Six Women Writers in Contemporary China:

A Comparative Study of Three Generations 1978-1989

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

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work on the thesis
I declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the writings of six mainland Chinese women writers - Ru Zhijuan, Shen Rong, Zhang Jie, Zhang Kangkang, Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi - belonging to three different generations as a reflection of the changing attitudes of Chinese urban intellectual women to literature and society in the period 1978-1989.

Underlying the various generational differences that emerge from a thematic analysis of their writing are two related trends: a trend away from collective orientation in the older writers’ works towards literature centred on the individual and the self in the younger writers’ works; and that of the younger writers away from the Chinese socialist and Confucian traditions that guided socialist literature in mainland China prior to 1978.

The trend away from socialist literary traditions is most palpable in the writers’ treatment of history and contemporary society. Whereas veteran writer Ru Zhijuan’s presentation of pre-1949 history perpetuated state myths of the Party’s glorious past, the younger writers challenged both the model of the heroic communist soldier and the use of class stereotypes to depict wider society that had been established in earlier Chinese socialist literature. Whereas social and political issues were central to the older writers’ fiction about the period from 1949, the younger women’s writing tended to focus on characters and their psychological development.

The writers’ treatment of love, sex and marriage showed a strong trend away from Confucian moral values in the younger writers’ fiction that intensified over the 1978-1989 period. Although all the writers presented a pessimistic view of actual marriages, and promoted marriage based on love as the ideal, the younger writers showed a much greater acceptance of blameless divorce and pre- and extra-marital sexual relationships than their older counterparts.
The writers' presentation of women in society reflected the continuing low status of Chinese women, despite their legal equality. Women's perceived lack of authority and prevailing Confucian concepts of women's nature and women's aptitudes influenced not only the way the women writers assigned gender roles in their fiction, but also the way in which they and their works were assessed by literary commentators. These rigid concepts of female nature also dominated the writings of most Chinese feminist critics.

Generational differences between the women can be attributed to their differing historical, cultural and social backgrounds, as well as differences in their personal experiences and marital status. The six women's writing reflects a society in the midst of rapid change in which old values and beliefs are being challenged but have not completely been displaced.
Contents

Acknowledgements .......................................................... ii

Abstract ........................................................................ iii

Introduction ..................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Approaches to Writing ............................... 19

Chapter 2: Attitudes to History .................................. 42

Chapter 3: Presentation of Contemporary Society ....... 71

Chapter 4: Love, Marriage and Sexual Morality ........ 124

Chapter 5: The Presentation of Women in Society ....... 197

Chapter 6: The Women Writers and Feminism ............. 220

Conclusion ....................................................................... 256

Appendix: Transcripts of Interviews with the Writers .... 260

Bibliography .................................................................... 287
Introduction

During my years in China (1979-1987) I came to know and respect many remarkable Chinese women. Through the women with whom I lived and studied at Beijing University in the early Eighties, and those with whom I worked at the Foreign Languages Bureau in the middle and late Eighties, I came to understand something of Chinese women's lives, aspirations and problems. This stimulated my interest in contemporary women's issues and women's literature and was an important factor in my selecting women writers as the subject of my research.

A further stimulus was the unprecedented rise in the quantity and quality of fiction by women in mainland China in the post-1978 period, a fact sufficient in itself to justify research that is exclusively concerned with women authors.

Women writers have been relatively neglected in English language studies of contemporary Chinese literature. Research articles have generally focused on well-known male writers such as Wang Meng, Zhang Xianliang or Liu Binyan. Hence it is hoped that this study will contribute towards filling this gap, and make possible a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary Chinese literary scene.

Studies of women's writing in the West have tended to focus on identifying what artistically distinguishes it as female, or what it means to be a female author. They have traced female literary traditions, and attempted to discover female themes, structures and textual strategies,¹ or

investigated the sexual prejudices with which female writers must contend. While these approaches have contributed much to understanding Western women's writing and have established women's literature as an independent field of literary study, the peculiarities of the mainland Chinese literary environment make the feminist aesthetic approach of limited use in a study of contemporary Chinese women's writing. Between 1949 and 1978, most literature in China was produced according to rigid political formulae that dictated everything from themes and language forms to the choice of protagonist and mode of characterization. Literature functioned primarily as political propaganda, which tended to inhibit the emergence of identifiably gender-specific writing. Despite the unprecedented (though still limited) freedoms allowed authors between 1978 and 1989, the writers themselves and Chinese readers (including literary critics, government officials and the general population) continued to assess literature primarily in terms of its content, and until the last few years of the period attached little importance to how this content was presented. To focus on the artistic or technical aspects of the women's writing when the writers saw their most important function as communicating a message would be to examine it outside the cultural and political assumptions under which it was written. My approach, then, is to take the women's writing in its cultural and political context and look at the way its themes and content developed in the only sustained period in Chinese socialist literary history in which literary diversity was tolerated. Because there was much less freedom of expression in literature before 1978, I have not included detailed analysis of the writers' pre-1978 works in this study.

In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of women's writing, this study compares the works of women writers belonging to three different age-groups. The authors and their works are examined as a reflection of the attitudes of urban intellectual mainland Chinese women.

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2 This is examined in detail in Joanna Russ, How to Suppress Women's Writing (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) and given some attention in Mary Ellman, Thinking About Women (London: Virago, 1979), Chapter IV, and Virginia Woolf A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, 1957).
to literature and society, both of which have undergone rapid change. Because of the special sensitivity of Chinese literature to its environment, I also analyse developments in the women’s fiction in relation to major political, intellectual and literary trends of the period.

In order to limit the study to a manageable size, the thesis focuses on six writers: three born in the early 1950s who represent the younger generation: Wang Anyi, Zhang Xinxin and Zhang Kangkang; two born in the 1930s who represent middle-aged writers: Zhang Jie and Shen Rong; and a veteran writer, Ru Zhijuan, born in 1925. Other writers are mentioned where one or more of their works are relevant to the topic under discussion.

All of the authors published much fiction between 1978 and 1989, so that it is possible to make valid generalizations about their works throughout the period, as well as comparisons with other writers. Well-known veteran writers such as Ding Ling and Bing Xin were excluded from the six because they have written little fiction since the Cultural Revolution. Likewise, "fifth generation" writers including Liu Suola, Can Xue and Liu Xihong were not considered because they did not begin to publish until the mid-1980s.

The chosen writers all published their works through the mainland Chinese official press and publishers, and were professional writers employed by the state. All are among the best known, most highly regarded women writers in mainland China. Thus, they are all writers who were generally acceptable to the establishment, and were basically representative of mainstream thought rather than dissident or radical.

\[\text{In addition, a considerable volume of research has already been done on these writers. They are covered in general literary histories, such as C.T. Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); and Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, "Women as Writers in the 1920s and 1930s," in M. Wolf and R Witke (eds) Women in Chinese Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp 143-168. There have also been several detailed studies of Ding Ling’s writing, including Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, Ting Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Tani E. Barlow, "Gender and Identity in Ding Ling’s Mother," Michael S. Duke (ed), Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), pp 1-24. Hence, to study these writers would be largely to repeat existing research.}\]
fringes. As all the writers were working within the same social and political system dominated by the Chinese Communist Party, all were subject to the same general framework of social and political restrictions on literature.

Ru Zhijuan and Wang Anyi were also chosen because as mother and daughter, they make possible a genuine comparison between two generations of women writers. Writers such as Tie Ning, Cheng Naishan and Wei Junyi could equally well have been subjects of the study, but were omitted simply because the limitations of time and thesis size would not allow a larger sample to be considered. Although I have not examined their works as systematically as those of the six writers selected, I believe that including them would not have significantly modified my findings.

Chapter 1 addresses the question of how the women conceive of their roles as writers, and what, if anything, they consider to be the function of literature. In the light of the controls placed on writers in China, I also examine the authors’ attitudes to external restrictions to determine the extent to which they influence their writing. This chapter attempts to establish the authors’ assumptions about themselves and their writing, and hence provides the basis for understanding their approach to the subjects discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapters 2-4 examine the writers’ treatment of three major topics: history; contemporary society; and love, sex and marriage. In each chapter, my general approach is to compare the extent to which, in their works, writers have accepted or rejected orthodox communist or Confucian criteria for interpreting events and phenomena; and the degree to which the characters and themes presented are a continuation of, or a challenge to, conventions established in earlier Chinese socialist fiction. Differences between authors of the different age-groups and between works published early and late in the period are analyzed as indicators of both political trends and changes in social values and attitudes.

In chapters 5 and 6, I focus more closely on the writers as women. Chapter 5 discusses the way the writers present women in society in their...
works, and follows these findings through to analyze their implications for women writers themselves. Chapter 6 considers the women writers in the context of a newly emerging interest in feminism in China. Starting with an analysis of Chinese feminist literary critics' views on the women's fiction, I go on to look at the writers' attitudes to feminism and to assess the extent to which feminist attitudes are identifiable in their works.

In my conclusion, I identify underlying generational trends common to the writers' treatment of all the thematic areas studied, and consider their implications not only for Chinese literature, but also for Chinese society.

Finally, I would like to stress that this is a comparative study of women writers of different age-groups. Where it is particularly relevant I have made comparisons with their male contemporaries, but this is not the main aim of this thesis. This may mean that the study does not point out some of the major differences between contemporary men's and women's writing in China, but for such comparisons to be made systematically a study many times the size of this one would be needed.

A Brief Introduction to the Writers and their Works

Ru Zhijuan

Born in 1925 in Shanghai, Ru Zhijuan was orphaned at the age of three and brought up by her impoverished grandmother. She went to the Communist base area in Jiangsu in 1944 where she worked in an army theatre troupe and began to write songs and poetry. Ru joined the Communist Party in 1947. She published her first short story in 1950, and in 1955 left the army to work as an editor of Wenyi yuebao (Literature and Art Monthly) in Shanghai.

Ru's works of the late Fifties and early Sixties, typified by "Lilies"
(1958), were tales of the courage of ordinary communist soldiers, or eulogies of life in the new socialist society. They were characterised by a bright, gentle, optimistic tone and their use of subject matter drawn from the everyday lives of ordinary people. Ru's "failure" to depict the exploits of larger-than-life proletarian heroes involved her in controversy in the late Fifties, and resulted in her being one of the first writers to be removed from office and denounced during the Cultural Revolution. After resuming publication in 1977, however, she expressed her defiance by taking the labels that had been used to criticise her fiction as the titles for two of her stories: "Family Affairs" and "Maternal Affection" (also translated as "Sons and Daughters").

The Cultural Revolution had shocked Ru out of her political naivety. Her best work of the post-1978 period, "A Badly-Edited Story" published in 1979, vents her anger at Party officials' betrayal of the Chinese people's and her own trust through a powerful exposure of the excesses of the Great Leap Forward. The theme of the work, that the Party must learn from its mistakes and restore its glorious tradition, dominated her fiction until the end of 1980. While Ru's fiction in this period continued her familiar technique of presenting themes through minor events in the lives of ordinary characters, her focus had shifted from eulogy to exposure of problems in the Party and society. Correspondingly the general tone of her works became one of grim urgency.

After 1981, Ru's focus changed again. Political criticism disappeared from her works completely as she reverted to eulogizing ordinary communist soldiers of the war years in the style of her works of

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5 Ru Zhijuan, "Jia wu shi" ("Family Affairs"), Ru Zhijuan xiaoshuo xuan (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1981), pp 256-266.


7 Ru Zhijuan, "Jianjicuole de gushi" ("A Badly-Edited Story"), in Ru Zhijuan zuopin xinshang, pp 180-203.
the Fifties. The reversion to socialist literary orthodoxy reached a peak in her semi-autobiographical novella "The Path She Trod" (1982), which depicts pre-1949 society in terms of rigid class stereotypes. At the same time Ru continued to depict ordinary people's lives. "After the Time was Ripe," the best of these stories, is a sensitive portrayal of the relationship between a woman and her father just after the death of her mother. The style is graceful, and the tone gentle and restrained, but, as with Ru's other works of the period, it is imbued with a strong sense of melancholy, that forms a sharp contrast to the author's earlier cheerful optimism.

**Shen Rong**

Shen Rong, the penname of Shen Derong, was born in Hankou on October 3, 1936, into the family of a supreme court judge under the nationalist government. In 1954 she entered Beijing Russian College and after graduation she worked at the Central People's Broadcasting Station and then as a middle-school teacher until forced to resign because of illness. She began to write plays in the early Sixties, and then turned to fiction.

In 1973, Shen completed her first novel, *Wannian qing (Evergreen)*, a story of class struggle on a rural commune written in the formulaic style that was the only acceptable way of writing during the Cultural Revolution period. She was attacked during the Campaign Against Lin Biao and Confucius because of her family background, and was only able to publish the novel in 1975 after personally appealing to "central literary authorities." Shen then began work on her second novel, also on class

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8 Ru Zhijuan, "Ta cong natiao lushang lai" ("The Path She Trod"), *Shouhualuo*, No 4, 1982, pp 170-250.

9 Ru Zhijuan, "Tiaojian chengshu yihou" ("After the Time was Ripe"), *Renmin wenxue>> 1984 nian duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1985), pp 456-469.

struggle in the countryside, *Guangming yu hei’an (Radiance and Darkness)*,\(^\text{11}\) but after the fall of the Gang of Four was in trouble again, this time because of Jiang Qing’s role in the publication of *Evergreen*. She was investigated and cleared, but her writer’s leave was cancelled and her pay stopped until 1980, when she was reimbursed. Shen, however, tenaciously continued her writing.

After 1978, Shen Rong moved quickly into new thematic areas, and experimented with new forms and techniques. From 1978 to 1981, most of her works were tragedies, exposing the injustices of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but in 1980 she also began to examine problems in contemporary society. "At Middle Age,"\(^\text{12}\) the novella that brought her national fame as a writer, highlighted the plight of middle-aged professionals in China who bear a heavy burden of work and have to raise families on meagre wages in cramped living conditions. Shen’s rather sympathetic depiction of two minor characters (both ophthalmologists), who emigrate to the West because they can see no hope for themselves or their daughter in China, evoked a debate among critics that lasted until 1983. Some critics accused Shen of maligning the Party and the social system.

After 1982 Shen Rong’s fiction concentrated on contemporary problems in the Party and society. Undeterred by the controversy over "At Middle Age," she continued to present incisive views on a wide range of issues, but the tragic tone of her earlier works was rapidly replaced with comedy. Among her best works of the period are two novellas that make skillful use of satire to criticise the way Party officials carry out ideological work among academics ("Snakes and Ladders"\(^\text{13}\)), and call into

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\(^\text{11}\) Shen Rong, *Guangming yu hei’an (Radiance and Darkness)* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978).

\(^\text{12}\) Shen Rong, "Ren dao zhongnian" ("At Middle Age"), *Shen Rong ji* (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1986), pp 149-236.

\(^\text{13}\) Shen Rong, "Zhen zhen jia jia" ("Snakes and Ladders"), *Shen Rong ji*, pp 334-430.
question Party membership selection criteria ("An Undisciplined Man"\textsuperscript{14}).

In 1983 Shen also began a series of works on women and marriage, first attacking the physical and spiritual constraints on women in traditional marital relationships ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre"\textsuperscript{15}) and then moving on to look at modern marriage in "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" (1984).\textsuperscript{16} "Can’t be Bothered to Divorce" (1988)\textsuperscript{17} brought her writing on the subject to a peak, using a mixture of humour and pathos to reveal the psychological and sociological factors that contribute to both the insipidness and the stability of many Chinese marriages.

Shen Rong’s fiction is characterized by its artistic variety and frequent experimentation with new forms. Within a basic realist approach Shen has drawn on techniques ranging from "stream of consciousness to absurdity and surrealism, with no one style or form dominating her fiction at any time after 1978.

Shen Rong is a member of the councils of the Beijing Branch of the Chinese Writers' Association and the Chinese Pen Association, and is a member of the standing committee of the Beijing Women’s Federation. She joined the Communist Party in 1986.

\textbf{Zhang Jie}

Zhang Jie was born in Beijing on April 27, 1937. Her father, a minor civil servant, abandoned the family early on, leaving them in straightened circumstances. In 1960 she graduated from the Economics department of the Chinese People’s University, and went to work in the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Shen Rong, "Sandan de ren" ("An Undisciplined Man"), \textit{Shen Rong ji}, pp 431-531.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Shen Rong, "Yang Yueyue yu Sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre") (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1984).
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Shen Rong, "Cuo, cuo, cuo" ("Wrong, Wrong, Wrong"), \textit{Cuo, cuo, cuo}, (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1986), pp 1-56.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Shen Rong, "Landi lihun" ("Can’t be Bothered to Divorce"), \textit{Xiaoshuo xuan\textsuperscript{\textregistered}k\textsuperscript{\textregistered}n}, No 6, 1988, pp 6-38.
\end{itemize}
First Ministry of Mechanical Equipment where she remained until transferring to a film studio in the late Seventies. Zhang Jie joined the Chinese Writers' Association in 1979, and became a professional writer in 1982. In 1980 she joined the Communist Party.

Zhang Jie began to write in the late 1970s. In 1978 and 1979 her fictional works were mostly eulogies of young people's silent self-sacrifice and their dedication to the nation or to socialist ideals. Artistically these early stories have a strongly lyrical quality and a quiet and serious yet optimistic tone. It was also in 1979 that Zhang Jie's works involved her in controversy for the first time. "Love is Not to Be Forgotten"\(^\text{18}\) aroused heated debate over its sympathetic depiction of love between a divorced woman and a married man, and over its criticism of traditional morality that places more importance on preserving marriage than on individual happiness or love. Some critics accused Zhang Jie of promoting immorality while others praised her for bringing the question of the relationship between love and marriage into the open.

"Love is Not to be Forgotten" set the direction for the development of Zhang Jie's fiction. After 1980 her works became much more critical of contemporary society. Zhang Jie had divorced in the late 1950s and now took up the cause of abused wives and divorcees in "The Ark" (1981)\(^\text{19}\) and "Tangram" (1983),\(^\text{20}\) bitterly protesting against the maltreatment of women in marriage, and the prejudice and sexual harassment suffered by divorced women.

Zhang's passionate belief in the socialist system also led her to focus on malpractices which she saw as hindering China's social progress. Her

\(^{18}\) Zhang Jie, "Ai shi bu neng wangji de" ("Love is Not to be Forgotten") *Ai shi bu neng wangji de* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp 102-122.

\(^{19}\) Zhang Jie, "Fang zhou" ("The Ark"), *Shouhuo*, No 2, 1982, pp 4-59.

first novel, *Leaden Wings*,\(^{21}\) is a frank exposure of the conservatism, nepotism and corruption that obstruct economic reform in a central government ministry. Zhang's portrayal of several high-ranking bureaucrats as negative characters aroused the ire of people who saw themselves as Zhang Jie's real-life models. She spent 1982 defending herself in court against accusations of being anti-Party and anti-socialist, and resisting efforts to have her expelled from the Party.

Zhang Jie toned down the intensity of her criticism in her 1983 works, but in 1984 returned to the fray. Satire gradually came to dominate her fiction, and the tone of her writing became colder and more detached. Among her best works after 1984 is "What's Wrong With Him?",\(^{22}\) a fierce social satire that uses the microcosm of life in a hospital to lash out at everything from the shortage of housing to the chastity cult, official corruption and Party propaganda. Zhang continued on in the same vein in her second novel *There is Only One Sun* (1988),\(^{23}\) her last major work of the period.

**Zhang Kangkang**

Zhang Kangkang was born on July 3, 1950 in Hangzhou. Her literary aspirations were encouraged by her family and school, and she published her first article at the age of eleven. In 1969, answering the call to urban youth to settle in the countryside, she went to a state farm in the Great Northern Wasteland in Heilongjiang, where she remained for eight years, working as an agricultural labourer, a brickyard labourer, and a writer for the performing arts propaganda team. She published her first


\(^{22}\) Zhang Jie, "Ta you shenme bing" ("What's Wrong With Him"), *Zhong shan*, No 4, 1986, pp 4-34.

\(^{23}\) Zhang Jie, *Zhi you yige taiyang (There is Only One Sun)*, *Wenxue siji*, inaugural issue, 1988.

