generations of people who toil and strive their whole lives—if they do not seek fame or fail to attain it, then their lives are utterly meaningless! They don't even measure up to the sort who relentlessly blow their own horns and who steal their fame by deceiving the world! Isn't such a value system unreasonable?

Every common person has his or her own positive moral qualities. All human beings have at least some degree of moral cultivation. It's a commonplace that, "Man gains by his cultivation, and woman gains by hers, but there is no gain without

cultivation.” “Gain,” here, refers to moral achievements. The greater one’s moral achievements, the greater the value. And the moral achievements one cultivates are not of the flesh but of the soul. Therefore only those who believe the soul is indestructible can have a reasonable view of the value of life. And to believe the soul is indestructible, one must be a person of faith. Only with faith does life have value.

Actually, faith is perceptual, and not purely brought forth by reason. Man was endowed with reverence for the natural world. Rulers simply take advantage of mankind’s reverence for the gods, launching their boats into the prevailing current, guided by profit and the propensity of the times, ~~and~~ setting up grand religious ceremonies to protect their authority. In actuality, genuine belief in religion is not limited to the ignorant. The wisest people, including great philosophers, scientists and writers, believe in the greatness of God even more than do the ignorant. The learned Dr. Johnson, for example, was an extremely devout Christian. Cervantes, who wrote *Don Quixote*, was once captured during military service, but was then ransomed for a huge sum by the order of the Trinitarians.<sup>32</sup> After he passed away, his remains were buried in the cemetery of a Trinitarian Monastery (see Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española*, volume 2, chapter 2, Editorial Gredos, 1981, Madrid edition). Monastery cemeteries never accept the remains of heretics; only those who share the faith would want their remains to abide together.

---

<sup>32</sup> The Order of the Trinitarians was founded specifically to ransom Christian captives, a task formally authorized by the Catholic Church since the Crusades.



I've heard that when a person faces a crisis, or is in a state of mental anguish, God will knock on his door—knock, that is, on the door of his heart. If he opens the door and lets Him in, then God will be in his heart, which is to say, this person has acquired faith. For most people, belief is there sometimes, and sometimes not; or seems to be there, but isn't; or may fade in a different time and place; or may be doubted when a prayer goes unanswered. This is the mindset of the average person. Untested, their faith lacks endurance.

On the road of life, if one chases wholly after fame, fortune, power and status, one will lack time for anything else. Perhaps not until the sudden clarity before death will one feel shame and regret, but the regret will come too late, and one can only die drinking down regret. But for those who refine their souls all their lives, their belief in themselves will certainly remain strong in old age.

A person must have faith to have an accurate view of the value of human life. To say that we simply die and then nothing, leaving behind only our good name or our life's work, is too unfair. What about people with no fame? And those fame-stealing masters of deceit—their fame's as great as can be, isn't it? And for a handicapped person, or someone with an incapacitating illness, what can he contribute? Are such people lacking in value?

The great English poet John Milton (1608-1674) lost his sight at age 44. He wrote a sonnet about his blindness, the main theme of which I shall summarize briefly as follows. He is at first bitter and rancorous: before even half his days are over, he has now lost his sight. In his world of vast darkness, he has no way to give reign to his unique talents. This was truly as hard to accept as death. And even though he still

wholeheartedly strove to serve God, his flesh could no longer obey his will. Next,

“Patience” soon replies in refutation:

... God doth not need  
 Either man’s work or his own gifts, who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state  
 Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
 And post o’er land and ocean without rest:  
 They also serve who only stand and wait.

This poem also applies to people with incapacitating illnesses. If they follow the intentions of Heaven and accept their pain, this, too, is service to God; it, too, is moral accomplishment, because it is also the refinement of the soul, the improvement of the self in the midst of suffering.

Buddhists like to say that life is like a flower that blooms in vain, a bursting bubble; all is emptiness. Buddhism denies all, and yet true conviction it affirms and re-affirms. “If there are some....who can inspire true conviction...even a single notion shall yield a pure belief...and accrue immeasurable blessings...if one persists in this undertaking, even for only four lines of sutra verses, speaking of them to others, one’s fortune will be greater still...” (*The Diamond Sutra*). And why is that? Because the Buddha has no form — not only can one not see him, there is no way even to imagine him. To be able to realize the existence of the Buddha we must possess ~~the~~ “Preincarnate Roots,” as well as “Inborn Wisdom,” which is to say one must undergo sustained refining. If one can transmit faith unto others, helping others to obtain blessings, the moral achievement is immeasurable.

