



Wang Ping

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A pair of perfectly bound feet must meet seven qualifications—small, slim, pointed, arched, fragrant, soft, and straight—in order to become a piece of art, an object of erotic desire. Such beauty is created, however, through sheer violence.

— Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China (1998)

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Quick Facts

- * Born in 1957
- * Chinese poet, novelist, and academic
- * First published book is *American Visa* (1994)

Biography

Wang Ping was born in Shanghai, P. R. China in 1957. She was educated at the Hangzhou Foreign Language School and received a B.A. in English and American literature from Beijing University, in China in 1984. During her undergraduate studies she lectured in English and Chinese at a number of Chinese universities and institutes. She published several poems and short stories in the magazines *New Poets*, *The Yangtsi River* and *Four Seas* in China.

Wang Ping came to the United States for pursuing higher degrees in 1985. She received her M.A. in English literature from Long Island University in 1987, and a Ph.D. in comparative literature at New York University in 1999. During her Ph.D. studies she was a resource teacher for the New York City Board of Education. She also taught English composition, Chinese and Asian-American studies, Chinese and Chinese literature, and fiction and poetry writing at several colleges and institutes in US. After graduating from New York University, she joined the English department at Macalester College in Minnesota as an assistant professor in 1999.

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Wang Ping

Biography continued

In 1994, Wang Ping published a book of short stories, *American Visa*, followed by the novel, *Foreign Devil* (1996), and a book of poetry, *Of Flesh and Spirit* (1998). Later she co-edited a poetry collection called *New Generation: Poetry from China Today* (1999). In 2000, her book, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China*, published by University of Minnesota Press won the Eugene Kayden Award for the Best Book in Humanities. Two years later Random House published it in paperback. Wang Ping's second book of poetry, *The Magic Whip*, was published by Coffee House Press in 2003. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in many periodicals such as *The Literary Review*, *The World*, *Lingo*, *West Coast Line*, *The Chicago Review*, *Best American Poetry* and *The Best American Poetry*.

American Visa is Wang Ping's first book that tells about a young woman named Seaweed who makes the difficult journey from China, during the Cultural Revolution, to New York City. Although she wants to stay with her family, she has to leave and enter a completely unknown and forbidding country. In the book, Wang Ping explores the strong contrast between Chinese and American cultures and what it means to a woman. Wang Ping's book is filled with very detailed descriptions about a place and time in recent history that many Americans know little about. *American Visa* has been considered as an emotionally gripping collection that deals with the unique themes of womanhood and dreams.

Wang Ping's second book, *Foreign Devil*, narrates the story of a young Chinese girl, Ni Bing, who tries to find her way into adulthood during the turbulent Cultural Revolution. The book describes Ni Bing as different from others from birth. These differences increase as she grows up, and she must choose between being "a Party member" or a "foreign devil" -- someone who associates with foreigners or has foreign ideas. Ni Bing dreams of having freedom and a free life. However, due to the repressiveness of her family and the turbulence of a society in Cultural Revolution, her family and friends cannot comprehend her. When she wants to leave China and study in the United States, she has to overcome many difficulties such as the conflicted cultural identity, the disapproval of her family, and a love affair with a man who finally proves to be selfish and domineering.



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Biography continued

Wang Ping is also a poet rooted deeply in Chinese poetry. Since she moved to America in 1985, she experienced the weaving of Chinese and America cultures, Chinese and English languages and the two poetic traditions. In 1998, Wang Ping published her first collection of poetry, *Of Flesh and Spirit*, in which she explores themes of culture, gender, sexuality, and identity. In her poems, Wang Ping consistently asks the question, “Who said a soul can’t cross the sea?” The book adopts a very personal tone to explore internal struggles -- the devils and angels -- and highlights moments of ecstasy throughout. As noted by Arthur Sze, “Wang Ping’s poems are notable for their incisive images and psychological acuity. *Of Flesh & Spirit* journeys from China to America and weaves passion and memoir into a shining loop.” In 1999, the collection *New Generation: Poems from China Today* was edited and co-translated by Wang Ping. This collection includes the work of twenty-four modern Chinese poets. These poets reflect on the upheaval in Chinese culture and society from 1980 to 1990s.

Aching for Beauty - Footbinding in China, is one of the most astonishing and influential works written by Wang Ping. In this book, she documents the practice that was a source of social mobility for women for over one thousand years in China. Wang Ping closely examines the relationship between beauty and pain, interprets the mystery of footbinding as part of a womanly heritage and demonstrates that footbinding was both empowering and destructive. As praised by Ha Jin, author of *Waiting*, winner of the 1999 National Book Award for Fiction, “*Aching for Beauty* demonstrates the complexity and the manifestations of a civilization’s obsession with the body-- its beauty, its fulfillment, its destruction, and its transformation. Wang Ping writes with passion and an understanding strengthened by the female experience. This is a rich, necessary, and invaluable book.”

Wang Ping has received a number of awards, including fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. *American Visa* was judged 1994’s Best Book for Young Adults by New York Public Libraries. *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China*, was the 2001 finalist for the Minnesota Book Award, and winner of the University of Colorado’s Eugene M. Kayden Book Award for “the best book in the humanities published by an American university press.” Wang Ping is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council of the Arts for poetry, the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1997, the Minnesota State Arts Board for fiction in 2001, and the Bush Artist Fellowship for poetry in 2003.



Wang
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