Throughout the period 1978-1989, the lives of the generation of youth who were sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution dominated Zhang Kangkang's fiction. From 1979-1981, she looked at the psychological and emotional scars left on both those who had been ostracised and persecuted because of their family backgrounds ("The Right to Love"), and those who had taken part in the ostracism and destruction out of misguided revolutionary zeal and a failure to question their own beliefs and actions ("Peony Garden"). Her main emphasis in this period was on condemnation of political extremism of the past, but in 1980, in "Summer," she also began to look at the problems these youth encountered in contemporary society as they attempted to establish more liberal, humane values and assert their individuality. "Northern Lights" aroused controversy in 1981 because, in expounding her theme of young people's search for a new philosophy of life, Zhang Kangkang depicted her heroine breaking her engagement and then forming relationships with two other men in succession. Critics accused her of promoting fickleness and promiscuity. Artistically these early stories are quite ordinary. They often


27 Zhang Kangkang, "Xia" ("Summer") in *Xia*, pp 63-88.

rely on highly contrived plots to push the action forward, and tend to portray characters in terms of positive or negative stereotypes.

From 1982 to 1984, the conflict between city youth returned from the countryside and conservatism, prejudice and jealousy formed the main thread of Zhang's fiction, and her attitude towards the Cultural Revolution began to change. In these works, typified by "Pagoda" (1983), protagonists begin to reassess their Cultural Revolution experiences in the light of the problems they now face, and look back with some nostalgia on their time in the countryside. In "Pagoda" Zhang also began to develop new artistic techniques. Her protagonists became less idealised, and in place of her previous straightforward chronological narration of events, she successfully adopted the technique of using pure interior monologue and a point of narrative that shifted between the five main characters.

After 1984, Zhang Kangkang intensified her artistic experimentation and expanded the scope of her themes. While her characters were generally still former rusticated youth, she now used them to examine the bewilderment of ordinary people attempting to come to terms with a rapidly changing society. In these stories, most notably "Indra's Net" (1987), and "Epidemic" (1988), bizarre characters who are often afflicted with various mental disorders strive only to further their personal interests in a hostile environment in which the competition for wealth and success takes precedence over ideological or moral concerns.

In 1986, Zhang Kangkang returned to the Cultural Revolution for the subject matter of her second novel, *The Invisible Companion*. In tracing the psychological development of her heroine towards spiritual

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29 Zhang Kangkang, "Ta" ("Pagoda"), *Zhiqing xiaoshuo xuan* (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1987).


independence and realization of her own political naivety, Zhang intersperses realist narrative with dreams and fantasies, and uses elaborately symbolic passages in a new exploration of the sexual experience.

The final years of the period saw Zhang Kangkang combine her concern for political and social commentary with her new interest in the bizarre. "The Fourth World" published at the end of 1988, a hard-hitting political allegory, indicated that Zhang Kangkang was continuing to grow as a writer, both in the sophistication of her artistry and in the perspicacity of her ideas.

**Zhang Xinxin**

Zhang Xinxin was born on October 4, 1953 in Nanjing. In 1969, on graduating from lower-middle school, she was sent to the countryside in Heilongjiang. She transferred into the army in 1971, and returned to Beijing in 1973, where she worked as a nurse. In 1978 she married, but separated almost immediately and was divorced in 1980. She entered the department of directing in the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in 1979.

In 1978 and 1979, Zhang Xinxin’s fiction followed the model of orthodox Chinese socialist literature in using straightforward narrative and complete plots to eulogise altruistic youth sacrificing their own interests to those of society, but the style and content of her works then underwent an abrupt change.

Between 1980 and 1983, her fiction examined the psychological turmoil of modern young women torn between their careers and the desire for love and marriage. The most outstanding of these works, "On the

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Same Horizon" (1981), traces the path to divorce of a young couple whose individual ambitions force them apart despite their continuing affection for one another. These works experiment boldly with new artistic techniques. Narrative, for example, is predominantly through interior monologue that in "On the Same Horizon" switches without warning between the two protagonists, and in "The Last Mooring Place" (1983) sees the narrator addressing herself as "you". The mood of these works conveys an increasing sense of social alienation and spiritual bewilderment and vacuity.

In seeking the causes of her heroines' anguish, Zhang Xinxin had presented Chinese society as a battleground on which only the toughest and most ruthless can survive. This unorthodox view, along with existentialist and absurdist interpretations of Chinese society in her 1983 works, resulted in Zhang becoming a target of the 1983 Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution. She was placed under intense political pressure, was temporarily unable to publish, and upon graduation from the Drama Academy had to wait almost a year before she was assigned work as a director at the People's Theatre in Beijing.

Zhang Xinxin responded with another abrupt change of direction. When she resumed publication it was with Peking Man, a collection of oral accounts co-authored by Sang Ye, that brilliantly captures the mood and spirit of contemporary Chinese society. In the remaining years to 1989, she continued in a predominantly journalistic style, recording her trips overseas in travel fiction; journeys to the countryside and along the Grand Canal in "factual fiction"; and life in the Drama Academy in "news fiction." The best of these works, "Returning to the Ancestral Home"

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35 Zhang Xinxin, "Zuihou de tingbodi" ("The Last Mooring-Place"). Zhongguo zuojia. No 1, 1985. The work was written in 1983.

36 Zhang Xinxin and Sang Ye, Beijing ren (Peking Man) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986).
is a sensitive, lyrical portrait of country life and the author's search for spiritual roots.

In the last years of the period, the tone of Zhang Xinxin's works became increasingly detached and cynical, her structures became looser, and her language became more complex. While in places the sparkling wit that characterises her later works reveals a certain insensitivity towards the people she depicts, in works like "Whether You Win or Lose, You Gain Something," in which she relates an experience in a London casino, she combines original subject matter with lively language and an unobtrusive yet rich philosophical message.

Wang Anyi

Wang Anyi, daughter of Ru Zhijuan, was born in Nanjing on March 6, 1954. In 1970, she was sent to Da Liu Brigade in Wu He County, Anhui Province to work as an agricultural labourer, and two years later she entered the Xuzhou Regional Cultural Troupe in Jiangsu, where she played the violin. In 1978 she transferred back to Shanghai to work as an editor for the journal Ertong shidai (Childhood).

Wang Anyi's early fiction centred on the experiences of young people in the countryside and in small rural theatre troupes during and just after the Cultural Revolution. In 1979 and 1980, stories including "Misty Rain," which brought her national recognition as a writer, followed the development of an innocent, naive young woman, Wenwen, who comes face to face with hypocrisy, corruption and sexual exploitation, yet continues her idealistic search for beauty and romantic love. These stories are fresh and often charming, but lack depth and variety.

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37 Zhang Xinxin, "Hui lao jia" ("Returning to the Ancestral Home") Renmin wenxue, No 12, 1984.

38 Zhang Xinxin, "Shi ying, shi shu, dou shi zhuan" (Whether You Win or Lose, You Still Gain Something"), Zuojia, No 9, 1988.

In 1981, Wang left the world of Wenwen behind to explore new themes and characters. She turned to an examination of the lives of the lowest stratum of society - workers in neighbourhood factories and working class children - demanding that the worth of even the lowliest individual be recognised, and that their humble, seemingly vulgar aspirations be given sympathetic understanding. At this time Wang also took up the theme of people's struggle against an adverse destiny. Several works written chiefly in 1981 and 1982, but also including her 1986 short novel *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River*, portray ambitious composers whose lack of formal training and talent force them to accept that they will never advance beyond the rural orchestras they despise.

Until 1982, Wang Anyi continued to focus narrowly on the minor joys and sorrows of ordinary individuals, but after a trip to the United States in that year, her whole perspective on life changed, and she began to encompass a much broader social spectrum in her works.

From 1984 to 1986, Wang's fiction became an exploration of Chinese culture. In a series of works on life in Shanghai, she presented a rich panorama of the lives of ordinary urban residents - the culture and spirit of modern China, while in two novellas on country life, she explored China's traditional culture. These works mark Wang's first significant move away from conventional literary techniques. "Street" has no plot and no central characters, but focuses on a street corner rather like a fixed movie camera. "Xiao Bao Village" is a vivid collage of village life that attests to the persistence of traditional ways on a rural commune. In these and later works, the author retreats from the text, leaving no indication of authorial attitude, and little guide as to what moral judgements readers should make on characters' actions.

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Wang’s new authorial neutrality became particularly significant in the last years of the period when she switched from depiction of broad society to a controversial examination of love, sex and sexuality. From 1986 to 1989, her major works were stories of extra-marital affairs, enunciating the theme that in the face of basic human instincts, all moral, social and legal prohibitions become meaningless. Wang’s implicit negation of traditional moral values, not surprisingly, evoked the moral outrage of some critics, but there was no sustained campaign against her, and she continued to explore the theme with increasing explicitness until early 1989.
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Approaches to Writing

"What place is this?"
...Liu Xiumei's voice answered from a high place:
"This is the path of literature."

Wang Guangtai...looked around... The walls of the tunnel were lined with strange, jagged rocks. One after another there appeared hideous judges of high and low rank, some with green faces and fangs, some with red hair and green eyes, some holding "registers of life and death," some carrying "ropes to bewitch the soul." Looking further down, he saw all kinds of terrifying instruments of torture standing like a forest: mountains of knives; seas of fire; cauldrons of oil; five horses to pull the body asunder. Beneath choppers lay pools of fresh blood...

"Ahhhh!" Wang Guangtai shouted in alarm. He was convinced this was the realm of the Judge of Hades, the Eighteenth Layer of Hell. 1

The writers' approaches to writing fiction - their aims, views on their role and responsibilities as writers, and their attitudes to various external limiting factors - play a major part in determining what they write about and how they write. It is therefore important to look at similarities and differences in approach between the writers as one of the keys to understanding the way they handle the specific topics examined in later chapters of the thesis.

An examination of the six writers' statements on their approaches to writing shows that they can be divided into three major categories. The

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1 Shen Rong, "Zou tou wu lu" ("Impasse"), 1986 zhongpian xiaoshuo xuan (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1988), Vol 1, p 18.
first category comprises the three older writers: veteran writer Ru Zhijuan and the two middle-aged writers Shen Rong and Zhang Jie. Zhang Kangkang represents a middle category, and the two remaining younger writers, Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi, form a third category.

The Older Writers

This first group is characterized by the close relationship they see between their writing and political, social and economic issues in contemporary Chinese society. In "On Thought, Techniques and Other Things," Ru Zhijuan wrote: "A writer should be a thinker... we must ponder problems, and think about concrete events occurring around us and in our political life."²

Shen Rong has described herself as "a writer who takes depicting life and the era as her responsibility."³ Later in the same essay, she clearly states the link she perceives between literature and politics: "Our life is inseparable from politics. If literary works want to reflect life, they cannot possibly be divorced from politics."⁴

Zhang Jie considers "a writer's duty is to reflect the reality of life, to express the people's feelings and to give people hope and courage."⁵ Though she does not specifically mention politics, she made the statement

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³ Shen Rong, "Bing fei youqu de zishu" ("An Uninteresting Self-account"), Shen Rong yanjiu zhuanyan (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1984), p 35. The article is dated December 4, 1983.

⁴ Ibid p 38.

while discussing the political, economic and social significance of her novel *Leaden Wings*.

The writers' views sound like a repetition of Mao's doctrine on the subordination of literature to politics, but apart from politics, the writers also stress the importance of their depiction of society being "accurate." Zhang Jie's statement above mentions not simply "life," but "the reality of life," while Shen Rong is quoted as saying she demands of herself that she "truthfully reflects social life."6

This emphasis on "truth" and "reality" is clearly to differentiate their understanding of how to depict society from that proscribed for writers in earlier decades. The "double revolutionary" method of writing, combining "revolutionary realism" with "revolutionary romanticism," introduced in 1958 and still advocated by some prominent literary officials in the mid-1980s,7 meant that writers could not present what they saw as an accurate picture of social life, but had to depict it as it would be in the ideal socialist society. This in practice made any exposure of significant problems apart from "class struggle" taboo. Thus the commitment to depicting "reality" here means a commitment to criticise as well as eulogize. The rationale the writers offer for this reiterates their sense of active involvement with contemporary political and social issues. Ru Zhijuan, whose fiction in the 1950s and early 1960s had concentrated on eulogizing new socialist society, explained in 1980:

"In life there are all kinds of [negative] characters. I ... see them blocking the path of advance to the Four Modernizations... I must depict these people, castigate a certain type of incorrect ideological style... In future I shall still praise that which should be praised. That which cannot be praised, I will castigate. Our principle is: whatever the greatest

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6 Quoted in Chen Danchen, "Shen Rong he tade chuangzuo" ("Shen Rong and her Writing"), *Wenhui yuekan*, No 2, 1983, p 59.

hindrance to realizing the Four Modernizations is, that is the object of our castigation. If you do not pick up your whip, if you still go and eulogise things...we will not realise the Four Modernizations.\(^8\)

Likewise, in "Why I Wrote Leaden Wings," Zhang Jie relates that she wrote the novel out of a passionate love of China and Marxism that made her feel the need to right things that are wrong.\(^9\) Leaden Wings, first published in 1981, not only criticised bureaucratic obstacles to economic reform, but offered practical suggestions for the future direction of political and economic reform. In an interview with West German journalists in August 1985, Zhang Jie pointed out that several reforms depicted in the novel were later implemented by the Chinese government, including the selection of factory managers and foremen by shop-floor election, and the proposal that behavioral science be studied and applied in Chinese industry. Political criticism of the novel was due, in her view, to the fact that her critics had less political and economic acumen than she did.\(^10\) Hence Zhang Jie sees her role as not only to make a timely exposure of problems of immediate concern, but also to offer serious advice on how to rectify the situation. Ru Zhijuan also sees offering solutions as one of a writer's most important tasks. She asks rhetorically: "If a writer cannot answer questions put forward by life, what would the people want us for?"\(^11\)

While the writers stress the necessity for constructive criticism, they still advocate praising positive phenomenon, as Ru Zhijuan's statement

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\(^8\) "Sixiang, jiqiao ji qita" ("On Thought, Techniques and Other Things").


\(^10\) "Rang wenxue he shidai tongbu tengfei" ("Let Literature Soar with the Era"), pp 160-161.

above on realizing the Four Modernizations shows. Shen Rong also
mentions one of the demands she makes of herself as being to "praise the
people,"12 while Zhang Jie considers that "as a writer, one must be good
at discovering and eulogizing beauty, because it gives us the strength to
go on living."13 In practice, particularly in the early 1980s, this often
involved setting up positive models for readers to emulate.

In the early 1980s, Zhang Jie and Ru Zhijuan both saw education
through models as one of the aims of their fiction, particularly that written
for young people. In "On Writing 'Small Path Through the Grasslands'
and Other Things," Ru Zhijuan relates how she was motivated to write the
short story by her observation that contemporary youth had retrogressed:

"I wondered how we writers could put some effort into [correcting] this
phenomenon... I felt I should offer a little education on sentiment and
personal qualities, and then thought I should set up [an example of] a
fairly ideal girl."14

Zhang Jie reveals similar goals in her writing of "Who Lives the
More Beautiful Life?," in which a dedicated young bus conductress is
presented as a model for youth whose values had been warped by "the
Gang of Four's ideological poison": "Youth are the motherland's hope and
future, those of us who engage in literary work have the responsibility to
help them grow up in a healthy way."15

12 In Chen Danchen, "Shen Rong he tade chuangzuo" ("Shen Rong and her Writing"), p 59.


14 Ru Zhijuan, "<<Caoyuanshang de xiaolu>> de chuangzuo ji qita" ("On Writing 'Small Path Through the Grasslands' and Other Things"), Ru Zhijuan xiaoshuo xuan, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), p 353.

15 "Meihua xiang zi ku han lai" ("The Fragrance of Plum Blossom Comes From the Bitter Cold"), p 81.
Although Shen Rong made no direct statements on literature as education in the early 1980s, she did provide a reader's letter for publication that appraises her novella "At Middle Age" in terms of its educational value: "...You set up a fine example for us, a model to be learned from - Lu Wenting [the novella's heroine] and yourself."

This concept of serious literature as a tool for education, a view that far pre-dates communist literary orthodoxy in China, weakened considerably in the later part of the 1980s. It disappeared from the three writers' statements on writing to the extent that Shen Rong remarked in a 1988 interview that she was "against literature educating people." Correspondingly, the rather idealized characters that had functioned as objects for praise and emulation in the three women's works virtually disappeared from their later fiction. Topical social and political criticism, however, remained an important part of their writing, and in the works of Zhang Jie and Shen Rong increased in intensity and overtness until the events of June 1989 brought what is hopefully only a temporary halt to their publication of fiction.

Although a significant proportion of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie's fiction deals with love and marriage, and with women's issues, these topics do not appear in their published statements on the aims of their writing. This is probably because throughout the socialist period prior to 1978, love and marriage were not considered "proper" subjects for literature. Hence, it should be borne in mind that the public statements on writers' responsibilities and aims examined in this chapter may be influenced by the writers' understanding of what they are expected to say, and while they reveal trends, they may not reflect the whole scope of the writers' literary interests.

Zhang Kangkang

16 Ibid p 82.
17 Author's interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.
Like the older writers, Zhang Kangkang has been motivated by a strong sense of social and political responsibility. Discussing the aims of her writing of the late 1970s, she wrote: "I hoped in my works forcefully to expose and condemn feudalism, modern superstition, and the extreme leftist line." Also like her older counterparts, she sees her role as accurately to reflect and appraise key issues in contemporary society. Offering advice to budding authors, she wrote in 1984 that writers who reflect "real life" must have "a high degree of sensitivity to developments of the period. This requires them to capture rapidly the new characteristics of new things as soon as they appear." Hence her fiction is often written as a direct response to specific problems she sees emerging or existing in society. "In the Hills and Beside the Lake," for example is "a loud shout on behalf of those courageous people who successfully trained themselves under adverse conditions," but who in the 1980s found themselves hindered at every step by "bureaucratism, professional jealousy and nepotism..."

But while the older writers tend to focus on issues at the level of the interests of the nation (e.g. economic reform in Zhang Jie's *Leaden Wings*), the Party (such as Ru Zhijuan's works aimed at restoring the glorious Party tradition including "A Badly-Edited Story" and "Sons and Daughters," and Shen Rong's "An Undisciplined Man" which criticises Party member selection criteria), or society in general (Zhang Jie asserts that "Love is not to be Forgotten" is not a love story but "probes

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19 Zhang Kangkang, "Xiaoshuo chuangzuo yu yishu ganjue" ("Fiction Writing and Artistic Sense"), *Xiaoshuo chuangzuo yu yishu ganjue* (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1985), p 79.

20 Zhang Kangkang, "Liudong, jiaocha" ("Flowing, Intersecting"), *Xiaoshuo chuangzuo yu yishu ganjue*, pp 118-121.
sociological problems",

Zhang Kangkang’s approach is to examine problems as they affect the individual. Discussing her responsibility as a writer in 1988, she said:

"After the smashing of the Gang of Four...some of my beliefs collapsed, I suddenly woke up to some things. I felt there were many unreasonable things in that past era, that society: the destruction of human feelings, the lack of respect for individuality, the restrictions placed on people. Quite apart from the problems of the political and economic system, many other aspects of society gave me cause for concern. I hoped to understand, and hoped others would understand, so I wanted to tell other people what I had already understood. In the last ten years [ie 1978-1988] this is what my sense of responsibility has become."

Here it is significant that Zhang Kangkang specifically excludes from her fiction "problems of the political and social system" as topics for examination in their own right. Thus when she offers political criticism in her works, it is usually in order to expose the harmful effects of political extremism on young people’s psychology, or the restrictions it places on individual freedoms.

Zhang Kangkang has repeatedly affirmed her commitment to representing her generation of youth, the so-called "forgotten generation" who reached adulthood during the Cultural Revolution. She sees her role not only as to "reflect the arduous path [they] have trodden, their praise of, criticism of and longings for life and society," but also to "influence and help them to overcome their own weaknesses as far as possible, and

21 Quoted in Zhang Weigong "Ai shi bu neng wangji de" ("Love is Not to be Forgotten"), in Teng Yun (ed), Xin shiqi xiaoshuo baipian pingxi, (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1985), p 74.