Christianity espouses three virtues: belief, hope and love. If one has faith and believes that the soul does not die, then one will have hope for eternal life. If one has faith, then God will be in one's heart. God is merciful, so the heart with God has universal love.

Socrates firmly believed that the soul is indestructible, and he firmly believed in the moral concepts of absolute truth, good, beauty and justice. He kept to his convictions, preferring the righteousness of drinking hemlock to living an ignoble life. His choice to die for his convictions has garnered history's highest veneration, and has been called second only to the death of Christ.

Socrates met death with equanimity; Jesus Christ, though, would tolerate the greatest suffering a body of flesh and blood could stand. Only when he could not bear it any more did he cry out and breathe his last. Once when I read to this point in the Bible, I thought: when he cried out, had he lost his faith? But I immediately understood that his great cry was to show the he had tolerated the intolerable before he expired. Why is he the world's saviour? Not because he could turn water into wine, or one loaf into innumerable loaves like some magician, nor because he could heal the sick. Rather, it is because he affirms how incomparable people are, and how great, that even a body of flesh and blood could accept so much pain for faith. He affirmed that life has meaning and value. Having conquered the flesh one hundred percent, Jesus Christ was the greatest man. He also thereupon changed from man into God.

I stand on the margins of life, looking back in order to investigate its value. A person who lives and refines the self for a lifetime will always have some degree of accomplishment. If one accomplishes something, then one has not lived this life in vain.

Looking ahead now, I am soon to leave the human world. If the soul does not die, it will, I think, remain together with what the soul calls “me.”

This world is like a great kiln, firing forth batch after batch of souls of varying qualities—varying even in their original qualities. Regarding these questions of the soul, what can I know? I can indulge in these flights of fancy, nothing more. I’m not even in a position to ask, much less to answer. Confucius said, “Not yet knowing life, how can one know death?” (Xianjin 11). “To say you do not know when you do not”, my own questions and answers can reach only to this point and stop.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Abraham. "Fielding and the Sympathetic View of Don Quixote." In *The Sanctification of Don Quixote*, edited by Eric J. Ziolkowski, 37–61. State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1991.
- Ai Mo 爱默. *Qian Zhongshu zhuan gao* 钱钟书传稿 [Draft Biography of Qian Zhongshu]. Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1992.
- Allen, Joseph R. *In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies Publications, 1992.
- Barlow, Tani. *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Barmé, Geremie. *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- . "Using the Past to Save the Present: Dai Qing's Historiographical Dissent." *East Asian History* 1, no. 1 (June 1991): 141–181.
- Barmé, Geremie, and Bennett Lee, eds. *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution, 77-78*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1979.
- Bell, Daniel. *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Berlant, Lauren. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Birch, Cyril. "Literature Under Communism." In *The Cambridge History of China*, edited by Roderick MacFarquhar. Vol. 15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Booth, Wayne C., ed. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Campbell, Colin. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Blackwell, 1987.
- Canqing lisu 殇情离素 (pseudonym). "Wo ye yao tuo jian yin shen yi 我也要觅件“隐身衣” [I also want to try on the cloak of invisibility]." November 9, 2009. <http://www.xs91.net/read.php?tid-15120.html/> (accessed May 31, 2012).
- Cao Wuwei 曹无为. "Du Women sa 读《我们仨》 [On We Three]." *Jiaoyu wenbao*, no. 9 (2004). <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).