22 Author’s interview with Zhang Kangkang, October 4, 1988.

step by step approach the truth."\(^{24}\) This latter goal echoes those of Zhang Jie and Ru Zhijuan, but Zhang Kangkang differs sharply from the two older women in the approach to the problem she considers appropriate, specifically criticising the setting up of ideal models for youth to emulate:

"The youth who comprised the 'old three grades'\(^{25}\) experienced tribulation and hardship, and today 'baptism literature' that sees youth as simple objects for education does not suit the needs of the times. [What is needed] is to enlighten youth using their own fate and misfortune, making readers see themselves in these artistic images."\(^{26}\)

Thus compared to the model bus conductress set up for youth in Zhang Jie's "Who Lives the More Beautiful Life?" whose perfect spiritual equilibrium and self-confidence enable her to accept insults and humiliation with equanimity, and who writes "pure, fresh, profound" poetry while living in a slum, even the most idealized of Zhang Kangkang's characters, Cen Lang in the "Summer" series of stories, suffers from self-doubt and depression when attacked by ultra-leftists and conservatives for her unorthodox ideas and lifestyle.

Zhang Kangkang's attitude to literature as eulogy also reflects the difference between her approach to writing and that of the older writers. Like her older counterparts, in the early 1980s she considered "a writer's responsibility is to discover and dig out beautiful souls and things in life...,"\(^{27}\) and "to depict the countless numbers of 'new people' who have

\(^{24}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Wo xie <<Beiji guang>>" ("My Writing of 'Northern Lights'"), Xiaoshuo chuangzuo yu yishu ganjue, p 27.

\(^{25}\) This refers to city youth who graduated from lower middle school in 1966, 1967 and 1968. Most of them went to the countryside to be "re-educated," and found their experiences there very disillusioning.

\(^{26}\) Quoted in Peng Fang, "Zhang Kangkang he tade 'duobianxing' renwu" ("Zhang Kangkang and her 'Polygonal' Characters"), Fuyin baokan ziliao, No 14, 1985, p 64.

surged forth in the midst of the construction of the Four Modernizations."^{28} But in her understanding,

"'new people' are not merely 'good people', even less are they 'perfect people', ...but they dare to negate old concepts and dare to negate themselves, both dare to create a new world and dare to create a new self."^{29}

Hence, they are not the upright, hard-working Party officials correctly implementing Party policy or seeking to reform the economy as are to be found in Zhang Jie's *Leaden Wings* or Shen Rong's "A Distracting Sunday,"^{30} nor are they the over-worked intellectuals in Shen Rong's "At Middle Age" - all characters in whom the self is subordinated to wider interests. Rather they are young people, like Cen Lang in "Summer," striving to win greater moral and intellectual freedom for the individual, or youth who have achieved personal success through individual effort, such as the self-taught medical researcher in "In the Hills and Beside the Lake."

In a short passage published in *Fiction Monthly* in 1988, Zhang Kangkang posed the question: "Why are people always examined from the point of view of society? Why can't we examine society from the standpoint of people?"^{31} This encapsulates the difference between her approach to writing and that of the three older writers. While all feel a sense of responsibility to examine contemporary social, political or economic problems in their works, Ru Zhijuan, Shen Rong and Zhang Jie

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^{29} "Wo xie <<Beiji guang>>" ("My Writing of 'Northern Lights'"), p 28.

^{30} Shen Rong, "Fannao de xingqiri" ("A Distracting Sunday"), *Shen Rong xiaoshuo xuan* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1980), pp 287-306.

^{31} Zhang Kangkang, "Fengmian ren yu" ("Words from the Person on the Cover"), *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, No 3, 1988, p 63.
tend to use characters to communicate their attitudes to specific issues, whereas in Zhang Kangkang’s works, characters are of central importance, and specific social and political phenomena are evaluated in the light of their effect on the individual.

Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi

In the approach to writing of Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi, the trend away from concern with specific social and political issues in the external world, and towards a concern with the individual and psychological becomes even more pronounced. The two writers rarely discuss aims and responsibilities, and where they do so, it is often in fairly vague terms centring on the writer as an individual.

In contrast to Zhang Kangkang and the older writers who could name specific social or political goals for their writing, in 1982, Wang Anyi wrote that her motivation for writing was not very clear: "It seems very hard to say why I want to write and what goal I want to achieve by writing a story." During an interview in 1988, she identified her early aims as self-expression: "In the earliest period, I just wanted to express my thoughts and feelings." Zhang Xinxin used almost identical words to speak of her early aims: "When I wrote "On the Same Horizon" and "The Last Mooring Place," my aim was to tell other people of the things and feelings I felt." It is significant that while Zhang Jie and Ru Zhijuan

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33 Author’s interview with Wang Anyi, October 12, 1988.

34 Author’s interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.
both spoke of expressing "the people's feelings,"\textsuperscript{35} Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi only claimed to represent themselves.

In line with this concern with the self, the works of the two younger writers in the early Eighties focused on exploring the inner world of their generation of youth. Wang Anyi wrote in 1981:

"I like to examine people's souls, explore their psychology. Whether Wenwen's eyelashes are long or short, her face round or pointed I don't care. But I want to convey every tiny movement in her heart."\textsuperscript{36}

Even in trying to help youth of her generation, Zhang Xinxin opted for a psychological approach. Discussing "Dreams of Our Generation," she wrote that she had depicted her age group's "bewilderment and degeneration in the face of the conflict between ideals and reality" and their "psychological and emotional sense of dislocation" in order to warn them "to face squarely the true situation in which we find ourselves in the external and internal worlds...and once more search for more realistic, more constructive ideals."\textsuperscript{37} This approach stands out in contrast to that of both the older writers who offered education through behavioral models and that of Zhang Kangkang who preferred to map the individual's struggle with conservative and leftist forces.

Towards the mid-1980s, the two writers broadened the scope of their literature, but their focus on psychological exploration remained. Zhang Xinxin saw a need for "works that master the whole panorama of

\textsuperscript{35} Zhang Jie: "Rang wenxue he shidai tong bu tengfei" ("Let Literature Soar with the Era"), p 160; Ru Zhijuan: see Dong Xiao, "Nuzuojia Ru Zhijuan tan duanpian xiaoshuo changzuo" ("Woman Writer Ru Zhijuan Discusses Short Story Writing"), p 98.

\textsuperscript{36} Wang Anyi, "Lushang ren congcong" ("People on the Road are in a Hurry"), Zhongguo qingnian, No 11-12, 1981, p 44-45. Wenwen is one of several semi-autobiographical characters whose experiences during and after the Cultural Revolution are the subject of most of Wang Anyi's early works.

\textsuperscript{37} Zhang Xinxin, "Biyaode huida" ("A Necessary Reply"), Wenyi bao, No 6, 1983, p 76.
the psychology of the era, \(^{38}\) and so turned to depicting the psychology of contemporary Chinese society rather than of specific individuals. Wang Anyi, after directly experiencing something of Western culture on a trip to the United States, attempted to capture the Chinese psyche in its traditional and modern forms in a series of works depicting contemporary life in the countryside and in Shanghai. This included studies of the characters of a diverse range of ordinary people and their interpersonal relationships.

In the late 1980s Wang Anyi's concern with the individual intensified even further. While her early works had concentrated on "thoughts and feelings," now she moved on to explore the individual's internal struggle with desires, instincts, and innate human weaknesses. In "Face to Face with Oneself," she talks of the loneliness of every individual's internal battle with "selfishness, a sense of inferiority, arrogance, weakness, brutality, cowardice, childhood ignorance, the turmoil of puberty, and the upsurge and repression of sexual desire." \(^{39}\)

"I think my literature is to establish contact between those lonely battlefields,... to tell people that they are not alone, the whole of mankind is behind them. At the same time it allows them to absorb strength and wisdom, so they can win their inner battle." \(^{40}\)

Thus Wang Anyi's early preoccupation with self-expression was replaced by the desire to unlock the innermost secrets of the universal human condition, a goal that moved her even further away from the political, economic and social aims that guide the writing of the first two groups of women.

\(^{38}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Xingyun'er" ("Child of Fortune"), Wenhui yuekan, No 2, 1985, p 12.

\(^{39}\) Wang Anyi, "Mian dui ziji" ("Face to Face with Oneself"), Huang shan zhi lian (Hong Kong: South China Press, 1988), pp 3-4.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
While Wang Anyi was progressing down the path of psychological exploration, Zhang Xinxin reassessed her whole approach to writing. Political pressure during the Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution in 1983 was one causal factor, but Zhang Xinxin explained that it was also because she became aware that ordinary people felt that fiction was too far from their own thoughts, too far removed from real people and real things. Inspired by Studs Terkel's *American Dreams: Lost and Found*, she turned to writing oral accounts in the belief that "because this style is closer to reality, it can narrow the gap between written language and readers, between the content expressed by written language and reality." Her first project, *Peking Man*, co-authored with Sang Ye, consists of the oral accounts of one hundred Chinese people from diverse age-groups and backgrounds. However, despite this abrupt change of style, Zhang Xinxin's concern with the psychological is still evident, for taken as a whole, *Peking Man* is a reflection of the mood and spirit of contemporary China.

In the late 1980s, Zhang Xinxin's goal of moving closer to recognisable reality led her to adopt a journalistic approach to writing. She turned to "factual fiction," "news fiction" and travel fiction, in which material is often overtly autobiographical, with the first-person narrator sometimes even identified by name as the author herself. Events and characters are portrayed only through the eyes and thoughts of the narrator, and the direct psychological depiction found in earlier works has

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41 In "Child of Fortune" (p 13), Zhang Xinxin wrote that the "series of setbacks" she faced caused a "terrifying degeneration of her powers of free ... imagination," and that it was because of this that she began to write oral accounts and travel fiction.

42 Quoted in Li Hui, "Dianxing, huangdan ji qita" ("Typical Models, Absurdity and Other Things"), *Fuyin baokan ziliao*, J3, No 24, 1985, p 85.

43 Quoted in Wang Fei, "Zhang Xinxin xiaoshuo de neixin shijing yu waizai shijie" ("The Internal and External Fields of Vision in Zhang Xinxin's Fiction"), *Wenxue pinglun*, No 3, 1986, p 51.

44 *Beijing ren* (*Peking Man*).
disappeared. Zhang Xinxin’s emphasis on closely reflecting reality in this period in some ways brings her more in line with the aims of the first group of writers, so that her "news fiction," "Searching for the Appropriate Character to Die,"\(^\text{45}\) repeats the themes of Shen Rong’s earlier work on the plight of intellectuals, "At Middle Age." But the very personal narrative method and the overt role the author assigns herself in her own works indicate that it is still concern with the self that dominates Zhang Xinxin’s writing.

The same concern with the self is also evident in the two writers’ statements on the related area of a writer’s responsibility. While recognising a responsibility to society, Wang Anyi puts the writer in first place:

"A good writer with moral integrity should be responsible to herself. Being responsible to herself, she will be responsible to society. She must be honest with herself, must not deceive herself."\(^\text{46}\)

Although Zhang Xinxin does not mention responsibility directly, in "Child of Fortune," she wrote: "A writer must first of all have a conscience, must sincerely write her own feelings in order to reflect the era in which she exists."\(^\text{47}\) In 1989, she also talked of a "sense of mission" that a writer who "treats life earnestly, and writes earnestly...cannot avoid." Once more the writer’s independent views (as opposed to those officially promoted by the government and Communist Party) are given prominence:

"I believe the so-called ‘sense of mission’ is simply the personal beliefs one firmly holds in order to be creative in the environment one exists in.

\(^{45}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Xunzhao heshi qu side juzhong ren" ("Searching for the Appropriate Character to Die"), Beijing wenxue, No 1, 1986, pp 2-13.

\(^{46}\) Author’s interview with Wang Anyi, October 12, 1988.

\(^{47}\) "Xingyun er" ("Child of Fortune"), p 12.
If one has chosen to live and work with the pen, it should be for beliefs - real beliefs needless to say.\(^{48}\)

These statements reveal both the similarities and the differences between Zhang Xinxin, Wang Anyi and the other writers under discussion. The outward orientation of aims and responsibilities in the first group, weakening in Zhang Kangkang, becomes inward orientation in this last group, illustrated by phrases like "should be responsible to herself," "must... write her own feelings," and "personal beliefs." Nevertheless, these differences are not absolute. Zhang Xinxin’s desire to "reflect the era," and Wang Anyi’s indirect sense of responsibility to society, shows that to them, as to the other writers, literature is still firmly linked to contemporary Chinese life.

Looking at general trends in the approaches of the six women, if one considers that the older writers examine people from the point of view of society and Zhang Kangkang examines society from the point of view of people, then Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi can be seen as examining the psychology of society and individuals from the point of view of the writer.

Attitudes to External Restrictions

In the unique Chinese literary environment, external factors including current government policies, the general political situation, and the views of literary critics (who often simply transmit political demands), can have a powerful and sometimes devastating effect on both a writer and his or her works. As the history of literature under Chinese communism has repeatedly shown, writers whose works are judged by the

\(^{48}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Lun zuojia de wutai biaoyan jiqiao" ("On Writers’ Performance Techniques"), Zheci ni yan na yi ban? (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1989), pp 236-238.
political leadership of the time to contain incorrect thought may have their books banned, and may themselves be punished with anything from being unable to publish new works, through being deprived of work and an income, to the extremes of being exiled to remote labour camps and even hounded to death. The judgement passed on authors and their works can change as rapidly as shifts in Party policy, so that a work may receive accolades when first published, but be criticised a few months or a number of years later. Thus writing is not only a prestigious and influential profession, but also a potentially dangerous one.

To varying degrees, the women writers under discussion have all personally experienced these external pressures. Ru Zhijuan was strongly criticised in the late 1950s, and during the Cultural Revolution was among the first writers to be denounced and removed from office, because her works depicted ordinary people in commonplace situations instead of the exploits of proletarian heroes.\textsuperscript{49} Shen Rong, unable to publish in the early 1970s because her father had been a supreme court judge under the Nationalist government, successfully appealed to Jiang Qing for the right to publish, but in the late 1970s was investigated and had her pay stopped for over three years because of this perceived link with the Gang of Four.\textsuperscript{50} Zhang Jie was threatened with arrest and expulsion from the Communist Party, and had to defend herself in court as a result of the suspicion of some officials that they were the models for negative characters in her novel \textit{Leaden Wings}.\textsuperscript{51} Zhang Xinxin became a target of the 1983 Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution for her Darwinian analysis of society in "On the Same Horizon." She was prevented from publishing, pressured to make a public self-criticism, and denied work on her


\textsuperscript{50} "Bing fei youqu de zishu" ("An Uninteresting Self-Account"), pp 29-37.

\textsuperscript{51} During my interview with her in 1988, she asserted that she had won because the political situation had eased, but a renewed political "tightening" would see her in trouble again.
graduation.\textsuperscript{52} Zhang Kangkang and Wang Anyi, though escaping political pressure, have both been targets of criticism for their liberal moral views. Thus there can be no doubt that all the writers are well aware of the problems that writing may bring them. In the light of this, in considering the women's approaches to writing it is significant to look at the attitudes they hold towards these potentially limiting factors.

During interviews in 1988, Zhang Kangkang, Zhang Jie and Shen Rong all commented specifically on the influence of politics on their writing. All stressed that political pressure could not influence their views, but indicated that it does influence their writing in various ways. Zhang Kangkang, speaking partly for writers in general and partly for herself, described the tactics she adopts to cope with a changing political environment:

"I think it is impossible to completely ignore politics, because in the last ten years policies have been constantly chopping and changing. So it might be that in one period policies are fairly open, in which case some works are quite easy to publish. Perhaps in another period, because of the influence of policy, you are not allowed to publish that kind of work. In that situation, you might write something more indirectly, more implicitly, or you might decide temporarily not to publish that particular work. Publishing here is not as free as in the West, so we are necessarily limited in what we can publish. So in this respect we must consider the political situation. But when all is said and done, the political situation cannot control our thoughts...so the difference is only one of degree and whether to write something now or later."\textsuperscript{53}

Though Shen Rong and Zhang Jie both said that they ignore the political situation when writing, this may have been partly because the

\textsuperscript{52} For a detailed account of Zhang Xinxin's experiences at this time see: Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tong yi dipingxianshang de xiamian" ("Underneath 'On the Same Horizon'"), \textit{Zai tong yi dipingxianshang} (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1988), pp 203-239.

\textsuperscript{53} Author's interview with Zhang Kangkang, October 4, 1988.
controls on writers at that particular time were relatively relaxed. Analysis of their works (see "Presentation of Contemporary Society"), suggests that consciously or unconsciously, they do adopt methods of presenting socio-political criticism that makes it less vulnerable to attack. Both women also added qualifications to their denials. Zhang Jie stressed the controlling function of editorial boards. She stated that though she is willing to present "very incisive views," if she does, "they won’t be published." She implied that she does not write works that editorial boards are unlikely to approve. Hence the political situation, as reflected in the decisions of editorial boards, does influence the content of her works. Shen Rong felt that political campaigns affected her creativity by making her very depressed, so that more than simply influencing her approach to writing, they made her tend to stop writing altogether.

Unwillingness to produce fiction according to the demands of specific government policy also led Ru Zhijuan to passively resist resuming her writing after her rehabilitation in the early 1970s. Assigned to write a film script in 1974 on the struggle to prevent the restoration of capitalism in Wenzhou, she adopted delaying tactics until the fall of the Gang of Four brought a change to policy demands on writers. Refusal to write (or at least publish) is one of the last options open to writers unwilling to compromise their integrity by producing insincere political propaganda.

In the case of Zhang Xinxin, political pressure in the mid-1980s clearly contributed to her major change of approach to writing. Unlike the older writers and Zhang Kangkang whose strong sense of responsibility made them unwilling to stop exploring social or political problems, Zhang Xinxin was willing to alter everything from subject matter, style and genre to the tone of her works. Sarcastic comments she has made about writers

54 Author’s interview with Zhang Jie, October 10, 1988.
55 Author’s interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.
56 See Sheng Ying, "Ru Zhijuan lun" ("On Ru Zhijuan"), p 393.
who believe themselves to be "carrying a cross for the whole of mankind," suggest that she sees little value in the kind of spirit of martyrdom displayed by Zhang Jie in "Why I Wrote Leaden Wings." This is not to say that Zhang Xinxin surrendered to political pressure, or in any way compromised herself, but that like many of her generation brought up in the Cultural Revolution, she is more adept at political self-preservation than Zhang Jie's generation.

Wang Anyi's attitude to external limitations reflects her personal approach to literature. During an interview in 1988, she said that she does not consider any limitations because: "A writer's work involves only the writer face to face with herself." As Wang Anyi's works have never been politically controversial, and her morally controversial works were published in the relatively liberal atmosphere of the mid- to late- Eighties, she in fact had little need to consider the political situation before 1988. However, the government's promotion of ideological and moral education since June 1989, and its campaign against pornography in 1990, have had a tangible effect on her writing. A short work published in September 1989, "Bathing," criticises the petty selfishness of intellectuals and praises the openness and dignity of a pedal-cart rider. Wang's abrupt switch from depicting love and sex to producing politically "correct" material suggests she is no less influenced by the political environment than the other writers. The extreme shortness of the work - a little over one page - coming from a writer who usually writes novellas, also makes one suspect that it may be a calculated exercise in self-protection.

A further potential influence on writers is the perceived needs of readers. In this respect there is no clear division along age lines between the writers. At interviews in 1988, Wang Anyi and Zhang Jie claimed to ignore readers, though in the early 1980s Zhang Jie had said that because

57 "Lun zuojia de wutai biaoyan yishu" ("On Writers' Performance Techniques"), p 236.
58 Author's interview with Wang Anyi, October 12, 1988.
"Who Lives the More Beautiful Life?" was written for young people, she had kept the themes simple and clear.60

Ru Zhijuan clearly takes her readers into consideration, for as earlier discussion has shown, some of her works were written with a specific audience in mind. She stresses not only educating readers, but also providing them with artistic enjoyment through good images and language.61

Shen Rong said she considers readers carefully when deciding on the techniques and language she will use in a story. In writing "The Secret of Crown Prince Village," for example, she used techniques from popular literature including deductive reasoning so that the story would appeal to peasants and low-ranking rural cadres. "At Middle Age" was written for intellectuals, and so utilised more sophisticated techniques such as non-chronological time sequence, flashbacks and dreams. Shen Rong also deliberately avoids using obscure vocabulary so that her works can be understood by a wide readership.62

Zhang Xinxin showed a similar concern for her readers, not only choosing her language and techniques with certain readers in mind, but in at least one work also adopting what she perceived to be readers' viewpoints. Discussing "How Did I Miss You?," which depicts the psychological turmoil of a "masculinized" young woman, she explained:

"I had put myself in the position of the readers. I knew what sort of woman readers liked, and how they liked women candidly to reveal their thoughts and feelings, so that's how I wrote it."63


61 See Dong Xiao, "Nuzuojia Ru Zhijuan tan duanpian xiaoshuo chuangzuo" ("Woman Writer Ru Zhijuan Discusses Short Story Writing"), p 98.