- Chang Tsong-Zung (curator) and Graeme Murray, ed. *Reckoning with the Past: Contemporary Chinese Painting*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.
- Charlton, H.B. *Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry*. New York: University of Manchester Publications, 1913.
- Chen Pingyuan 陈平原. "Xiandai Zhongguo de "Wei Jin feng du" yu "liu chao sanwen" 现代中国的“魏晋风度”与“六朝散文” [The Wei-Jin style in modern Chinese essays and Six Dynasties essays]." In *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu zhi jianli* 中国现代学术之建立 [The establishment of modern Chinese scholarship]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998.
- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Confucius. *The Analects*. Translated by D. C. Lau. New York: Penguin, 1979.
- Consuming Literature: Best Sellers And The Commercialization Of Literary Production in Contemporary China. Cross, Gary. "Consumerism." In *Encyclopedia of European Social History*, edited by Peter N. Stearns, pp. 77–88. Vol. 5. 5. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Daruvala, Susan. *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Davies, Gloria, ed. *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
- Dennerline, Jerry. *Qian Mu and the World of Seven Mansions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Dittmer, Lowell. "Learning from Trauma: The Cultural Revolution in Post-Mao Politics." In *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, edited by William A. Joseph et al. Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Dooling, Amy D. *Women's Literary Feminism In Twentieth-Century China*. New York: MacMillan, 2005.
- "Douban du shu: Xi zao." <http://book.douban.com/subject/1078250/> (accessed May 23, 2012).
- Dudden, Frederick Homes. *Henry Fielding: His Life, Works, and Times*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

- “Du Feiduo he Women sa 读《我们仨》和《斐多》 [On We Three and Phaedo].” Du shu 读书 (December 2003). <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Eifring, Halvor, ed. *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Fairbank, Wilma. *Liang and Lin: Partners in Exploring China's Architectural Past*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- “Feiduo de pinglun 斐多的评论 [Reviews of Phaedo].” <http://book.douban.com/subject/1050471/reviews> (accessed January 17, 2012).
- Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews*. New York: Everyman's Library, 1910. [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24196947M/Joseph\\_Andrews](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24196947M/Joseph_Andrews).
- Friedman, Norman. “Forms of the Plot.” *Journal of General Education* 8, no. 4 (1955): 241–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27795481> (accessed April 29, 2012).
- Gagnier, Regenia. “The Literary Standard, Working Class Autobiography, and Gender.” In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. University of California Press, 1998.
- “Gan xiao liu ji 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School].” [http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content\\_3687/15.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_3687/15.pdf) (accessed May 6, 2012).
- “Gao Mang hua ren duo yi 高莽:画人多矣 [Gao Mang: Portraitist for Many].” March 12, 2009. <http://zx.findart.com.cn/9864766-zx.html> (accessed January 18, 2012).
- Gao Qiufu 高秋福. “Yang Jiang bai sui xin bu lao 杨绛百岁心不老 [Yang Jiang at 100 is not old at heart].” *Hong Kong Wenweibao* (July 16, 2011). <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2011/07/16/OT1107160011.htm> (accessed January 18, 2012).
- Gewurtz, Margo. “The Afterlife of Memory in China: Yang Jiang's Cultural Revolution Memoir.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English* 39, nos. 1-2 (January 2008). <http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/issue/view/27> (accessed June 6, 2012).
- “Guan yu linghun cunzai de lunzheng 关于灵魂存在的论证 [A Debate on the Existence of the Soul].” <http://book.douban.com/review/1030702/> (accessed January 17, 2012).

- Hall, D.L., and R.T. Ames. *Thinking through Confucius*. SUNY series in systematic philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. ISBN: 9780887063770, <http://book.s.google.com/books?id=LngnKYeBteAC>.
- Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- Hanan, Patrick, ed. *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- . “The Autobiographical Romance of Chen Diexian.” In *Chinese Fiction of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Essays*, 199–214. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- . *The Chinese Vernacular Story*. Harvard East Asian series. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- . *The Invention of Li Yu*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Hao, Zhidong. *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers*. New York: SUNY Press, 2003.
- Hazlitt, William. “On the English Novelists.” In *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by Percival P. Howe. Vol. 6. State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1819.
- Hong Zicheng. *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*. Translated by Michael M. Day. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Hou Minze 侯敏泽. “Gan xiao liu ji du hou 《幹校六記》讀後 [A Response to Six Chapters of a Cadre School.]” *Du shu*, no. 9 (September 1981): 9–12.
- Hsia, C.T. “Shuping: A Yuan hui qu le – Women Sa 書評:阿圓回去了--- 《我們仨》 [Book Review. “Ah Yuan Has Gone Back:” We Three].” <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/10842322/> (accessed January 17, 2012).
- Hsieh, Daniel. *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2008.
- “Hu Qiaomu, a Chinese Hard-Liner, Is Dead at 81.” *The New York Times* (September 29, 1992). <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/29/obituaries/hu-qiaomu-a-chinese-hard-line-r-is-dead-at-81.html> (accessed May 26, 2011).
- Idema, Wilt, and Beata Grant. *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Jay, Paul. “What's the Use? Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography.” *Biography* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1987).