62 Author's interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.

63 Author's interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.
Zhang Kangkang, in contrast, takes the view that writers should improve their readers. She believes:

"Writers should not pander to readers, should not adopt the attitude 'I'll give you whatever you want'. No, I'll give you what I have thought about and see which of you like it."^64

These differences in attitudes to external limitations contribute towards differences between writers who otherwise have basically similar approaches to writing. Thus while Zhang Jie and Shen Rong share a commitment to exposing social and political problems, Shen Rong's concern for readers means that she has consistently used very clear, straightforward language, and plots that are easily followed, in order to enunciate her themes. Zhang Jie on the other hand, who gave less consideration to Chinese readers in the late 1980s, published some rather obscure works in 1988 including "Bait" and "Across the Road," which use complex and difficult language including classical Chinese unintelligible to many contemporary mainlanders.^65 They have little plot and do not offer clear-cut themes. Likewise, though Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi both have an approach to writing that stresses psychological depiction and self-expression, Zhang Xinxin's response to political pressure contributed to her developing in a different direction from Wang Anyi.

In summary, the six writers share a common commitment to depict accurately modern Chinese society in their works, though in their choice of subject matter and themes there is a trend away from a socialist realist understanding of literary reality in Ru Zhijuan's works towards a less politically correct, more naturalistic presentation of reality in the younger

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^64 Author's interview with Zhang Kangkang, October 4, 1988.

^65 "Yu'er" ("Bait") and "Hengguo malu" (Across the Road") were both published in Tianjin wenxue, No 6, 1988.
writers' works. The degree to which writers see themselves primarily as commentators on and critics of social and political issues decreases in direct proportion to the decreasing age of the writers, while concern with the individual and psychological increases. Within this general framework, the writers' attitudes and responses to potentially restrictive factors further differentiates their approaches to writing. While the historical and literary backgrounds of the authors, looked at in detail in following chapters, determine the broad categories to which they belong, differences in personality and personal experience determine minor differences between them, creating the unique approach of each.

66 Socialist realism, as explained by political and literary authorities including Zhou Yang and Hu Yaobang, is "not the same as the reality of life" because it uses a Marxist world view to reflect the essence of life through aesthetic images. Socialist realism depicts "the future development of reality and ideals for life" as well as "the profound truth that brightness will be victorious over darkness." As later chapters will show, most, though not all, of Ru Zhijuan's works fulfil these criteria, suggesting that as well as being accurate in her depiction of society she is also concerned with being "correct." Naturalism, defined by Chinese literary theoreticians as "the idea that every thing and every phenomenon that exists in objective reality should be depicted in art," is not considered "realism," and is criticised on the grounds that it does not necessarily either have aesthetic significance or reveal the "essence" of life. (The theoretical definitions above can be found in Xin shiqi wenxue liu nian (Six Years of Literature of the New Period) (Compiled by the Contemporary Literature Research Centre of the Chinese Academy of Sciences) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985), pp 77-79.) Some works by the younger writers which literary critics do not consider politically or morally correct have been criticised for their "naturalism." (See, for example, criticism of Wang Anyi's "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" in Li Xia, "Xing yao xie, dan bu neng diule mei" ("Sex Can be Depicted, But Not at the Expense of Beauty"), Zuopin yu zhengming, No 9, 1989, pp 23-25 and 27.)
Attitudes to History

"You wrote 'As he dived into the water, Chairman Mao's teaching flashed across his mind: 'To die for the people is to die a worthwhile death', but at the time I didn't have time to think that."

"You mean you didn't think of Chairman Mao's teachings at all?"

"That's right, not at all."

"Then what about when you could hardly swim from exhaustion, or when you were knocked under the water by waves? You must have thought of - 'sacrifice'."

"No," he answered me simply, "I never thought I might be sacrificed, I'm an excellent swimmer."

In line with the close connection the writers see between their fiction and contemporary Chinese society, their depiction of history tends to be restricted to either events that have directly affected the lives of their own generation, or those that can act as a vehicle to comment on contemporary society. With the exception of one or two minor stories, to date none of the writers have written about pre-Republican times, and only Ru Zhijuan has set stories entirely in the pre-1949 period. The younger writers rarely focus on events that occurred prior to the Cultural Revolution. Thus the period of history under consideration is the fifty or so years from the late 1920s to the late 1970s, with particular emphasis on

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1 Zhang Kangkang, "Ta shibushi yingxiong?" ("Is He a Hero?"), Xia (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1981), p 44.

2 Two I am aware of are short pieces by Wang Anyi among several published under the collective title "Wang Anyi jinzuo xiao ji" ("A Small Collection of Wang Anyi’s Recent Works"), Shanghai wenxue, No 1, 1986.
the period of Communist rule.

Within this period, a key event for all writers is the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957-58, because this marks the official dividing line between those events in Chinese Communist Party history which may be criticised and those which may not. The document which summarizes the official attitude to Party history held throughout the post-1978 period, the ‘Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China’, declares that the Party made a number of serious mistakes which began with the ‘magnification’ of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and did not completely stop until the convening of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. Major developments in pre-1949 Party history, including the Party rectification movement of 1942, (covered in the first section of the resolution), are all given approval, as are the movements of the early fifties (covered in the third section). Whether by design or accident, the conclusions of the ‘Resolution’ have been followed exactly by all the writers under consideration, so that, while the Anti-Rightist Campaign, Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution are all subject to strong criticism, no writer expresses criticism of, or traces the source of later extremism back to, any events earlier in Communist history, even when personal experiences might give them reason to do so. The only slight deviation from the official line shown by the writers is that, while the Anti-Rightist Campaign has never officially been completely negated,

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3 Adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in June 1981, and published in *Renmin ribao* on July 1st, 1981.

4 For example in "Cong Xizihu dao Beidahuang" ("From West Lake to the Great Northern Wasteland"), *Xinyuan*, No 3, 1982, pp 113-114, Zhang Kangkang relates how her father, an intellectual who worked for the Communist underground in the late 1940s, was put under investigation in 1952, then removed from his post as editor of the *Zhejiang Daily*, to work as a manual labourer until he was finally rehabilitated in the early 1980s. But despite this experience, the only persecuted intellectuals she presents in her works are those designated rightists in 1957 or denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Ding Ling’s experiences during the Party Rectification Movement in 1942 also failed to produce any critical writing on that event.
none of the writers depict any character who was *justly* designated a rightist, that is: they completely negate the campaign in their works. However, though all the authors are working within the same broad attitudinal framework, there are still significant differences in the way writers of different generations approach pre-1949 and post-1949 history.

**The Writers' Presentation of Pre-1949 History**

The most distinctive characteristic of the veteran writers' presentation of history in their post-1978 fiction is their treatment of the pre-1949 period. This combines a consistently nostalgic, very orthodox representation of the heroic exploits of members of the Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army and its predecessors with the use of class stereotypes to depict the wider society of the same period, and has more in common with works of the 1950s by the same authors than with the works of younger writers in the Eighties. Thus in late 1978, when the main literary trend was towards exposure of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, Yang Mo returned to the Anti-Japanese War for the setting of "Report," a short story that expounds the "never forget class struggle" theme through characters who could have stepped out of her 1958 novel *Song of Youth* - politically naive women university students, wicked landlords, and politically astute, heroic peasant communists.

In "A Badly-Edited Story," published in 1979, Ru Zhijuan contrasts Party-peasant relations during the civil war with those during the Great Leap Forward, presenting Old Gan of the pre-1949 period as the personification of the ideal communist cadre. Old Gan, whose very

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6 Yang Mo, *Qingchun zhi ge* (*Song of Youth*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958).

7 "Jianjicuole de gushi" ("A Badly Edited Story").
appellation indicates his familiarity with the peasants, prefers to go hungry himself rather than accept all of a peasant family’s remaining grain. He gladly suffers prolonged exhaustion and starvation in the cause of bringing the people a better future, and is moved to tears of gratitude when they forego their basic needs to support the communist army. There is no hint as to why or how "Old Gan" should have become the callous, self-seeking "Secretary Gan" who starves the same peasants to procure himself promotion during the Great Leap Forward. While criticising the deterioration of Party-peasant relations to the extent of suggesting that past experience could make peasants unwilling to support the Party in a future crisis, Ru Zhijuan does not look beyond the accepted myths about "glorious Party tradition" to consider whether the problems that became evident in the mid-Fifties may have had their roots in an earlier time.

"Sons and Daughters,"8 published a year later (1980), presents a similar picture of the courage and composure of a heroine of the Revolutionary war. However in both this and "A Badly-Edited Story", it is important to note that history is being recalled not only for the sake of eulogising the Party’s glorious past, but more importantly to provide a contrast with its inglorious present. It is possible that Ru deliberately recreated stereotyped communist heroes and heroines in order to highlight how far from this ideal contemporary communist cadres had strayed.9 Nevertheless, Ru’s basic support for the image of the model revolutionary soldier is evident in her later works, for while the younger writers progressively moved away from the eulogistic depiction of standardized war heroes, Ru Zhijuan actually returned to it in 1984 with the short story "Route Marker,"10 which portrays an "ordinary" PLA hero of the type

8 "Er nu qing" ("Sons and Daughters").

9 I note a similar technique using an idealized contemporary character in one of her works on contemporary society, see pp 71-71.

10 Ru Zhijuan, "Lu biao" ("Route Marker"), Wenhui yuekan, No 11, 1984, pp 2-4.
found in her 1950s stories "Lilies"\(^{11}\) and "On the Banks of the Cheng."\(^{12}\)

Wu Yuan, trying to catch up with the main contingent of the army on a night march through a Nationalist-held area is unable to find a route marker. He sees a light in a dilapidated shelter and finds a blind deafmute who attacks him fiercely. Unable to communicate any other way, Wu Yuan simply holds the man tightly until his refusal to hit back and his tears make the man realise he is a communist. The man then takes him outside and points out the route that the main forces had taken. The story has no function other than to perpetuate the mythical image of the communist soldier in the civil war period. Ru’s only departure from earlier communist literary convention, and the images favoured by most male writers, is her depiction of Wu occasionally being overcome by frustration and despair and frequently shedding tears - weaknesses which do not detract from the overall image and which, like the clumsiness and bashfulness of the messenger in "Lilies" actually add to the sympathetic appeal of the character. Ru continued this trend in 1985 with the image of a former hero of the Huaihai Campaign in "The First Serviceman to be Demobilized."\(^{13}\)

Ru’s depiction of wider pre-1949 society also continues earlier conventions of socialist literature. The characters in her semi-autobiographical novella "The Path She Trod,"\(^{14}\) all behave in accordance with class stereotypes. Ye Bao and her brother Yi Bao, abandoned by their wealthy, wastrel father on the death of their mother, are taken in by their impoverished grandmother. Their struggle to survive in the lowest stratum of society is a typical tale of the suffering of the poor

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\(^{11}\) "Bai he hua" ("Lilies").


\(^{13}\) Ru Zhijuan, "Diyige fuyuan de junren" ("The First Serviceman to be Demobilized"), *Shanghai wenxue*, No 1, 1958, pp 34-38.

\(^{14}\) "Ta cong natiao lushang lai" (The Path She Trod").
in the evil "old society." Yi Bao, working as an apprentice in Shanghai, is exploited by his capitalist boss. Wealthy relatives living in luxury coldly turn down their appeal for financial help. Yi Bao's penniless workmates bring the family food, and an impoverished scholar lends them a room to live in free of charge. The rich are depicted as hypocritical, miserly and devoid of any human warmth, while members of the lower classes are depicted as kind, sympathetic and generous.

Hence, Ru's depiction of pre-1949 history offers no challenge to either orthodox political analysis, or to established conventions for Chinese socialist literature, yet it seems that she occasionally uses these images derived from communist orthodoxy to make an implicit criticism of the current practices with which they form a strong contrast.

Shen Rong's presentation of communist war heroes and pre-1949 society was similar to that of the older writer in 1979-80, but by 1984 she had already moved away from completely conventional images. "Eternal Spring,"15 published in 1979 and "Snow,"16 published the following year, both deal mainly with the Cultural Revolution, but refer back to heroic events that occurred in the Anti-Japanese War. "Eternal Spring" in particular, presents a very orthodox picture of the exploits of the heroine, Han Lamei.

Han Lamei's early history is a repetition of a well-established literary formula: when she was five, her parents died at the hands of a rich landlord. She was subsequently sold three times, the third time to a landlord from whom she ran away. Fleeing from a pursuing band of the landlord's lackeys, she was saved by the political instructor of the Military Work Team operating in the area, Li Mengyu, under whose guidance she became an outstanding guerilla fighter and joined the Communist Party. After other heroic adventures, Han and Li marry, but are parted by war

15 Shen Rong, "Yongyuan shi chuntian" ("Eternal Spring"), Shen Rong ji (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1986), pp 1-148.

16 Shen Rong, "Bai xue" ("Snow"), Shen Rong xiaoshuo xuan (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1981), pp 324-382.
duties. Li is later told that Lamei was killed by Japanese troops as she single-handedly diverted them away from a group of fleeing villagers. Through both their individual qualities (courage, daring, self-sacrifice and so on) and their intimate relationship with the masses, Han and Li represent the same ideal of the communist fighter of the 1940s as does the image of Old Gan in Ru Zhijuan’s "A Badly-Edited Story" discussed above. As in Ru’s story, however, this stereotyped heroic image is ultimately designed to highlight the injustice Han later suffered in the Cultural Revolution, and to emphasise the need in the late 1970s for people like Han to be rehabilitated. Hence, once more, the past is evoked to serve present purposes.

Though Shen Rong continued to depict conventional pre-1949 heroes in "Snow" (1980) with the images of the peasant woman "West Slope Granny" and the communist soldier Chen Hong, in "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre,"17 published in 1984, she presents a far less conventional and idealistic picture of life with the communist troops. Shen Rong begins Yang Yueyue’s story with a stereotyped early history,18 but instead of going on to describe her heroic deeds and noble sacrifices as a communist fighter, the author portrays her as reluctantly agreeing to an arranged marriage with an army officer on the understanding that she will be able to continue her work and study. However, she finds herself forced to give up her work and follow her husband wherever the war takes him, bearing several children all of whom die. Life with the revolutionary army does not develop Yang Yueyue to her full potential. Instead she becomes a mere appendage in a very traditional marital relationship. Her ability and desire to contribute to the revolution are completely wasted and, during the time she spends with the army, her political understanding and literacy actually retrogress. Yang Yueyue’s fate undermines the mythical

17 "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre").

18 Her father was hounded to death by a landlord when she was a small child; when her mother died she was taken care of by a woman cadre and later joined the Communist Party.
image of communist history both by showing mundane, unheroic aspects of army life (though not denying its heroic aspects), and by revealing that traditional thought (in this case concepts of marital relations) could be a stronger influence on communist cadres and officers than communist ideals.

Another of Shen Rong’s later works shows a significant change in the treatment of images of members of the upper stratum of republican society. Whereas, in Ru Zhijuan’s works and Shen Rong’s earlier works, the wealthy and members of the Nationalist Party only appeared in completely negative roles (for example in Ru’s "The Path She Trod" and Shen’s "Eternal Spring"), in "An Undisciplined Man," published in 1985, the worst of former "class enemies" are presented in a relatively sympathetic light. The progressive intellectual hero of the story, Yang Zifeng, is introduced as being born into a "comprador-bourgeois-feudal landlord class family", but his father, Yang Kaiming, who, because of this class status, in earlier socialist literature would have represented everything despicable and evil, is described as "by no means terribly degenerate." Unlike earlier comprador-landlord images, he is depicted as possessing some positive traits: he is very fond of his sons and his young second wife, and is not depicted maltreating or exploiting anyone. He is patriotic and relatively open-minded, able to debate politics with his left-leaning son without becoming dictatorial.

Another character, Yu Shaoxiong, is a high-ranking member of the

19 "Sandan de ren" ("An Undisciplined Man").

20 Well-known to be modelled on the life of Yang Xianyi, a distinguished intellectual best known for his English translations of Chinese literature.

21 "Sandan de ren" ("An Undisciplined Man"), p 439.

22 The image of the second wife, a country girl from an impoverished teacher’s family, is also a departure from the stereotyped image - whereas in earlier literature a second wife of low social status is often depicted as suffering maltreatment and deprivation, here she is not only treated well, but gradually comes to assume control of and responsibility for the whole household.
Nationalist Party, very close to Jiang Jingguo. Having known Yang Zifeng at Oxford University, he invites him to edit the supplement to a Nationalist-run paper, promising to give Yang a free hand to publish what he pleases. Yang is directed by the Communist Party to accept the offer, and finds that Yu keeps his word completely, not even interfering when he publishes an article on Pagoda Hill at Yanan. Later Yang finds out that Yu used his position to protect him and his left-wing friends, and once went to great trouble to persuade the military police to remove Yang Zifeng's name from their blacklist. Yu is depicted as loyal and upright, and a genuine patriot. However, Shen Rong is not suggesting that the Nationalists were or are basically benevolent, for, as a result of refusing to engage in corruption in Taiwan, Yu fell from favour and at his last appearance is living in exile in America, an impoverished and broken man. What is significant is that with the image of Yu, as with that of Yang Kaiming, Shen Rong has moved away from the portrayal of individual characters according to rigid class stereotypes. This shift may be a result of the more liberal literary atmosphere of the time enabling Shen to switch from orthodox literary formulae to depicting her own family background.\(^{23}\)

As noted earlier, the younger women writers rarely mention pre-1949 events in their works. Where they do, however, they show a tendency to question or even negate established literary stereotypes.

In 1980, when Shen Rong was still depicting conventional heroes and villains, Zhang Kangkang published a short story which reassessed the orthodox condemnation of one kind of villain of the "old society." "The Far-off Sound of the Bell\(^ {24}\) begins with a familiar tale of thwarted love: in the late 1940s, Ji Yuan was prevented from marrying her lover, Zhao, by her wealthy father, who considered the stevedore's son to be too lowly

\(^{23}\) See p 69.

\(^{24}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Youyuan de zhongsheng" ("The Far-off Sound of the Bell"), in Xia, pp 89-111.
a match for his daughter. When Zhao came to the house looking for Ji, her father condescendingly offered him money as travelling expenses to go away. Zhao angrily refused, and left to join the communist forces. Ji was then forced to marry a Nationalist military official.

For thirty-two years after parting with Zhao, Ji sees her father only as a feudal tyrant and sordid merchant, her hatred for him only matched by the love she sustains for Zhao. But a twist of the plot finally reveals that the hated representative of the evils of the old society and the cherished representative of the new society are in fact identical in nature. Zhao, now a powerful, high-ranking judge, reenacts step by step the scene between himself and Ji's father thirty-two years before. Zhao's daughter wants to marry Ji's son (an ordinary worker), but Zhao opposes her marrying so far beneath her social and economic status. He meets Ji (without recognising her) to try to end the relationship, and, as well as telling her that the marriage would not be "suitable," informs her that it was he who arranged her son's sudden return from the countryside and his factory job. The "travelling expenses" offered by Ji's father have been replaced by unsolicited "favours," but are simply a more insidious form of pay-off to an unwanted suitor. Ji suddenly realises her own naivety. As her love for Zhao evaporates, she reassesses her hatred for her father, and realises that he was merely following an age old tradition and, like Zhao, acting in what he believed were the best interests of his daughter and himself. Although she had had misgivings about the marriage, she now resolves to break with tradition and give the children her support.

Though the plot is too contrived to be plausible, the ideas Zhang Kangkang conveys are significant. Of relevance to the discussion here is her presentation of Ji's father as being neither an evil individual, nor a representative of an evil class, but merely a perpetuator of traditions widely accepted by all strata of Chinese society. While condemning his action, she interprets his motives as part of a cultural heritage that has remained unchallenged in the socialist society.

While Zhang Kangkang's move away from the simplistic use of
class status to interpret character was followed by the older writer Shen Rong a couple of years later, the direct attack on the stereotyped image of the communist fighter found in Wang Anyi's "Xiao Bao Village," and the devaluation of the heroic past found in Zhang Xinxin's "Dust," have to date not been echoed in the works of older writers.

Wang Anyi's attack on the image of the hero of the revolutionary war is not a denial of actions, but of stereotyped motives. Just as Zhang Kangkang denied the evil intent of the wealthy father in the story just discussed, so Wang denies any lofty motive behind the actions of the "revolutionary hero" in "Xiao Bao Village." In the following scene Bao Renwen, an aspiring young writer, questions the "old revolutionary" Bao Yanrong about his motivation for taking over from his dead squad leader and charging the enemy:

"... Was it because of your hatred of reactionaries, or for the liberation of the people of your home?"