- Johnson, Kay Ann. *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Judge, Joan. *The Precious Raft of History : the Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Knapp, Bettina. "Review: Memoires Decousus." *World Literature Today* (September 1997): pp. 865–866.
- Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂. *Dan gui tang qian : Qian Zhongshu jiazu wenhua shi* 丹桂堂前 : 钱钟书家族文化史 [Before Cassia Hall: A Cultural History of the Qian Zhongshu Clan]. Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 1992.
- Kong Qingmao 孔庆茂. *Qian Zhongshu zhuan* 钱钟书传 [Biography of Qian Zhongshu]. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1992.
- . *Yang Jiang ping zhuan* 杨绛评传 [A Critical Biography of Yang Jiang ]. Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1992.
- Kwok, Sing Li, ed. *A Glossary of Political Terms of The People's Republic of China*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1995.
- Laughlin, Charles A. *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.
- Lee, Haiyan. "All the Feelings That Are Fit to Print. The Community of Sentiment and the Literary Public Sphere in China, 1900-1918." *Modern China* 27, no. 3 (July 2007): 291– 327.
- . *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Leys, Simon. "Peking Autumn: Foreword." In *Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*, by Yang Jiang, 3–6. Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961.
- Ling Xiaolei 凌晓蕾. "Juan juan xi liu zhong gui hai; ping fan dang zhong jian zhen qing – du Yang Jiang Women sa 涓涓细流终归海 平凡当中见真情——读杨绛《我们仨》 [Trickling Back into the Sea, Sighting Truth in the Ordinary: On Yang Jiang's We Three]." Qinghai Shifan Daxue xuebao, no. 1 (2004). <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Liu, James J.Y. *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

- Liu Meizhu. "Interviews with Yang Jiang." *China perspectives* [Online], no. 65 (2006).  
<http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/636> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Luo Yinsheng 罗银胜. *Yang Jiang zhuan 杨绛传* [A Biography of Yang Jiang].  
 Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 2004.
- Mace, Nancy A. *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition*. Newark, NJ:  
 University of Delaware Press, 1996.
- Man, Paul de. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): pp. 919–930.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2906560>.
- Marx, Karl, ed. *Über Kunst und Literatur*. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1953.
- McGrath, Jason. *Postsocialist Modernity : Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- McMahon, Keith. *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.
- Mirsky, Jonathan. "China: A Maverick Dares to Challenge the Party Line." *The New York Times* (August 25, 2005).  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/24/opinion/24iht-edmirsky.html> (accessed May 6, 2012).
- Moody, Peter R. *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China*. Plymouth, UK:  
 Lexington Books, 2007.
- Motsch, Monika. "Qian Zhongshu yu Yang Jiang er san shi 钱钟书与杨绛二三事 [Two Or Three Notes on Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang]." *Du shu 读书* (October 2006). <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Myshkin, Prince. "Dostoyevsky and the Romantic View of Don Quixote." In *The Sanctification of Don Quixote*, edited by Eric J. Ziolkowski, 95–120. State College, PA: Penn State Press, 1991.
- Owen, Stephen. *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Plaks, Andrew. "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative." In *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, edited by Andrew Plaks. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Pollard, David, ed. and trans. *The Chinese Essay*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Prusek, Jaroslav. "Reality and Art in Chinese Literature." In *The Lyrical and the Epic: Studies in Modern Chinese Literature*. University of Indiana Press, 1996.