"There wasn't any motivation. I was worked up into a killing fury. When I came off the battlefield I'd kick a dog if I saw one - kick it until it yelped. But usually I can't even bear to kill a chicken."27

Bao Yanrong's reply simultaneously shatters the image of the politically motivated communist war hero, and ridicules those people who still seek to perpetuate it. In the face of the straightforward language and simple honesty of Bao Yanrong's words, the hackneyed political phrases in which Renwen speaks and the stereotyped images they convey simply appear foolish.

Zhang Xinxin's "Dust" uses the attitudes of contemporary youth

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25 "Xiao bao zhuang" ("Xiao Bao Village").

26 Zhang Xinxin, "Fu tu" ("Dust"), Shanghai wenxue, No 6, 1983, pp 49-55. The translation I have used throughout the thesis is that by W.J.F. Jenner, published in Renditions, No 27 and 28, Spring and Autumn 1987, pp 163-173.

27 "Xiao bao zhuang" ("Xiao Bao Village"), p 250.
towards war veterans preoccupied with writing their memoirs to suggest that heroic exploits of the war years have already become irrelevant. She opens the story with sketches of three veterans enthusiastically writing or planning their memoirs, oblivious to the fact that the young people helping them regard them with a cynicism that borders on contempt. One old woman is a city planner, but, instead of writing about her area of expertise as suggested, wants to write about "life with the guerillas in the old days." The young narrator replies: "Unless you have something new to say, you'd do better writing about your childhood." They then "haggled endlessly about what she was going to write... like traders in a cattle market bargaining by making finger signals inside each other's sleeves." The association of "writing revolutionary memoirs" with "bargaining like cattle traders" is clearly derogatory. The events the old woman wants to retell have already been devalued by being repeated ad nauseam, and can no longer command the respect or even interest of the younger generation.

In a second sketch, a young man goes to great trouble checking the fine historical details of an old man's memoirs, hoping to be given a share of the royalties, only to have the old man hand them all in as Party dues. The satirical tone of the narrator makes it clear that she considers details like "who actually did or did not attend some epoch-making meeting" to be of little significance. The disposal of the royalties also reflects the disparity between the attitudes of old and young - while the old man records history out of a sense of pride in and duty towards the Party, the young man does so at least partly in the hope of financial reward.

"Dust" encapsulates the generational differences observable in the fiction of the writers under discussion. While Ru Zhijuan nostalgically presents dedicated communist revolutionaries fighting selflessly to liberate the people, the young writers treat these figures with disbelief and even scorn. Likewise, the younger writers challenge the older writers' stereotyped images of the evil characters against whom these heroes
fought. This negation of the orthodox communist interpretation of history indicates the extent to which the status of the Communist Party had fallen in the eyes of the young writers in the 1980s, for by denying the sanctity of its past, they also question its present moral authority.

**Attitudes to the Post-1949 Period**

In dealing with post-1949 history, all the writers pass over the events of the early 1950s and concentrate their attention on the three major political upheavals of the period of Communist rule that were to be denounced officially in the 1980s: the Great Leap Forward, the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution. Not surprisingly, as the longest, most recent and most disruptive of the political movements, and as that which personally affected all of the writers, the Cultural Revolution is examined in greatest detail. Since, on one hand the middle-aged and veteran writers adopt the same basic approach to all three events, and on the other, the young writers rarely touch on the Great Leap Forward and Anti-Rightist Movement, I shall not consider each event separately, but focus on differences in the way younger and older writers treat this period as a whole.

Both middle-aged and veteran writers tend to present the Great Leap Forward, the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Cultural Revolution from the point of view of the victims. In early works these were often tragic heroic victims who suffered and sometimes died during these movements for a noble, altruistic cause. This model of the heroic victim can be found in works such as Ru Zhijuan's "A Badly-Edited Story" (1979) in which peasant cadre Old Longevity is labelled a Rightist and dismissed from his post during the Great Leap Forward because he tries to ensure that the peasants of his brigade will not starve. Similarly, Shen Rong's
"Song of Praise"\textsuperscript{29} (1981) depicts (among other heroic victims) a county committee secretary who resists the implementation of Great Leap Forward policies as unsuitable for his area. Out of concern for the peasants' welfare, he also insists on leaving every family with one cooking pot when every iron or steel object was being thrown into blast furnaces during the "backyard steel" campaign. As a result he is dismissed from his post and dies labouring at a tree plantation. Zhang Jie's "The Child From the Forests"\textsuperscript{30} (1978), set in the Cultural Revolution, depicts an intellectual sent to a remote forest to "reform himself through labour" who dies of cancer rather than accept conditions for receiving treatment that include admitting his own guilt and agreeing to betray and falsely accuse other people. Other examples of such characters can be found in Ru Zhijuan's "Small Path Through the Grasslands"\textsuperscript{31} (1979) and Shen Rong's "Snow" (1980) and "Eternal Spring" (1979).

These early heroic victims bear some resemblance to the conventional images of revolutionary martyrs found in earlier socialist fiction. Morally impeccable, they suffer and die to protect the innocent or in achieving some project that benefits the people. (Two of Shen Rong's heroic victims, Han Lamei in "Eternal Spring" and a county secretary in "Song of Praise," die while directing water-control construction projects designed to benefit large areas of the countryside.) They always suffer for a noble cause, rather than as a result of any personal considerations, and their tragic fates are a strong denunciation of the political extremism that created them.

While political criticism remained a part of later stories dealing with the Anti-Rightist Movement - Cultural Revolution period, the vehemence

\textsuperscript{29} Shen Rong, "Zan ge" ("Song of praise"), in "Zan ge" Shen Rong zhongpian xiaoshuo ji, (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp 5-42.

\textsuperscript{30} Zhang Jie, "Cong senlin lai de haizi" ("The Child From the Forests"), in Ai, shi bu neng wangji de (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp 7-25.

\textsuperscript{31} Ru Zhijuan, "Caoyuanshang de xiao lu" ("Small Path Through the Grasslands"), Ru Zhijuan zuopin xinshang (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1987), pp 144-172.
of political exposure found in early works gradually faded, and the altruistic/heroic, morally-impeccable nature of the protagonists weakened in line with the general trend in post-1978 literature. In Shen Rong’s "The Secret of Crown Prince Village" (1982), Li Wanju, the dedicated brigade Party branch secretary around whom the plot revolves, is no longer depicted suffering physically and mentally as did earlier images of Cultural Revolution victims, but is forced to devise schemes to deceive his superiors in order to ensure the economic well-being of his village. Whereas earlier protagonists clash head on with the forces of evil, he avoids confrontation through cunning and trickery. He is a modified hero, much more of a middle character than his earlier counterparts.

Zhang Jie’s "Emerald" (1984), sympathetically depicts the suffering of a woman branded a Rightist during the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Whereas victims depicted in earlier works suffered for insisting on upholding the truth or working for the common good, Zeng Lingr willingly takes on the Rightist label on behalf of a man whom she blindly adores. The sacrifice has no political significance and achieves nothing but the satisfaction of Zeng’s personal aim of protecting a lover whom Zhang Jie depicts as a mediocre, ungrateful man, totally undeserving of Zeng’s devotion. Zeng retains the martyr-like qualities of earlier heroines (Zhang describes her expression while being denounced as resembling that of "pictures of martyrs in church"), but her suffering for a personal and unworthy cause is a significant departure from the politically oriented sufferings of earlier heroines of this type.

"An Undisciplined Man," published by Shen Rong in 1985 takes this trend even further. The main character, Yang Zifeng, though a supporter of, and active worker for the Communist Party, is a heavy drinker who is at times arrogant and insensitive - in no way a standard hero. He is

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denounced during the Cultural Revolution without specific charges (because his "materials" were used by mistake on one of his friends), but apart from denying any guilt, he makes no show of resistance, nor any stand on behalf of the truth. Instead of seeing the proceedings as an acute political struggle, he merely regards them as a farce. Yang Zifeng is a further development away from the earlier model of the tragic hero, but what he maintains in common with the main characters of earlier stories dealing with this period of history is his status as a victim.

Another area that the older writers examine is that of the effects of these political movements on the family. Here the victims are not political activists, but ordinary women and children. Ru Zhijuan's "Family Affairs" describes the anxiety of a mother suddenly forced to return to cadre school, leaving her sick seven year-old daughter at home fending for herself. It is little comfort to her to know that adverse circumstances have so matured the little girl that she is already capable of managing alone. The fate of children separated from their parents and left unsupervised and uncared for by the Cultural Revolution is also touched on in Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring" and "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," and in Zhang Jie's *Leaden Wings* (the character of Mo Zheng). All sympathetically depict children who, finding themselves left destitute, had little choice but to steal to survive, and were then treated as criminals.

Other stories look at problems faced by the families of "Rightists." Zhang Jie's "Repentance" shows how the lack of courage and political faith of a man designated a Rightist in 1957 ultimately destroyed his son's spirit. Shen Rong's "A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal" depicts the

34 “Sandan de ren” ("An Undisciplined Man"), p 474.
35 "Jia wu shi" ("Family Affairs").
36 Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings).
38 Shen Rong, "Meiguise de wancan" ("A Rose-coloured Evening Meal"), Shen Rong
bitterness remaining between family members twenty years after the eldest son broke relations with his "Rightist" father. Ru Zhijuan's stories, "Boat Without a Rudder" and "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," both depict the personal tragedies of educated women widowed by the deaths of their "Rightist" husbands during the Cultural Revolution. To end the discrimination against their children, they marry uneducated workers whose "good" class status affords them protection, but this leaves them in relationships that are emotionally and intellectually unfulfilling. They face a dilemma: should they seek divorce, thus showing gross ingratitude to the men who "saved" them, or should they resign themselves to a life without love and understanding?

These stories all show how the destructive effects of these political movements affected the most basic human relationships, not even sparing small children. There is less heroic drama in them than in the stories depicting acute political struggles, but they present problems that are not solved by the ending of the political movements that created them: child criminals remain social outcasts for life; intra-familial relationships are weakened permanently, and so on. These stories indicate that the social effects of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and Cultural Revolution may have as much long term influence on the development of Chinese society as their political consequences have.

Since the older writers make it clear through their writings that the post-1956 political movements caused enormous suffering, in the light of their perceived responsibility to "answer questions put forward by life," one might expect that they would also attempt to analyse the cause of

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41 See p 22.
such disasters and even examine the psychology of political extremists in the same way that they examine that of their victims. But the writers tend either to avoid the issue or to remain at the level of simplistic orthodox political explanations.

In stories published early in the period, evils associated with the Cultural Revolution tend to be blamed on "Lin Biao and the Gang of Four" (as for example in Zhang Jie's "The Child from the Forest," and in Shen Rong's "The Secret of Crown Prince Village"), but other standard political scapegoats also appear. In Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring," the individual responsible for the persecution of Han Lamei and Li Mengyu turns out to be a communist traitor and KMT lackey of the war period - a stock villain of Communist literature of the 1950s (found for example in Zhou Libo, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*). Apportioning blame to such figures is, of course, both expedient and convenient: it echoes the official Party line and is therefore "safe," and, by expressing acceptance of the official explanation, it avoids having to trace responsibility beyond the Gang of Four to examine the role of Mao Zedong. This strategy also avoids the question of whether individuals in lower ranks of society should be held personally responsible for their own actions.

Even though ready-made scapegoats like Lin Biao and the Gang of Four are not available for writers dealing with the excesses of the late Fifties, equally simplistic political explanations have been made for the actions of individuals. In "A Badly-Edited Story," Ru Zhijuan strongly hints that Secretary Gan starves the peasants to gain fame and promotion, but her final judgement of Gan comes in a very short paragraph at the end of the story in which she attributes Gan's actions to "the ideals for which [he and Old Longevity] had searched and struggled for so many years, and for which they had paid such a price." The villain is suddenly


43 Though direct reference to Mao would not politically be an option for the writers.
declared a sincere idealist, and is therefore absolved of the possibility of having acted out of self-interest. The fact that this tacked-on ending clearly contradicts the message of the bulk of the story, and is obviously designed to make it politically acceptable, only reinforces my argument that, in their works, the older writers have not been willing to confront squarely the question of individual responsibility and guilt.

Though the use of simplistic political explanations declined as the focus of Chinese politics moved away from criticism of the Gang of Four and onto the push for modernisation, the older writers still did not examine the psychology or consciences of guilty individuals. Perpetrators of extreme leftist policies and persecutors of the innocent remain vague, often anonymous, figures. In Zhang Jie's "Emerald," Zeng Lingr is denounced by unidentified voices, while in Shen Rong's "An Undisciplined Man," Yang Zifeng's Cultural Revolution persecutors are not distinguished as individuals, but only as members of a "rebel faction." Where individual characters who could be considered guilty do appear, some are merely guilty of handing down orders from above, rather than acting on their own initiative - for example, Secretary Hu in Shen Rong's "Song of Praise" and Deputy County Secretary Qi in "The Secret of Crown Prince Village." Others personally initiate extreme action, but remain two-dimensional figures whose psychology is left unexplored. These include characters such as the young political zealots Man Jianghong in "Song of Praise" and Revolutionary Committee Director Cai in "Snow."

To date only two stories by the older writers can be considered exceptions to this trend: "A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal" by Shen Rong, and "Repentance" by Zhang Jie. In both works, however, the narrator who reflects on his guilt through a continuous interior monologue is just as much a victim as he is an offender.

"Repentance" depicts a father who comes to blame himself for the early death of his son. The boy had been a bright, outgoing child, but, when his father was labelled a "Rightist" in 1958, he was ostracised by his playmates. Instead of giving his son strength and encouragement, and
teaching him the principles in which he believed, the father avoided making any explanation of his position, and timidly submitted to his expulsion from the Party. As a result, the boy became increasingly introverted and developed a strong sense of his own inferiority. The son's last chance of regaining a normal psychology was destroyed in 1976, when his father (fearful of the consequences) prevented him from taking part in the Tian'an Men Incident. His spirit broken, the boy died of illness soon afterwards. The story follows the father's thoughts as he looks back on his son's miserable life and recognises that he had failed in his paternal duty to instill the correct political beliefs in his son. Had he not been so weak and cowardly, his son would probably still be alive. He "repents," "not because of something he did, but because of something he failed to do." 44

In the final analysis, this "something" was that he failed to impress on his son his own status as an innocent victim of political extremism. Though Zhang Jie is describing the psychology of a man who made mistakes as a result of the Anti-Rightist Campaign, his is not a political guilt, and those responsible for wrongly designating him a Rightist do not even appear in the story, let alone reveal their thoughts and feelings at the time.

"A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal" looks at a similar situation, but this time through the eyes of a guilty son. Su Hong broke off all relations with his family when his artist father was labelled a Rightist in 1958, and twenty years later, at the first family reunion, he finds his father cold and unforgiving. His thoughts flow back over the course of events, revealing how the family tragedy was created by both his naive political trust and his own lack of courage. As a young college student in 1958, he had no cause to doubt the word of the Party, so that when his father was pronounced anti-Party and anti-socialist, he believed it unquestioningly, seeing it as his duty to make a clean break and prove himself an "iron-willed revolutionary." Later however, he acted only out of fear and weakness, not daring to write except in impersonal slogans copied from

44 "Chanhui" ("Repentance"), p 101.
the newspaper, and deliberately ignoring his father (by then working as a labourer) when they met by chance during the Cultural Revolution. Su Hong's crime is not so much political as a crime against filial piety - particularly serious in the Chinese cultural context. But his unfilial conduct was caused by political extremism for which he was not responsible, and to this extent he is also a victim. His status as victim is further reinforced by his recollection of breaking with the girl he loved to protect her from being tainted by his family's rightist label. This left him with a sense of loss that his subsequent loveless marriage only served to intensify. As with Zhang Jie in "Repentance," Shen Rong examines a guilty conscience, but does not touch on the psychology of those more directly responsible for the political extremism that created this guilt.

The fact that the older writers do not explore the minds of the guilty would not be so conspicuous if it did not stand out as a contrast to the works of the younger writers. Though they do not attempt to trace responsibility for political movements to political leaders, Zhang Kangkang, Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi have all written works in which the main character took part in the violence, destruction and persecution of the Cultural Revolution, and Zhang Xinxin and Zhang Kangkang in particular have examined in detail the psychology of the political zealot.

Zhang Kangkang began early in the period with a confessional work, "Peony Garden,"\(^45\) in which a former Red Guard leader finally comes to understand the meaning of, and need for, beauty, thirteen years after she had led the destruction of the peony garden and its peony pavilion. The story depicts in some detail the warped psychology Jin Tong developed as a result of her fervent belief in Cultural Revolution politics.

In the new era, she believed, life needed no embellishment. She cut her hair short, donned khakis and coarsened her voice, believing herself the pinnacle of true beauty. In her eyes peonies polluted the purity of socialism and had to be replaced with "revolutionary cabbages"; the

\(^{45}\) "Mudan yuan" ("Peony Garden").
elegant peony pavilion represented "feudal superstition" and had to be destroyed. Elated by the physical act of destruction she led her followers to write on a decapitated bodhisattva: "The marvellous achievements of the Red Guards will live forever." In the countryside her hatred of beauty intensified. She began to be shunned by her peers, but never doubted the correctness of her beliefs until on a trip back to Hangzhou she discovers that the peony garden and pavilion are being restored for the visit of the president of the United States. Her "everlasting achievements" as a red guard are being negated overnight. She meets a former red guard "comrade-in-arms" who tells her the flowers they removed as "criminal evidence of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism" were all transplanted to Lin Biao's provincial palace. Jin Tong feels the pain and humiliation of having been cheated, and for the first time begins to doubt herself. Doubt finally turns to shame and bitter remorse at her own naivety and ignorance. Back in the restored peony garden, she tearfully realises that life cannot be without laughter and beauty. She has learned the lesson at the cost of thirteen years of her youth.

Zhang Kangkang's presentation of Jin Tong as acting out of a combination of naivety, ignorance and sincere though misled beliefs is reminiscent of "wounded literature" stories of the late 1970s such as "The Scar" or "Maples." Jin is a victim of betrayed political trust, warped by the era, and her own basic innocence is emphasised by the mention of the ultimate scapegoat Lin Biao. But unlike "The Scar," for example, the message of the work is not simply to learn to shift from one object of blind political faith to another, but to learn from one's own personal mistakes how to make better personal judgements in future. The tendency towards self-questioning rather than political accusation that starts to emerge here was developed in later works of Zhang Kangkang (for example, "White

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Poppies"\(^{48}\) and "Spirit of Fire"\(^{49}\) and came to a peak in Zhang Xinxin's "Dust," published in 1983.

The narrator of "Dust," as a teenager in the Cultural Revolution, committed excesses broadly similar to those of Jin Tong: wrecking a "Rightist's" house and harassing his housekeeper. But Zhang Xinxin directly rejects the "excuse" that it was done as a result of naive revolutionary faith. The initial motivation for the raid came from the desire to join in the excitement of the times, and the target was chosen because he was someone who had not yet been raided, rather than because he was believed to be a political enemy. Likewise, the real motivation for chasing his housekeeper to her home in the countryside was not because the teenagers really suspected she was a landlord, but because "we were dying for a train ride." When the adventure was spoilt by the discovery that the woman had middle-peasant status, the narrator recalls that she was "furious with her for not being a landlord." Their disappointment is only dispelled when their leader makes a poorly substantiated claim that she is a landlord after all. They all joyfully believe him. Zhang Xinxin comments:

"I had actually been waiting for the conclusion our leader reached. Even if it had been based on even flimsier grounds I think I'd have grabbed at it and believed it."\(^{50}\)

Throughout the story, Zhang Xinxin emphasises the failings of the individual that led her to folly: her lack of any attempt to think about what she was doing (pp 166, 167, 169); her rejection of any information which might damage her faith (p 167), and her eager, unquestioning acceptance of things she wanted to believe (pp 166, 171). The author

\(^{48}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Bai yingsu" ("White poppies"), *Xia*, pp 112-130.

\(^{49}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Huo de jingling" ("Spirit of Fire"), *Xia*, pp 244-272.

\(^{50}\) "Futu" ("Dust"), translation, p 171.
makes no political accusations, but traces Cultural Revolution excesses to a cultural environment that discouraged analytical thought:

"Landlords. Poor peasants. Good people. Bad people. Revolution. Counter-revolution. Could it be that the oversimplified ways we were brought up to think in and our love for what was good and beautiful had left us defenceless... If we had become aware a little earlier of the complicated make-up of our beliefs, held on to the essentials, and had a clear view of our own desires, even the most trivial ones, then perhaps we could have avoided those ignorant mistakes that we imagined were the firm and resolute thing to do."

The stress here is on individual self-awareness, and the need for the individual to take more responsibility for his or her own actions, a theme that gives the work significance beyond its historical framework.

The introspection of the heroines of "Dust" and "Peony Garden" contrasts with that of the central characters in Zhang Jie's "Repentance" and Shen Rong's "A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal." In Zhang Jie's work, the father's remorse is based on his failure to transmit his political faith to his son, while in Shen Rong's story, the son, though admitting his weakness, still sees himself as innocent because he initially acted out of political conviction. In "Dust" and "Peony Garden," however, the characters' regret results precisely from their own failure to question their political beliefs. Hence, in the older writers' works, acting solely out of political convictions is presented as blameless, while in the younger writers it is questioned. This is a further indication of the weakening of faith in Communist Party politics among the younger women writers in the 1980s.

While later stories have continued to examine openly the guilt of individuals, there has been a noticeable shift away from the strong sense of self-recrimination that pervades works like "Dust" and "White Poppies."

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Zhang Kangkang's "Never Repent," published in 1987, presents several characters who during the Cultural Revolution were variously guilty of promiscuity, bribery, stealing, mass appropriation of public property and so on, but she regards their misdemeanours with much more tolerance than previously. Like Zhang Xinxin, she declares that history cannot take all the responsibility for the guilt of individuals, and that the individual must have the courage critically to examine his own failings, but she asks: "But even if we repent, who could act as the father confessor?" While affirming the need for self-questioning, she has moved to a position in which she can accept human failings as something both natural and unavoidable. Self-recrimination is seen as largely unnecessary. It is interesting to note that male writers of the younger generation have recently produced works with similar, though more defiant messages. Liang Xiaosheng's *Vindication of a Red Guard* begins with an epigraph in large, bold print: "I was once a red guard. I do not repent." After years of painful introspection, some young writers have reached the conclusion that their mistakes were merely human.

The main focus of criticism in the younger writers' works is on members of their own generation, but the guilt of older generations is not ignored either. "Dust" includes a scene in which an old man is forced to kneel on the floor while "grey-haired, bespectacled women from the street committee... with sleeves rolled up and sticks in their hands" demand that he confess to counter-revolutionary crimes. This type of image appears nowhere in the works of the older women writers. Zhang Xinxin also points the finger at members of the older generation who led youth astray during the Cultural Revolution and now decline to accept any responsibility. She recalls that the "elder" who, several years after the Cultural Revolution, patronizingly lectured her on the foolish excesses of

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52 Zhang Kangkang, "Yong bu chanhui" ("Never repent"), *Xiaoshuo jie*, No 5, 1987, pp 44-70.

her generation, was the very same person who at the time had informed her that the man they were raiding was "a notorious rightist". It was this unequivocal answer that had reassured the teenagers that their action was justified.

Particularly in their depiction of the experiences of educated youth in the countryside, the younger writers also expose the moral corruption of Cultural Revolution cadres - something which the older writers usually ignore in favour of depicting their political extremism. In Wang Anyi's "A Corner of the Wide World," an innocent young girl, Wenwen, is shocked to discover that the admired and respected Director Zhang has made a girl sleep with him in return for assigning her a job in a factory. Wenwen is even more horrified and disgusted to discover that she herself had been chosen as a delegate to a provincial meeting for activists not because of her good work, but because Zhang wanted her to marry his son. Because quotas for factory jobs and university places (the main avenues for educated youth to leave the countryside) were in the hands of commune cadres, they commanded enormous personal power over individuals. Director Zhang makes it clear to Wenwen that if she agrees to the marriage, she will be assured of a place in university, but if she refuses, she can forget about ever leaving the countryside. This story, Wang Anyi's "Once Around the Commune" and Zhang Kangkang's "Never Repent," also reveal that bribery was another means of returning to the city. "Never Repent" indicates that the web of corruption extended throughout the system. The company commander who demands bribes from youth wishing to go to university is taking them partly because he in turn must bribe higher officials in order to secure his own transfer back to his home county. Not surprisingly, innocent, idealistic youth suddenly confronted with the moral corruption of their respected revolutionary


55 Wang Anyi, "Rao gongshe yi zhou" ("Once Around the Commune"), Shouhuo, No 3, 1982, pp 233-244.
elders, very rapidly became disillusioned and cynical. The way youth reacted and developed in response to their experiences in the countryside is an important theme of these and other works by Wang Anyi and Zhang Kangkang, and is examined further in later chapters. The disillusionment they experienced in the countryside is clearly an important factor in explaining why they question both the Party's historical myths, and the conventional depiction of history in previous socialist literature.

The marked generational differences in the attitudes of the writers to history raises the question of why these differences should occur. Ru Zhijuan's nostalgic, idealistic presentation of pre-1949 history is easily understandable in terms of a personal history which gave her a very strong emotional attachment to the Communist Party and communist troops. For Ru, to negate communist history would be to negate a large part of her own past, and threaten the beliefs she had held for a lifetime.

In contrast, as a result of their experiences in the Cultural Revolution, the young writers realised early on that political rhetoric and reality could be quite different. They were thus more likely to question the conventional interpretation of pre-1949 history. Further, the same political movement that caused their disillusionment may have also contributed to their willingness to question orthodoxy through its own political teachings. One of the strategies of the Cultural Revolution was to convince youth of their right to question the Party and its leadership. For the first time since the communists took power, the image of the Party as infallible and sacred was publicly destroyed. Hence it may well be partly a legacy of this early indoctrination that young writers refuse to accept the Party's orthodox interpretation of pre-1949 history, and are more willing than their elders to question the Party in general. The younger writers also have less attachment to the Communist Party than the older writers - none of them are Party members and all denied any wish to join the Party. This also means that they have less reason to maintain Party myths.

The middle-aged writers were brought up in idealistic climate of the
1950s, and are both Party members, factors which would predispose them to presenting Party history in a positive light. Shen Rong also began her writing career during the final years of the Cultural Revolution period, with two novels containing the stereotyped characters and plots that were the only acceptable method of writing at the time. It is not surprising then, that her early works in the post-1978 period should continue to present a conventional view of pre-1949 history. Her shift away from historical stereotypes during the last ten years may result from both the general literary trend towards depicting "middle" characters and her own family background. Her father having been a KMT judge and one of her uncles a factory owner, she may have felt that the upper classes of Republican society were not as evil as conventional images of them suggested.

Despite the three older writers' general adherence to the Party line, it would be wrong to regard them merely as Party hacks, for works by both Ru Zhijuan and Shen Rong have pre-dated official Party announcements on the political movements they depict. Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring" was completed in the summer of 1978, but Shen could find no journal willing to publish it until 1979 because it criticised the entire Cultural Revolution period, before the 1978 Third Plenum had done so officially. Ru Zhijuan's "A Badly-Edited Story" (1979) similarly attacked the Great Leap Forward and the 1957-58 Anti-Rightist Campaign before the official verdict had been pronounced. Hence, although there was probably a good indication that these movements would be negated, considering the uncertainty of Chinese politics, it seems that the writers were motivated more by strong personal political convictions than by the desire to present the "correct" attitude in their fiction.

The reluctance of older writers to examine the guilt of individuals

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56 Her autobiography mentions them without any hint of criticism. See "Bing fei youqu de zishu" ("An Uninteresting Self-Account"), pp 22-25.

in post-1949 political movements is more difficult to explain. It is not simply a question of the younger writers examining their own actions in political campaigns during which the older writers were not personally guilty of excesses, for though Zhang Xinxin is describing her own experience in "Dust," neither Wang Anyi or Zhang Kangkang took part in political movements, yet they are still willing to place themselves in the position of the guilty in their writings. When questioned on this point, Zhang Kangkang offered the explanation that young writers are willing to accept the ugliness in man and so "present themselves more truthfully," while older writers, because of the nature of their education, cannot accept that man is ugly and evil, and so to the present want to hide it. Wang Anyi saw the problem in terms of the development of a "spirit of self-questioning." While she believes that "educated youth writers" possess this spirit, she sees the older writers as failing to question themselves. This, she considers, explains why her mother, Ru Zhijuan, "to date hasn't written anything penetrative on the Cultural Revolution."

Perhaps the key to understanding this phenomenon is the whole approach of the writers to literature. As we saw in Chapter One, the older writers' basic concern is with political and social commentary. Hence their works on the post-1949 political movements are most importantly political criticism or praise of events and individuals (eg "Eternal Spring"; "A Badly-Edited Story"; "The Child from the Forests"). For them, psychological analysis does not need to go beyond political assessment or self-assessment (eg "Repentance"; "A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal"). The younger writers’ stronger concern with the individual and the psychological, however, leads them to look more intensely at the individual's role in history, and look beyond politics to human weaknesses and desires.

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58 This information comes from interviews held with the three writers in 1988.

59 Author's interview with Zhang Kangkang, October 4, 1988.

60 Author's interview with Wang Anyi, October 12, 1988.
Presentation of Contemporary Society

This work... brazenly promotes the protagonist's egoist philosophy of life... but isn't to praise [such people] to praise extreme individualism? Isn't it praising the bourgeois idea of the strong eating the weak? If we use Marxism to re-evaluate the "prescription for society" drawn up in "On the Same Horizon" I think the author will discover the poverty of her own thought.¹

The socialist system staunchly opposes individualist thought and action... in the long term, individualists may become cancerous cells in society, poisoning society's healthy flesh and polluting the people's pure souls. We really cannot wait idly to see its evil effect.²

With the exception of Ru Zhijuan, whose works have been divided fairly evenly between historical and contemporary settings, the writers all place most of their works in the present. Leaving aside works dealing mainly with love, marriage and sex, which will be looked at in the next chapter, the older writers tend to use their writings to examine specific political and social problems in the world of officialdom and senior intellectuals, often sharply criticising the status quo. The younger writers show less interest in politics and more in broader society. They tend to depict the world of the middle and lower strata of Chinese society:

¹ Zhu Jing, "Miwang de 'chuantouxing de muguang'" ('Perplexed 'penetrating gaze''), quoted in Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang de xiamian" ('Underneath 'On the Same Horizon''), p 209.

² Yang Xucun, "Geren fendouzhe de beige" ('Dirge of the Individualist'), quoted in Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang de xiamian" ('Underneath 'On the Same Horizon''), p 211-212.
students and young intellectuals, ordinary city dwellers and country people. There is, however, considerable variation between the works of the three younger writers: Zhang Kangkang shows a relatively strong concern for political and social problems while Wang Anyi rarely makes them a theme of her works. These trends show complete concurrence with the writers' approaches to literature discussed in Chapter One.

In works dealing with the post-Cultural Revolution period, one of the early images to appear was that of the newly rehabilitated cadre. In some works (but by no means all) he represents a return to goodness, order and justice, and signals the end of an era of chaos. The cadre determined to stamp out corruption over job allocation for graduating students in Shen Rong's "A Distracting Sunday" is one such character. Some of these cadres are shown to have gained wisdom from their experiences during the Cultural Revolution, so that they resume their work as more thoughtful administrators, more in touch with the common people. In Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring," Li Mengyu only came to realise the difficulties faced by ordinary people after he had been disgraced during the Cultural Revolution. Accustomed to a spacious apartment, a chauffeur-driven car and a maidservant to run the house, he suddenly found himself living in cramped conditions, having to squeeze onto crowded buses to get to and from work each day, and having to join long queues in the markets to obtain basic food supplies. This experience made him determined to care more for the common people on resuming office.

"Baptism," a novella by the veteran writer Wei Junyi, depicts a similar character. After being wrongly denounced during the Cultural Revolution, Wang Huifan realises that he himself had carelessly allowed innocent people to be labelled Rightists in the late 1950s, and on resuming office begins the rehabilitation of others who had been wrongly accused.

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3 Shen Rong, "Fannao de xingqiri" ("A Distracting Sunday"), Shen Rong xiaoshuo xuan, pp 287-306.

While this view of rehabilitated cadres fitted in with the generally optimistic view of the new era that prevailed just after the 1978 Third Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee, as early as 1979, two of the writers warned that some cadres had learned nothing from their experiences. In Ru Zhijuan’s "Small Path Through the Grasslands," old cadre Shi Yifeng is rehabilitated after years of suffering during the Cultural Revolution, but on resuming office coldly ignores the plight of a man whom he himself had wrongly designated a Rightist in 1957. Ru Zhijuan shows concern that rehabilitated cadres were only interested in the injustice done to themselves, and refused to recognise that their own mistakes had brought even more suffering to others.

Zhang Kangkang’s "This is Not What I Wanted," expresses outrage at the self-righteous resumption of privileges by newly rehabilitated cadres. Far from gaining more concern for the ordinary people through their suffering, the cadres she depicts feel that suffering has given them the right to an elite lifestyle as a form of compensation. Without any qualms they move back into luxury apartments with armed guards at the gates to keep out the ordinary people; they ride in chauffeur-driven cars, cursing at people toiling along with loaded handcarts for blocking their way; they think nothing of flattening people’s homes to make room for gardens around their children’s new houses. Zhang Kangkang indicates that the fall of those associated with the Gang of Four merely made way for the return of an equally oppressive elite to take their places.

Although neither of these works is outstanding in itself, both are significant as the first works by any of the writers under consideration to criticise cadres currently in office. Apart from these two works, 1978 and 1979 had basically been a "honeymoon" period for the new administration, with most works focusing on criticism of past extremism and ending with

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5 "Caoyuanshang de xiaolu" ("Small Path Through the Grasslands").

6 Zhang Kangkang, "Wo yao de bushi zhexie" ("This is Not What I Wanted"), *Xia*, pp 131-146.
all wrongs being righted in the new era (eg Zhang Jie: "Child from the Forests"; Shen Rong: "Eternal Spring"; Ru Zhijuan: "A Badly Edited Story"). Besides the general optimism mentioned above, this was, of course, also due to the fact that writers had previously never been allowed to criticise the status quo. The lessons of the Hundred Flowers Movement and Cultural Revolution cannot have been far from the writers' minds, even when such movements had been officially negated. It is in this light that these early critical works should be viewed, even if the criticism is mild and tactful as in Ru Zhijuan's story. By 1980 it was clear on one hand that political and social life was still riddled with problems, and on the other that writers could get away with saying so (although they would be constantly reminded not to go too far). As a result Shen Rong and Zhang Jie in particular, and Zhang Kangkang to a lesser extent, began critically to expose maladies in contemporary political and social life, even openly examining problems in purely internal Party matters such as the selection of Party members.

Zhang Jie

Some of the sharpest criticism has come from the pen of Zhang Jie. Starting with the short story "Magnetic Field" in 1980, she has written a number of works including the Mao Dun Prize-winning novel Leaden Wings which reveal the sordid nature of the struggle for power and privilege that goes on within the ranks of the Party elite. Positive

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9 Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings).
characters invariably find themselves battling against a powerful and unscrupulous opposition that threatens to overwhelm them at any time. "Magnetic Field," "Magnetic Field (Part 2)" written in 1981 and Leaden Wings all end in victory for the representatives of justice and goodness, but Zhang Jie emphasises that it is a very tenuous victory: the opposition remains firmly entrenched, and its minor defeat will only intensify its efforts to protect its interests. Who the ultimate victor will be is left in the air.

Both the "Magnetic Field" stories and Leaden Wings show the negative aspects of the networks of mutually advantageous relationships that operate throughout Chinese society. In all three works they operate between senior officials of the fictitiously-titled Ministry of Heavy Industry. Through subordinates in key positions, Minister Zhao in "Magnetic Field" is provided with a house much larger than his rank entitles him to, and in return promotes those involved at the first opportunity. When a young reporter is assigned to investigate complaints, they unite first to fob her off with lies, and later to conduct a smear campaign to discredit her. Making use of a wide range of connections, they pressure her using methods ranging from anonymous abusive phone calls to accusations of sexual immorality and threats to prevent her from joining the Party.

Leaden Wings describes in greater detail how such networks of relationships have acted as a formidable hindrance to economic reform. Officials who feel threatened by reform, whether because of their conservatism, incompetence or personal antagonism to individuals, tacitly unite to create all kinds of obstacles for reformers. The corruption, cronyism and political manoeuvring described make the novel one of the

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10 Zhang Jie, "Chang (xu)" ("Magnetic Field Part 2"), Fang zhou, pp 185-211.

11 Zhang Jie worked in the First Ministry of mechanical Equipment for many years which gave her a detailed first-hand knowledge of the type of ministry she depicted in her fiction.
boldest exposures of evils rampant in the contemporary Chinese bureaucracy that has been published in China to date.

Zhang Jie's criticism was taken so seriously by the bureaucrats she had described that she had to spend 1982 defending herself and her novel against charges of being anti-Party and anti-socialist. Thus it is a tribute to her courage and resilience that she resumed her critical writing in 1983, albeit in a much milder form. "The Time is Not Yet Ripe,"12 depicts Section Chief Yue's tactics for eliminating a rival for promotion by delaying his admittance to the Party until his own promotion is secured. This time, however, Zhang Jie depicts his machinations ending in conclusive failure, as his seniors pass over him in favour of his more technically competent rival. The story optimistically depicts the end of promotions based solely on political criteria, and the emergence of a new generation of senior officials who could perhaps be seen as more "expert" than "red." Compared to the negative characters in Leaden Wings, Yue is not evil but merely devious - a thoroughly unpleasant man who even speaks to his wife in pompous, insincere bureaucratic rhetoric.

Perhaps because she wished to avoid a repetition of the trouble Leaden Wings had brought her, Zhang Jie does not set the story in a specific government bureau, and depicts the most senior officials as positive characters. Later critical works, though as sharp in their criticism as "Magnetic Field" or Leaden Wings also avoid references that could pinpoint them as targeting specific institutions or individuals. "Today's Agenda"13 for example, takes place in an unspecified "bureau" and speakers are often unidentified. Further, the general focus of criticism


13 Zhang Jie, "Guanyu xx qu xx paichusuo guanyu xxx jiefa xxx zai 'wen ge'zhong za qiang x minzhu dangpai wo tongzhan duixiang shehui zhiming renshi xxx siren wenwu yuqi jinyin shoushi xxx you xiang fayuan konggao xxx wuxianzui zhi pangzheng cailiao jing ge zhibu ji quanti zhigong taolun qingkuang de huibao"("Today's Agenda"), Zumulu, (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1985), pp 434-474. For a full translation of the title see the bibliography.
after 1983 swung away from central government ministries onto the relatively safe targets of cultural bureaucrats in a country town ("The Other World"\textsuperscript{14}) and life in a hospital ("What's Wrong With Him?"\textsuperscript{15}). "Today's Agenda" and "What's Wrong With Him?" also make extensive use of satire, absurdity and exaggeration, which makes Zhang's criticisms more pungent, but at the same time removes them from a specific reality.

While Zhang Jie's earlier stories ended with at least tenuous optimism, since 1984 her stories have lost even a token show of optimism. "Today's Agenda," which describes the endless, unproductive meetings of bureau officials, begins with a list of items on the committee agenda, and ends a year later with the same items still on the agenda. "The Other World" ends with the disgrace and defeat of the positive character, Rong - an honest, naive, talented artist - by the hypocritical and unscrupulous head of the local Artists' Association who has schemed to take Rong's place on a trip overseas.

The decreasing confidence in the system expressed in Zhang Jie's works is also reflected in changes she has made to later versions of stories. Whereas in the original version of "The Ark" published in 1982 she described the 'fresh wind' that had recently blown into 'stifling theoretical circles' as 'enabling her [Marxist theoretician Cao Jinghua] to express her observations and reflections on society and her pursuit of lofty communist ideals,'\textsuperscript{16} in a version that appeared in 1986, this has been changed to 'enabling her to carry out relatively unrestricted observation and reflection on society.'\textsuperscript{17} It would appear then, that with the passage of time, Zhang

\textsuperscript{14} Zhang Jie, "Chuan xingr" ("The Other World"), Zumulu, pp 289-326.

\textsuperscript{15} "Ta you shenme bing" ("What's Wrong With Him?").