- Qian Zhongshu. *Fortress Besieged*. Translated by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- . *Humans, Beasts and Ghosts: Stories and Essays*. Edited by Christopher G. Rea. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- . *Song shi xuan zhu* 宋诗选注 [Poems of the Song, Selected and Annotated]. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1958.
- Rea, Christopher, ed. *China's Literary Cosmopolitans: Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Modern Letters*. forthcoming.
- “Review: *Fei duo* 斐多 [Phaedo].” *Dangdai zuojia pinglun*, no. 5 (2000). <http://www.cnki.co m.cn/> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Schafer, Edward H. “The Sky River” [in English]. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 4 (1974): pp. 401–407. ISSN: 00030279, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/600583>.
- Schwarcz, Vera. “Strangers No More. Personal Memory in the Interstices of Political Commemoration.” In *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, edited by Rubie S. Watson. School of American Research Press, 1994.
- Shapiro, Judith. “The Re-education of a ‘Stinking Intellectual’.” *The New York Times* (November 25, 1984). <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/25/books/the-re-education-of-a-stinking-intellectual.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed May 6, 2012).
- Shen Fu. *Six Records of a Floating Life*. Translated by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Suhui. New York: Penguin Classics, 1983.
- Short, Philip. *Mao: A Life*. New York: Holt, 1999.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, eds. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Spence, Jonathan. “Preface.” In *Six Chapters of My Life ‘Downunder’*, by Jiang Yang, translated by Howard Goldblatt. Hong Kong: University of Washington Press / The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983-4.
- Strassberg, Richard E. *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Sturgeon, Donald, ed. The Chinese Text Project. <http://ctext.org/shuo-yuan> (accessed May 29, 2011).
- Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory : Emotion After the “Death of the Subject”*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

- Tian Huilan. "Jiu Zhongguo dushi yijiao de sumiao: Yang Jiang Dao ying ji man ping 旧中国都市一角的素描-杨绛《倒影集》满评 [Perspective sketches of old Chinese cities: A critical essay on Yang Jiang's Reflections in Reverse]." In *Yanjiu ziliao ji*, edited by Tian Huilan 田蕙兰, Ma Guangsu 马光裕, and Chen Keyu 陈轲玉. Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1997.
- Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness*. Vol. II: The Negative Affects. New York: Springer, 1963.
- Volpp, Sophie. "Wu Lanzheng's Jiang Heng Qiu." *Journal of Theater Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 113–138. <http://140.112.58.221/journal/sec-8/113-138.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2012).
- Wagner, Alexandra Rose. "Landscapes of the Soul: Essays of Place and Chinese Literary Modernity, 1920-1945." PhD diss., Yale University, 2004.
- Waltner, Ann. "On Not Becoming a Heroine: Lin Daiyu and Cui Ying-ying." *Signs* 15, no. 1 (1989): 113–138.
- Wang Anyi 王安忆. *Jishi yu xugou* 记实与虚构 [Actual Reports and Fictional Construction]. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993.
- Wang, Jing. *When "I" Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.
- Wang Lingzhen. *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Wang Wei. *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*. Translated by Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, and Xu Haixin. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991.
- Wang Wei 王维 (701-761). *Wang Youcheng ji jian zhu* 王右丞集箋註 [Collected and Annotated Works of Minister Wang of the Right]. Edited by Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成 (1683-1756). Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1977.
- Wang Zheng. *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Waters, Geoffrey, trans. "Du Fu as Literary Critic: 'Six Quatrains Written in Jest'." [http://www.cipherjournal.com/html/waters\\_xiwei.html](http://www.cipherjournal.com/html/waters_xiwei.html) (accessed May 23, 2011).
- "Wen hua ming ren ku 文化名人库 [Archive of Famous Cultural Figures]." <http://culture.people.com.cn/> (accessed January 17, 2012).
- Wu, Pei-yi. *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

- Wu Xuezhao 吳學昭. *Ting Yang Jiang tan wang shi* 听杨绛谈往事 [Listening to Yang Jiang Speak of the Past]. Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2008.
- Wu, Yenna. "Ironic Intertextuality in Six Chapters from a Floating Life and Six Chapters from Life at a Cadre School." *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* 26, no. 2 (1991): 51–80.
- Yang Jiang. "Ah Fu yu Ah Ling 阿福与阿灵 [Lucky and Nimble]." In *Collected Writings*, 250–253. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . *Baptism*. Translated by Judith Amory and Yaohua Shi. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2007.
- . "Bingwu dingwei nian jishi 丙午丁未年记事 [Years of the Horse and the Ram]." In *Collected Writings*, 163–191. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . *Chun ni ji* 春泥集 [Spring Mud Collection]. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1979.
- Yang Jiang. *Collected Writings*. Vol. 4: Plays and Literary Criticism. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Da xiao hua 大笑话 [Big Joke]." In *Collected Writings*, 9–20. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Di yi ci guan li 第一次观礼 [My First Public Assembly]." In *Collected Writings*, 339–342. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Di yi ci xia xiang 第一次下乡 [First time down to the countryside]." In *Collected Writings*, 276–292. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . *Fei duo* 斐多 [Phaedo]. Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2000.
- . "Fei'erding guanyu xiaoshuo de lilun 菲尔丁关于小说的理论 [Fielding's theory of fiction]." In *Collected Writings*, 236–266. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . *Gan xiao liu ji* 干校六记 [Six Records of a Cadre School]. In *Collected Writings*, 1–51. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Gui 鬼 [Ghost]." In *Collected Writings*, 135–165. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Hua huar 花儿 [Huahuar]." In. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe. —
- . "Huiyi wo de fuqin 回忆我的父亲 [Remembering my Father]." In *Collected Writings*, 59–115. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.

- . “Huiyi wo de gumu 回忆我的姑母 [Remembering my Third Aunt].” In *Collected Writings*, 116–133. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Jiang yin cha (hu si hu xiang, da xu) 将饮茶(胡思胡想,代序) [About to Drink the Tea (Messy Thoughts in Lieu of a Preface)].” In *Collected Writings*, 55–58. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Ji nian Wen De Xiansheng 纪念温德先生 [In Memoriam Mister Winter].” In *Collected Writings*, 213–217. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- Yang Jiang. “Ji Qian Zhongshu yu Wei cheng 记钱钟书与《围城》 [On Qian Zhongshu and Fortress Besieged].” In *Collected Writings*, 134–159. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Ji Yang Bi 记杨必 [On Yang Bi].” In *Collected Writings*, 254–266. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Kongsu da hui 控诉大会 [Criticism Meeting].” In *Collected Writings*, 240–244. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Lao Wang 老王 [Old Wang].” In *Collected Writings*, 202–205. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Lin Nainai 林奶奶 [Granny Lin].” In *Collected Writings*, 206–212. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Li Yu lun xiju jiegou 李渔论喜剧结构 [Li Yu on Dramatic Structure].” In *Collected Writings*, 276–292. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . *Lost in the Crowd: A Cultural Revolution Memoir*. Translated by Geremie Barmé. Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1989.
- . “Lulu, bu yong chou! 璐璐,不用愁! [Lulu, don’t despair!]” In *Collected Writings*, 1–8. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Lun Sakelei Ming li chang 论萨克雷《名利场》 [On Thackeray’s Vanity Fair].” In *Collected Writings*, 214–235. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “On Qian Zhongshu and Fortress Besieged.” Translated by Jesse Field. *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, no. 76 (2011): 68–97.
- . Shishi, gushi, zhenshi 事实、故事、真实 [Facts, stories, true events]. In *Collected Writings*, 293–307. Vol. 4: plays and literary criticism. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . “Shi ye 事业 [The Enterprise].” In *Collected Writings*, 166–205. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.