\textsuperscript{17} See Zhang Jie ji, p 47.
Jie's own political optimism diminished, or at least, in her perception the necessity to depict political optimism had decreased.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Shen Rong}

Shen Rong's works often contain criticism that is as penetrating as Zhang Jie's, but because she carefully balances exposure with eulogy, delivers her salvos through characters' casual or flippant remarks, or even employs meaningful silences, her criticisms are more subtle than Zhang Jie's. Shen Rong is married to a bureaucrat working at the People's Daily, so like Zhang Jie, she has a detailed inside knowledge of the workings of the Chinese bureaucracy.

In "A Distracting Sunday," Shen looks at the problem of university students using connections to get preferential treatment in being assigned their jobs after graduation. Though she exposed the inequalities of a system in which powerful officials can use their positions to have their children assigned work in large cities while the children of ordinary people must go wherever they are sent, she does so through a positive character determined to end this type of corruption, even though he realises it may cost him his job. Whereas Zhang Jie depicts the networks of relationships as operating between ruthless, self-seeking characters, Shen Rong shows that it is not always that simple. Each of the people who comes to plead the case of the student Ding Dazhi with Party Secretary Mu is respectable, honest and upright - old friends making what they

\textsuperscript{18} Though in my interview with Zhang Jie on 10th October 1988 she denied both of these possibilities, her explanation tended to support my first conclusion. According to Zhang, whereas in 1982 when she first published "The Ark" she felt there genuinely was the possibility of pursuing lofty communist ideals, by 1986 the changed political situation made her feel that the possibility of pursuing communist ideals was so remote as to be virtually non-existent, hence she made the relevant cuts. Thus, though she says her belief in communist ideals had not changed, what had diminished was her belief that they could be realized - which can also be considered one aspect of political idealism.
consider is a reasonable request for special consideration. Shen Rong deliberately depicts them as "very good comrades" to show how these networks extend to all corners of society and consequently how difficult they are to eliminate.

In "Weekend," "Crescent Moon" and "Snakes and Ladders," Shen looks at the problem of old politically-oriented cadres unable to adapt to the needs of a changing society. In "Weekend," she presents rural cadres totally ignorant of agricultural science and the new agricultural policies of the Eighties attempting to use techniques learned in the Fifties (mobilizing the masses and struggling against landlords) to lead rural modernization. The topic is a serious one, but Shen Rong lightens it by having the old cadres expose their inadequacies through lighthearted conversation during a card game.

"Crescent Moon" looks at rural cadres' lack of understanding of young peasants' cultural needs. A young man and woman, stranded in town after watching a film are picked up by Director He of the Commune Office. Unable to comprehend that intelligent rural youth now need more than simply to labour in the fields all day, he decides to have them publicly criticised for falling into bad ways. Like the cadres in "Weekend," Director He is not an evil character, he is simply seriously out of touch with the times.

"Snakes and Ladders" examines the sensitive issue of the Party's ideological work methods. Through the negative example of Director of the Party Committee Office, Ji Zikuan, who forces criticisms and self-criticisms out of the intellectuals under his authority, Shen Rong calls for an end to the pressure tactics such cadres developed in the 1950s, and

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19 "Fannai de xingqiri" ("A Distracting Sunday"), p 305.

20 Shen Rong, "Zhoumo" ("Weekend"), Shen Rong xiaoshuo xuan, pp 383-398.

21 Shen Rong, "Wanwan de yueliang" ("Crescent Moon"), Cuo, cuo, cuo, pp 334-354.

22 "Zhenzhen jiajia" ("Snakes and Ladders"). Throughout this thesis I have used the translation of Geremie Barme and Linda Jaivin entitled "Snakes and Ladders" in At Middle Age, (Beijing: Panda Books, 1987), pp 119-236.
shows that they only lead to evasion and straight-out lies on the part of intellectuals. Shen openly depicts the suspicion and resentment with which political commissars are now regarded, as well as the strong distrust of intellectuals that is still harboured by political diehards. Shen Rong’s criticism is sharp, so to make it more palatable she softens it in several ways. First, she presents as a contrast to Ji, a younger, lower ranked political cadre, who though obliged to go along with Ji’s methods is fundamentally opposed to them and understands the damage they do to Party-intellectual relations. Second, some of her most scornful criticisms are made through the caustic remarks of the rebellious young cynic, Qin Tongtong, who describes the political leaders of the academy as "rank amateurs," "hardened old ignoramuses" - cadres ready to use leftist labels to denounce things about which they know nothing. Qin Tongtong is a flippant young woman not taken seriously by the other characters, so through her Shen Rong can make comments that may not have been acceptable coming from more serious, responsible characters. Third, the final speech by the Centre Head, Wu Tianxiang, the climax to the story, balances criticism with praise for the new national administration: condemnation of the methods used by the political leaders of the academy is followed immediately by affirmation that the general situation since the Third Plenum is "very good" and that "there’s simply no need to lie any more." Whether Wu’s words reflect Shen Rong’s beliefs or whether she is playing the same games she depicts in "Snakes and Ladders," the criticism plus praise formula is one that affords writers some protection in exposing negative aspects of current political life.

Another issue on which Shen Rong has been outspoken is that of the selection and promotion of Party members. She had touched on this question in her 1981 work "Song of Praise" in which First County Secretary Chang survives the Cultural Revolution unscathed by employing the

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23 Ibid p 200.

24 Ibid p 227.
philosophy: "It's better to undertake something small than something big, and even better to do nothing at all." He pretends to study politics everyday, while Second Secretary Ti throws himself into the practical work of building a bridge. As a consequence, Ti is later imprisoned as a supporter of the Gang of Four, while the spineless yes-man Chang is promoted to become deputy secretary of the regional committee. The narrator recalls that on hearing this: "Nobody listening said a word. It was as if all were learning something, as if we all understood something." Shen Rong prudently leaves her message unspoken, but her criticism is as clear as if she had spelled it out.

"An Undisciplined Man," published in 1985, looks at the same problem in relation to Party membership through the contrasting characters of Yang Zifeng and Chen Zhongya. The brilliant, outspoken Yang Zifeng has worked for, but outside the Party since his youth, and openly criticised extreme political movements at their inception, motivated by concern for the fate of Party and nation. Chen Zhongya, in contrast, is a timid, mediocre man who never dares take the initiative or offer his own opinions. But whereas Chen is accepted into the Party, Yang is consistently refused membership. It is probably a reflection of the relatively liberal literary atmosphere in 1985 that Shen Rong does not use silence to speak for her, but makes a strong criticism through veteran Party member Huang, who comments:

"A group of people have emerged in the Party who always feel that Party members are superior beings. They only allow others to listen to them, and won't allow others to speak; everything they say is correct while everyone else is speaking rubbish. Those who heed their words can get into the Party while those who don't can't. If it goes on like this

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25 "Zan ge" (Songs of Praise"), p 21.

26 Ibid p 34.
with the numbers of yes-men in the Party increasing, and those who dare to speak out unable to join, this party of ours is going to be ruined."  

Yang Zifeng also speaks out strongly against the self-abasement he would hypocritically have to demonstrate if he wanted to ensure his acceptance into the Party. His stinging attack is softened by everyone listening bursting into laughter at the "rubbish" he is speaking, while Huang points out that the Party is currently working to eliminate this kind of "leftist" influence. But Huang's reassurances are not very convincing, considering the fact that they contradict the fears he himself had expressed earlier. His rather formal statement however, does supply an "optimistic" side to an otherwise heavy condemnation of Party selection criteria.

Several of Shen's less important works take a humorous look at other political and social problems. "On the Problem of Piglets Surviving the Winter," presents a wry view of the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures set in motion by the unnecessary concern of a leading cadre (also see p 204). "The Tragi-comedy of the Rooster" looks at the improvements brought to agriculture by the economic reform policies of the Eighties though a rooster's humorous account of his own life. It pokes fun at those unwilling to lose the security of "the communal pot of rice" as well as at conservatives whose misplaced patriotism makes them hostile to anything foreign (here represented by imported English hens which the rooster detests). It also touches on the problems of newly rich peasants who find themselves continually being asked to contribute money and

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27 "Sandan de ren" ("An Undisciplined Man"), p 528.

28 Ibid pp 529-530.


30 Shen Rong, "Da gongji xibeiju" ("The Tragi-comedy of the Rooster"), Cuo, cuo, cuo, pp 379-393.
goods to various causes. "Ten Years Deducted"\textsuperscript{31}, a gentle satire based on a rumour travelling around Beijing that the authorities have decided to deduct ten years from everyone's age to make up for the lost decade of the Cultural Revolution, warns against blind belief in directives from above. "Impasse"\textsuperscript{32} uses a mixture of fantasy and farce to depict the plight of former national model reformist factory manager Wang, cold-shouldered by the media who now have new targets for their propaganda campaigns, and frustrated by the bureaucracy who have thwarted his reforms and ousted him from his position. In desperation Wang turns to a writer of "reform literature" whose characters have all triumphed over extraordinary difficulties. The failure of these fictional characters to offer Wang any practical help both highlights the problems facing successful reformers and at the same time satirizes writers of reform literature who depict their characters achieving success by using methods that in reality will not work.

Probably partly as a result of Shen's use of the techniques described above, none of her contemporary works have placed her under the kind of political pressure that Zhang Jie has experienced. Even the controversy over "At Middle Age,"\textsuperscript{33} the subsequent film script for which was labelled by one critic "Unrequited Love Number Two,"\textsuperscript{34} did not prevent her from receiving a national prize for the novella in the year it was published.\textsuperscript{35} As a consequence there has been no sudden shift in her choice and current social and political problems in Shen's works are Chinese social...

\begin{itemize}
\item[31] Shen Rong "Jianqu shi sui" ("Ten Years Deducted"), \textit{Renmin wenxue}, No 2, 1986, pp 7-12.
\item[32] "Zou tou wu lu" ("Impasse").
\item[33] "Ren dao zhongnian" ("At Middle Age"). For further discussion of the work, see p 247-248.
\item[34] See Xu Chunjiao, "Yibu you yanzhong quexian de yingpian" ("A Film with Serious Shortcomings"), \textit{Shen Rong yanjiu zhuang ji}, pp 344-351; Yan Gang, "Wei dianying <<Ren dao zhongnian>> bian" ("In Defence of the Film 'At Middle Age'"), \textit{Shen Rong yanjiu zhuang ji}, pp 352-361.
\item[35] In contrast, Zhang Jie had to wait until 1985 to receive the Mao Dun prize for \textit{Leaden Wings}.\
\end{itemize}
treatment of subject matter as is to be found in Zhang Jie’s writing before and after 1982. One trend that is discernable however is a gradual move away from the tragic to the comic treatment of themes, so that the tragic mood of works like "Eternal Spring" (1979) and "Snow" (1980) has been largely replaced by the humour found throughout "The Tragi-comedy of the Rooster" (1984) or "An Undisciplined Man" (1985).

Ru Zhijuan

In contrast to Shen Rong and Zhang Jie, Ru Zhijuan’s strongest criticisms of contemporary political and social problems were made in fiction written in the first years of the post-1978 period. "Small Path Through the Grasslands," (discussed on page 73 above), one of the earliest works to expose the failings of cadres newly rehabilitated after the Cultural Revolution, was published in 1979, when Shen Rong and Zhang Jie were still optimistically depicting all old wrongs being righted in the new era. "A Badly-Edited Story,"36 Ru’s most powerful critical work, which condemns the Party’s betrayal of the trust of the peasants during the Great Leap Forward, was also published in this year.

By 1980, when Shen Rong and Zhang Jie had just begun to examine current social and political problems in their works, Ru Zhijuan’ critical passion had already cooled considerably. Though she continued to focus on problems in the Party and society, her aim shifted to smaller targets and less sensitive problems.

36 “Jianjicuole de gushi” ("A Badly Edited Story").
"An Ancient Song"37 and "Before the Bulletin Board,"38 expose corruption among middle and low-ranking cadres over job allocation and the assignment of pay rises. "Before the Bulletin Board" looks at the problem in a country school where instead of allocating pay rises to the most needy or hardest working, Director Jia allocates them to himself, his wife and the headmaster's wife's sister. Though this is blatant corruption, it would be useless for the teachers to complain, because Jia is a relative of the wife of a member of the County Party Standing Committee. Individuals without connections are powerless against those with them. All the impoverished teachers can do is attempt to join the network of relations by offering "gifts" they can ill afford to those in power, or as one teacher does, use her knowledge of such gifts to blackmail the Director into giving her an after-hours labouring job. Ru ends the story with a call to eliminate such corrupt practices, likening them to ruts that constantly appear in a dirt track and must be periodically flattened out if traffic is to flow smoothly.

In "An Ancient Song," Qu Yong, a former revolutionary soldier, goes to the North-East to persuade his daughter to transfer back to the south rather than marry a local boy, but finds that he would have to become involved in a network of corrupt relationships and gift giving before he could arrange such a transfer. Qu is horrified to discover that his own bureau chief, in town on the pretext of "studying," is wining and dining local officials at public expense to ensure his son's transfer to a good job. A former comrade-in-arms from whom Qu seeks help treats him coldly until he finds out that Qu is friends with a powerful official. Now regarding Qu as part of the network, he goes out of his way to facilitate the transfer, help which the idealistic Qu now refuses.

37 Ru Zhijuan, "Yi zhi gulao de ge" ("An Ancient Song"), Ru Zhijuan xiaoshuo xuan, pp 267-305.

Though it is inconceivable that Qu could really be so ignorant of the widespread use of connections to get things done in Chinese society, and therefore not likely that he would be shocked by it, Ru Zhijuan’s presentation of this character as the embodiment of the original ideals of the Party reveals by contrast the extent to which these ideals have been lost. As the only positive cadre presented, he also provides a "bright" side to a gloomy portrait of cadre corruption.

"Sons and Daughters,"39 another of Ru Zhijuan’s 1980 works, also looks at the problem of the loss of revolutionary ideals among Party cadres through a former heroine of the civil war, who in later life becomes obsessed with the traditional concerns of family and home. Her only interests lie in keeping her apartment immaculate, and arranging for her unwilling son to marry a suitable wife and be transferred to a job she considers carries a high social status.

Ru Zhijuan’s aim in writing these stories was "to restore and carry on the fine tradition of the Party," something she considered a matter of great urgency if Party and nation were to survive.40 But it may reflect her sense of the near impossibility of this task that the former war heroine dies without coming to the realisation that she and those like her have betrayed the revolution for which they once fought.

After 1980, Ru Zhijuan no longer attempted to restore Party tradition by criticising contemporary maladies, but focused on eulogising heroes of the war years. In her writing on contemporary society, she returned to her style of the late Fifties and early Sixties, depicting minor incidents in the lives of ordinary people.

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39 "Er nu qing" ("Sons and Daughters").

40 See Ru Zhijuan, "Wo dui chuangzuo de yidian kanfa" ("Some of My Views on Creative Writing"), Ru Zhijuan xiaoshuo xuan, p 372, and Sheng Ying, "Ru Zhijuan Lun" ("On Ru Zhijuan").
In "After the Time was Ripe," a daughter returns home after the death of her mother and her brother’s marriage, to improve her father’s flat. She throws out old furniture, buys new comfortable chairs and arranges everything to allow maximum comfort and convenience. But the old man feels uncomfortable with it. He clings to the ancient, tattered and familiar - the sentimental attachments that his daughter has overlooked. The subtleties of the relationship between father and daughter are depicted very sensitively. The daughter, well-meaning, enthusiastic, carefully not mentioning her dead mother; the old man hiding his unease and trying to appear grateful, understanding her good intentions and finally regaining peace of mind with the thought that he can restore his accustomed environment once his daughter has left.

"The Wedding Feast" (1985), one of Ru Zhijuan’s last pieces of fiction written to date, carries on the same mood with its portrayal of the psychology of a man trying to cope simultaneously with the materialistic snobbery of his wife and her relatives at their wedding feast, and the death of his mother the previous evening which he conceals from them. The stark contrast between the joy that a wedding feast should symbolize and the grief and vulgar snobbery that cloud this celebration are reflective of the increasing disappointment and disillusionment that Ru Zhijuan seems to have felt in the mid-1980s. In place of the gentle bright, optimistic tone that characterised her pre-Cultural Revolution works, one senses a melancholy that even her attempts to find comfort in the glory of the war years in works such as "Route Marker" and "The First Serviceman to be Demobilised" could not dispel.

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41 "Tiaojian chengshu zhihou" ("After the Time was Ripe").
43 "Lubiao" ("Route Marker").
44 "Diyige fuyuan de junren" ("The First Serviceman to be Demobilised").
While the works of Shen Rong, Zhang Jie and, to a lesser extent, Ru Zhijuan concentrate on the upper strata of society - the middle and higher levels of the government bureaucracy and senior intellectuals, Zhang Kangkang tends to focus on the social and political issues facing her age-group, particularly those affecting the lives of city youth who had been sent to labour in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution.

The positive characters depicted in Zhang Kangkang's works up to 1983 tend to be youth who, despite being deprived of a formal education, struggled to educate themselves during their stay in the countryside, and after the Cultural Revolution were able to pass university entrance exams, or gain social recognition for their scientific or artistic achievements. (In this they form a strong contrast to Wang Anyi's protagonists, as will be seen below). They are characters whose ability and perseverance have brought them success, though they are constantly hindered by representatives of conservatism and the extreme-left.

Typical of this type of positive character is university student Cen Lang, the heroine of a series of five short stories published between 1980 and 1982. Cen is lively, intelligent and willing to express with word and action her own independent views on issues ranging from arranged marriage to politics. In a politics class, and later in a politics examination ("Summer") Cen expresses doubt about the then prevailing class struggle theories, and as a result fails the examination. In "Travelling Afar," she criticises the literary theory lecturer for merely repeating the textbook without offering his own independent views, and for avoiding discussion


46 These were not, however, controversial views at the time the story was published in 1980.
of controversial questions. She is thrown out of the class. Zhang Kangkang criticises the current education system that "fetters students' imagination" - obliging them to parrot prescribed views and punishing anyone who offers original ideas, and through Cen offers unorthodox views, such as demanding that even "literary theories that have always been regarded as classics" should be critically re-examined - a demand that can be assumed to include, if not specifically refer to, Mao's "Yanan Talks."

The question of freedom of expression for intellectuals presented here has interesting parallels with Shen Rong's "Snakes and Ladders." Both stories depict independent thinkers being criticised for unorthodox ideas, and in each case, the conflict is between intellectuals and Party representatives. (In the "Summer" series, Lu Hong, the conservative leader of the class Party group, is Cen Lang's chief adversary). In both writers' works, the majority of intellectuals insincerely go along with Party demands, but privately support the non-conformist viewpoint. This parallel is significant because it indicates that Party-intellectual conflicts are not caused simply by old, non-specialist cadres attempting to use ideological work methods learnt in the 1950s as Shen Rong suggests in "Snakes and Ladders." Whereas Shen suggests through the character of Yang that younger cadres are more liberal and will handle Party-intellectual relations more sensitively, in the "Summer" series, the Party member who attacks Cen Lang most fiercely is a fellow student in her twenties - both young and a literary specialist herself. So despite Shen Rong's expressed optimism, Zhang Kangkang's works indicate that the stifling of intellectual freedom by the Party is perhaps as serious among the lower and younger strata of the intelligentsia as it is among senior intellectuals.

47 "Qu yuanfang" ("Travelling Afar"), p 156. This criticism is repeated in "Ta" ("Pagoda"), p 610.

48 Ibid p 156.
The concerns expressed by Shen Rong over Party member selection and promotion criteria in "Song of Praise" and "An Undisciplined Man" are also paralleled in the works of the younger writer. Cen Lang is denied Party membership, and despite her scholarly brilliance is rejected as a research student.\textsuperscript{49} After refusing to use her connections to get a easy job, she is assigned work in a regional education bureau in the remote countryside. Her cheerful acceptance of the job as a chance to help underprivileged country children, does not change the fact that as a non-conformist she has been assigned the job as a form of punishment. Academically mediocre Lu Hong, in contrast, is steadily promoted through the Party, and kept on as a political instructor at the university after graduation. Works such as "Faint Morning Mist"\textsuperscript{50} (1980) and "Red Poppies"\textsuperscript{51} (1983), also look at young people like Lu Hong, who learnt to display a mixture of political zealotry and puritanism during the Cultural Revolution and are still favoured for promotion by conservative leaders, thus adding a new young force opposed to reform to the ranks of communist officials.