- Yang Jiang. "What a Joke." Translated by Christopher G. Rea. *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, no. 76 (2011): 34–67. ———. "Women sa [We three]." In *Collected Works*, 130–265. Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . Xizao 洗澡 [Baptism]. In *Collected Writings*, 211–444. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Yin shen yi 隐身衣 [The Cloak of Invisibility]." In *Collected Writings*, 192–196. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Yin shen yi 隐身衣 [The Cloak of Invisibility]." In *Collected Writings*, 192–198. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Yishu yu kefu kunnan: du Hong lou meng ouji 艺术与客服困难-读《红楼梦》偶记 [Art and Overcoming Difficulty: A note on Dream of the Red Chamber]." In *Collected Writings*, 267–275. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Yi zhe xu 译者序 [Translator's Preface]." In, 1–18. Vol. 5. *Collected Writings*. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "You shenme hao? Du Ausiding de "Aoman yu pianjian" 有什么好?读奥斯丁的《傲慢与偏见》 [What is there in her? On Austen's Pride and Prejudice]." In *Collected Writings*, 327–345. Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Yu ren 玉人 [Jade Lady]." In *Collected Writings*, 21–40. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- . "Zhao Peirong yu Qiang Yingxiong 赵佩荣与强英雄 [Zhao Peirong and 'Strong Hero']." In *Collected Writings*, 247–249. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.
- "Yang Jiang Xiansheng yijin wei yi yi ci dianshi gongkai lumian." 杨绛先生迄今唯一一次电视公开露面 [Yang Jiang's Only Appearance on Television (Transcript of Duihua episode)]. June 16, 2010 <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/11995838/> (accessed January 17, 2012).
- Yang Jiang 杨绛. *Women sa 我们仨 [We Three]*. Taipei: Reading Times Press, 2003.
- Yang Jiang 杨绛. *Yang Jiang sanwen 杨绛散文 [The Essays of Yang Jiang]*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1994.
- . *Yang Jiang wen ji 杨绛文集 [The Collected Writings of Yang Jiang]*. 8 vols. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2004.

- . *Zou dao ren sheng bian shang Zi wen zi da* 走到人生边上-自问自答 [Arriving at the Margins of Life: Answering My Own Questions]. Taipei: Shibao chubanshe, 2007.
- Yang Jiang 杨绛, Li Bing 李冰. “Zhuan fang Yang Jiang: Chu shu jiang Women sa de gu shi 专访杨绛:出书讲《我们仨》的故事 [Interview with Yang Jiang: Out with a book on the story of We Three]” (June 12, 2003). <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42223/114516/114519/6782582.html>.
- Yang Jianmin 杨建民. “Ning jing, ping he, zhi hui, qing jie ... Yang Jiang zhi mei 宁静、平和、智慧、清洁.....杨绛之美 [Quietude, peace, wisdom, and purity: the beauty of Yang Jiang]” (). <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/42223/114516/114519/6782589.html> (accessed November 27, 2010).
- Yang Zao 杨早. “Jiu shi nian dai wenhua yingxiong de fuhao yu xiangzheng – yi Chen Yinke, Gu Zhun wei zhongxin 90年代文化英雄的符号与象征-以陈寅恪、顾准为中心 [1990s Cultural Heroes as Icons and Symbols: The Cases of Chen Yinke and Gu Zhun].” In *Shuxie wenhua yingxiong: shiji zhi jiao de wenhua yanjiu* 书写文化英雄-世纪之交的文化研究 [Writing Cultural Heroes: Cultural Studies at the Turn of the Century], 18–45. Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000.
- Ye Hanyin 葉含飴. “Yang Jiang wenxue chuanguo yanjiu 楊絳文學創作研究 [A Study of Yang Jiang’s Creative Writing].” Master’s thesis, Soochow University (Taiwan), 2004.
- Yeh, Wen-hsin. “Historian and Courtesan: Chen Yinke and the Writing of ‘Liu Rushi Biezhuan’.” The George Ernest Morrison Lectures in Ethnology, no. 64 (2003). <http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/psc/ccc/morrison/morrison03.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2012).
- Yu Jie 余杰. “Zhi, xing, you de zhi xing xian shi 知·行·游——重读杨绛 [Wisdom Revealed in Knowledge, Conduct, and Excursion: Re-reading Yang Jiang].” *Dangdai wentan*, no. 5 (1995). <http://www.cnki.com.cn/> (accessed May 31, 2012).
- Zeitlin, Judith T. *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007.
- Zhang Jiaping 张家平. ““Yin shen yi” shang xi 《隐身衣》赏析 [The Cloak of Invisibility: a Critical Appreciation].” In *Zhongguo xian dang dai wenxue mingzuo shang xi* 中国现当代文学名作赏析 [Critical Appreciations of Renowned Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literary Works]. Hefei: Hefei gongye daxue chubanshe, 2006. <http://culture.mastvu.ah.cn/xsyd/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=780> (accessed May 23, 2012).