While "Information Explosion"\textsuperscript{52} also looks at tensions between young intellectuals and the Party through a young self-taught engineer who is locked out of his laboratory as a result of the jealousy of the Party branch secretary, "In the Hills and Beside the Lake"\textsuperscript{53} looks at a problem not touched on in the works of the older writers - the suppression of talented youth by older intellectuals and a jealous public. The hero, Li Po,

\textsuperscript{49} "Wu xue de dongtian" ("A Winter Without Snow"), p 41.

\textsuperscript{50} Zhang Kangkang, "Dandan de chen wu" ("Faint Morning Mist"), Shouhwo, No 3, 1980, pp 4-56.

\textsuperscript{51} Zhang Kangkang, "Hong yingsu" ("Red Poppies"), Xinshiqi nuzuojia bairen zuopin xuan, Vol 2, pp 90-121.

\textsuperscript{52} Zhang Kangkang, "Xinxi baozha" ("Information Explosion"), Qingnian wenxue, No 4, 1983, pp 27-35.

\textsuperscript{53} Zhang Kangkang, "Zai qiuling, zai huban" ("In the Hills and Beside the Lake"), Zhang Kangkang zhongpian xiaoshuo ji (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1982), pp 309-438.
struggles to study science throughout his time in the Great Northern Wasteland, and develops a strong interest in a deadly regional disease. Unable to continue his research in the North-East, he returns to Hangzhou and publishes papers while working in a hospital pharmacy. But though his theories are acclaimed in the newspapers, they offend a professor who had previously supported him, because they prove the professor's earlier theories were wrong. He condemns Li Po, who is then attacked on all sides by people jealous of his success. The secretary of the personnel department blocks his transfer to a hospital where he could continue his research, and advises him to forget about doing further research.

Zhang Kangkang provides a fortuitous happy ending when a specialist offers Li a job, but this does not soften the grim tone of the story. One of its most surprising assertions is that the situation for young intellectuals was worse in the early 1980s when the story was written than it was during the Cultural Revolution. In the light of the vicious attacks he has experienced after returning to the city, Li Po reappraises a youth who had denounced his research during the Cultural Revolution, and concludes that "compared with the numerous tribulations he had suffered afterwards, the harm... done to him in that era seemed to have already declined to a very secondary position."\(^{54}\)

Zhang Kangkang's examination of the problems now facing her age-group came to a peak in "Pagoda,"\(^55\) published in 1983. While the protagonists of earlier stories were rather idealized figures, fearlessly seeking new standards of truth and beauty and defiantly asserting their individuality, in "Pagoda," Zhang Kangkang presents characters who are less idealized. Each of five people who worked on the same state farm in the North-East during the Cultural Revolution has had to come to terms with reality. A youth who had to remain on the farm because he married a local girl admits he longed to return to the city, but had no choice but

\(^{54}\) *Ibid* p 435.

\(^{55}\) "Ta" ("Pagoda").
to accept his lot as a lowly tractor driver. Economic hardship creates constant squabbles between another young couple. A self-taught philosopher has been unemployed since returning to Hangzhou. A research student cannot find a husband. Through the tractor driver, Zhang Kangkang compares their situation to that of middle-aged intellectuals as described in Shen Rong's "At Middle Age":

"Two years ago "At Middle Age" rocked the whole country... Admittedly it was very moving, but I think no matter how hard doctors and technicians in their forties work for their low wages, at least they have academic degrees, academic records and service records. For better or for worse, they are the backbone of their work units. They have to be used because there's no one else. The way things are developing now, they have excellent prospects. What do they have to worry about? We Cultural Revolution high school graduates are the ones who've really lost out. We have none of the skills in demand; we're still quite young; people despise us and kick us around like footballs. Husband and wife are both on low wages. Early each morning they take the kids on their backs and go off to work. If only someone would write a story "At Thirty"..."

Most frustrating to the five is that the ideas and opinions of their generation go unheeded. Even the most successful among them, now a deputy section head in the Silk Bureau, complains that though his superiors praise his articles on industrial management, none of his proposals are ever adopted. A tour guide's suggestions for improving customer service only evoke his leaders' distrust. The tractor driver points out that on the farm, thirty year-olds have no right to express opinions. Furthermore, apart from the lucky few who attended university after the

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56 See p 27, n 25.

57 "Ta" ("Pagoda"), p 603.

58 Ibid pp 610-611.
Cultural Revolution, their lack of tertiary training leaves them with poor prospects in a system that now stresses formal qualifications.59

While the protagonists of "Pagoda" are no longer the rebellious, talented idealists found in earlier works, they still strive altruistically for a better society, as their complaints about their opinions being ignored show. After 1983 Zhang Kangkang gradually turned to presenting characters whose concerns focus chiefly on their own private interests. Instead of being anxious about the state of the education system or industrial management, these later characters are more interested in achieving fame and fortune. No longer clearly divided into positive and negative types, characters frequently treat one another with suspicion and hostility, and the line between insanity and a normal psychology becomes increasingly blurred in a society where rationality seems to be disappearing.

"Ocean in a Puddle"60 (1984) and "Morpheus on Sunshine Island"61 (1985) show the beginning of this trend. "Ocean in a Puddle" comments on the difficulties of carrying out economic reform. Whereas Shen Rong and Zhang Jie's works on the subject portray factory heads and the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy, Zhang Kangkang’s characters are a boatman on a dilapidated passenger boat on Hangzhou’s West Lake and a sleazy businessman from the North-East. Both support reform, but only because they see it as the key to improving their personal circumstances. The businessman’s arrogant flaunting of his new wealth leads to a hostile confrontation between the two men.

59 Ibid p 613.


"Morpheus on Sunshine Island" depicts a man unable to adjust to the new values of Chinese society in the 1980s and its new standards for measuring success. Accustomed to gaining position and status by copying political model heroes rather than through practical achievements, he suddenly finds himself being surpassed by people he had despised: a classmate he had criticised for studying during the Cultural Revolution wins a scholarship to study in America; a chauffeur who uses his job to do private business and is adept at cultivating social relations is promoted ahead of him. Jealousy consumes him and he develops severe insomnia. Treatment by an astute psychologist finally makes him realise the onus is on him to make himself competitive. As with her earlier works, Zhang Kangkang makes her message clear: "incompetence will never again be regarded as a virtue," but her depiction of the man's sense of dislocation and his unreasoning jealousy foreshadow the psychoses that afflict later characters.

In 1987 and 1988, the depiction of the irrational and bizarre dominated Zhang Kangkang's writing. In "Indra's Net" (1987), most of the characters suffer from mental disorders. A former Cultural Revolution activist now believes himself a scientific genius. He claims to communicate with flying saucers and to be able to use his computer to calculate anything (including people's whereabouts). A villagers obsessed with finding his father, whom he is convinced was a revolutionary. He even digs up graves in his search and has his feet broken by other villagers as punishment. Yet the seemingly normal narrator believes that they are also normal. "Epidemic" (1988) depicts a woman whose fear of contracting hepatitis leads her to completely isolate herself from society and make a fetish of hygiene. Each of these characters

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62 Ibid p 183.
63 "Yintuoluo de wang" ("Indra's Net").
64 "Liuxing bing" ("Epidemic").
exists in his or her own tortured world alienated from a society that to them appears uncomprehending, unjust and dangerous.

At the same time these works reflect the new importance of money in Chinese society and the change in values that has accompanied this phenomenon. In "Epidemic," the narrator, a journalist, sees the widespread fear of contracting hepatitis as an opportunity to make a quick profit from the sale of preventive medicine.\(^6^5\) Whereas in earlier stories, characters placed their hopes for the future in socialism or the Party, (for example in "Information Explosion" the young engineer expresses the belief that the Party will solve his problems for him),\(^6^6\) now they see making money as the only way to secure a better future. "Yellow Poppies"\(^6^7\) describes the dilemma of the main character who realises that if he wants better living conditions and respect from his neighbours, he has to sell his valuable collection of grain ration tickets. Though the collection is of great sentimental value as well as the only thing he has that evokes his young son's admiration, it appears that the lure of money and the material comforts it will bring will prove too strong to resist.

At the end of 1988 Zhang Kangkang published a story that combines the techniques she developed in works like "Indra's Net" with her earlier interest in politics. At first "The Fourth World"\(^6^8\) seems to be merely a bizarre, surrealist tale of a professor kidnapped by a taxi driver chasing a strange blue light, but as the story progresses, its allegoric nature becomes increasingly evident.

The driver has taken the intellectual on board because he needs his help in catching the blue light, yet he distrusts him and ignores his advice, first to change direction at a fork in the road, and then to stop for a while

\(^{65}\) \textit{Ibid} p 35.

\(^{66}\) "Xinxi baozha" ("Information Explosion"), p 33.

\(^{67}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Huang yingsu" ("Yellow Poppies"), \textit{Shanghai wenxue}, No 7, 1988, pp 16-22.

\(^{68}\) "Di si shijie" ("The Fourth World").
to prevent the car overheating. As a result, they lose the blue light, the car breaks down, and they finally run out of petrol in a barren valley surrounded by high mountains. The professor tells the driver:

"... you will never catch (the blue light), and if I ride in your car I shall never catch it either. In the past there was talk of the "three great mountains," now there are countless mountains on all sides, creating this impassable valley. In the final analysis these countless mountains are no more than the gods of the land and wealth, kings, officials and the emperor all combined in a new form in the body of one "Thousand-hand Guanyin.""

Though Zhang Kangkang does not spell out what the "Thousand-hand Guanyin" represents, she is clearly referring to the communist-dominated social and political system.

The story expresses a sense of despair over the future of China unprecedented in Zhang Kangkang’s works:

"Hadn’t a great man once modestly affirmed that he belonged to the Third World? The professor couldn’t remember in which paper he’d read that a Fourth World was now appearing on Earth. If the citizens of the Third World caught up with you and left you behind, didn’t that mean you dropped a grade? Maybe you couldn’t even preserve your qualifications as citizens of the world. Wasn’t [a nation] without education, culture and a legal system on a vicious circle towards self-destruction?... He felt the shadow of disaster and a sense of crisis envelop him,... swallow him up."

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69 Mao Zedong’s analysis of the burdens on the Chinese people in the 1940s likened imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism to "three great mountains."

70 "Disi shijie" ("The Fourth World"), p 13.

71 The theory of "Three Worlds" was put forward by Mao Zedong in a conversation with the Zambian president in 1974. He categorized China as belonging to the Third World. See Zhongguo xiandai lishi cidian (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1987), pp 42-43.

72 "Disi shijie" ("The Fourth World"), p 15.
The professor dies placing his hopes for the future in his students, having come to the realization that the blue lights are in fact only will-o’-the-wisps. It is possible that in her reference to the professors’ students, Zhang Kangkang saw hope for China in the student movement that began in late 1986, and at the time of publication of this work had not been suppressed by the government, but she does not make this reference explicit.

The depiction of the bizarre and irrational in literature was, of course, not new. Of the writers examined in this thesis, Zhang Jie had presented society in this light in 1986 with "What’s Wrong With Him?",73 and as we shall see below, Zhang Xinxin was moving in this direction as early as 1983 with works such as "The Mad Amaryllis."74 The writer best known for her representation of deranged individuals in a hostile environment, Can Xue, had also begun to publish in 1986, before Zhang Kangkang had fully developed this approach. Although there may be elements of copying a fashionable literary trend in any or all of these writers’ works, however, a more fundamental reason for the emergence of this type of writing at this time probably lies in changes in society itself.

In the Eighties, the mixture of traditional and Communist ideology that had dominated Chinese society for several decades, was further complicated by the introduction of Western ideas and elements of the market economy. Trying to accommodate such diverse ideas and values could hardly create anything but spiritual confusion. Added to this, failures in reform policies, the exposure of widespread corruption among communist cadres, and serious inflation that brought much hardship, left many people discontented with the present, but unable to see a way out for the future.

73 "Ta you shenme bing" ("What’s Wrong with Him?").

74 "Fengkuang de junzilan" ("The Mad Amaryllis"), Wenhui yuekan, No 9, 1983, pp 2-10.
The mixture of ideologies competing for people's minds are reflected in these stories: In Zhang Kangkang's "Indra's Net" a young woman with a persecution complex initially practises Buddhism, but after apparently being cured abandons both this and the khakis and pumps she has worn since the Cultural Revolution and adopts a more Western style. She symbolically cuts off her long plaits, has her hair permed and wears a Western dress.75 In Zhang Jie's "What's Wrong With Him?", an old man who has made a fortune mending shoes, burns money to spirits hoping to save his grandson's life. Some characters place their hope in science (the mad computer enthusiast in "Indra's Net"), while others still conscientiously try to do their job as good communists (the well-meaning class teacher in "What's Wrong With Him?"). Everyone tries to find their own way out in a society that can no longer offer clear-cut solutions to the individual, and which Zhang Kangkang's "The Fourth World," with its tragically accurate premonition of national disaster, suggests will not even be able to save itself.

Zhang Xinxin

Unlike the older writers and Zhang Kangkang, Zhang Xinxin has shown little interest in contemporary political questions. Although she touches on problems like the corruption of Party cadres and the privileged lifestyle their children lead, the main focus of her writing has been on the exploration of the psychology of young adults of her own generation and the social environment that has created it.

75 "Yintuoluo de wang" ("Indra’s Net"), p. 49.
After publishing her two earliest works, "In the Quiet Ward"\(^\text{76}\) (1978) and "A Tranquil Night"\(^\text{77}\) (1979), which use simple, complete plots without direct psychological depiction to praise the selfless virtue of ordinary youth, and which the author agrees simply copied the orthodox style of the times,\(^\text{78}\) in 1980 Zhang Xinxin wrote her first psychological study, "How Did I Miss You?"\(^\text{79}\) While the two earlier works had presented a generally positive, optimistic view of Chinese society, in depicting the confused psychology of a young bus conductress torn between career ambitions and the desire for traditional femininity, "How Did I Miss You" depicts society in a much harsher light.

In her work on the bus, the conductress has to contend not only with constant jostling and crowding, but also with the jeers of young men and the stony indifference of most of the passengers to her difficulties. It is an environment devoid of sympathy or consideration for others in which the individual must be physically and mentally tough in order to survive. In response the woman has learned to brusquely pull and push people on and off the bus, to counter jibes with cutting remarks and to release her frustrations by snapping at even the rare individuals who try to help her. It is only when she tries unsuccessfully to be gentle and compliant to please a man she loves that she realises her character has been irreversibly "masculinized" by her environment.\(^\text{80}\)

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\(^{76}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Zai jingjing de bingfangli" ("In the Quiet Ward"), *Beijing wenyi*, No 11, 1978, pp 20-28.

\(^{77}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Yige pingjing de yewan" ("A Tranquil Night"), *Beijing wenyi*, No 12, 1979, pp 17-23.

\(^{78}\) Zhang Xinxin expressed this view in an interview with the author on August 29, 1988.

\(^{79}\) Zhang Xinxin, "Wo zai nar cuoguole ni" ("How Did I Miss You?")*, Shouhuo*, No 5, 1980, pp 91-105.

\(^{80}\) The heroine of Zhang Xinxin's work forms a strong contrast to that of the bus conductress, Tianye, in Zhang Jie's "Who Lives the More Beautiful Life," see p 27.
The theme of the struggle for survival is developed further and stated more explicitly in "On the Same Horizon," published in 1981. Through a young couple whose marriage disintegrates as they tenaciously pursue their separate careers, Zhang Xinxin identifies competition as the main driving force in society, and shows the destructive effects of extreme competitiveness on both individual psychology and interpersonal relationships. The struggle for recognition in the art world forces the man to expend most of his energy on devising strategies for eliminating rivals, establishing connections with influential people and producing paintings that will be commercially popular. He sees the struggle for success as "a boxing match" in which there are no set rules, and no contestant can tolerate the existence of opponents. He even makes a Darwinian comparison between human society and nature: "... The whole of society, like nature and the animal world has been arranged in a harmonious struggle for existence."

"On the Same Horizon" is significant both for its controversial Darwinian explanation of society and social progress, and for its technical innovation. The work is structured around the psychological development of the male and female protagonists rather than a plot, and moves freely between interior monologue, dialogue, memories and feelings. The first person narrative alternates without warning between the two main characters, leaving the reader to determine the narrator's identity.

81 "Zai tongyi dipinxian" ("On the Same Horizon").
82 Ibid p 189.
83 Ibid p 216.
84 Ibid pp 216-218.
85 Whereas according to Marxist theory it is the development of the forces of production that advance society, Zhang Xinxin's male character reflects that "the whole world advances in the midst of competition" (p 218).
Having made the break with both the orthodox political interpretation of socialist society and conventional literary techniques, Zhang Xinxin went on to further experimentation in her 1983 works. "Thirty Minutes in the Early Morning"\textsuperscript{86} carries on the theme of the struggle for survival in a competitive society. The story is almost plotless, and simply follows the thoughts and feelings of a person of unidentified gender cycling to work through crowded streets. Constant use of animal imagery repeats the parallels drawn between the fight for survival in the animal world and life in human society found in "On the Same Horizon."

The endless stream of cyclists the narrator joins are "a school of fish," a reckless rider is "like an eel,"\textsuperscript{87} buses are "like whales,"\textsuperscript{88} and vehicles waiting to cross an intersection are "like wild beasts panting heavily."\textsuperscript{89} Through a highly subjective depiction of the most mundane of daily activities, Zhang Xinxin recreates the atmosphere of life in the "great whirlpool"\textsuperscript{90} of a Chinese city.

Zhang Xinxin's criticism of the reality of life in China continued in "Dramatic Effect."\textsuperscript{91} In this work, a serious and dedicated young actor with the ideal of achieving artistic excellence is assigned work in a provincial theatre that has to cater to vulgar taste in order to remain economically viable. At the climax of the story, he has no choice but to play a slapstick role in a poorly-written propaganda play in front of his former teachers, grinning and buffooning while his heart weeps at his own degradation. While on one level Zhang Xinxin is decrying the vulgar

\textsuperscript{86} Zhang Xinxin, "Qingchen, sanshi fenzhong" ("Thirty Minutes in the Early Morning"), \textit{Shanghai wenxue}, No 3, 1983, pp 52-57.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid} p 53.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid} p 54.

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid} p 55.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid} p 53.

commercialization of art, the stage is clearly an analogy for life where ideals are crushed by reality and people are forced not only to act and speak contrary to their wishes, but also to pretend that they are happy to do so. Considering the strong interest in the works of Sartre among young Chinese intellectuals in the early Eighties, it is not unreasonable to read this work as an existentialist-influenced criticism of contemporary Chinese society.

Though Zhang Xinxin had offered unorthodox ideas in her fiction and utilized new techniques such as interior monologue and non-chronological time sequence, up to this point, her style was still completely realist. At the end of 1983, however with "The Mad Amaryllis,"92 she introduced elements of the absurd into her writing for the first time.

The work is a satire on the dehumanizing effect of the avid pursuit of material wealth. The population of a country town become so obsessed with growing amaryllises for profit, that they even resort to murder to obtain the plants. The central character, Dr Lu, only becomes aware of the danger of this unchecked materialism when he has a dream in which everyone around him turns into sinister giant amaryllises. He saves himself by getting rid of his plant and breaking off relations with the amaryllis fanatics around him.

Zhang Xinxin’s very pessimistic presentation of socialist society, and her use of Darwinian and Existentialist analysis aroused the wrath of the conservatives. Linked in official eyes to an existentialist movement at Fudan University, she became a central target of the 1983 Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution. Direct political pressure on her was reinforced by an intense campaign against her works by literary critics. She was accused of "praising capitalist individualism," "lacking a Marxist worldview," having divorced herself from reality, and having developed the "decadent consciousness of the exploiting classes" - some of the most

92 "Fengkuang de junzilan" ("The Mad Amaryllis").
dangerous political labels available. As a result, for more than a year no literary journal would carry Zhang Xinxin’s works, and when she finally resumed publication with the oral accounts, *Peking Man*, it marked a complete change for her of both style and genre. Nevertheless, her next purely fictional work basically carried on from where "The Mad Amaryllis" had left off, albeit minus the openly non-Marxist social analysis.

"Philately" depicts a greedy, corrupt, uncaring society in which the paramount concern in interpersonal relationships is self-interest. A respected philatelist has gained fame by currying favour with old experts in the field and plagiarising their ideas. He uses his position as head of the philatelic society to make forgeries of a valuable stamp which he sells at a huge profit. A young wife surreptitiously values everything in the home of her parents-in-law, so as to demand their most valuable possessions when she and her husband move to their own flat. Even the parent-child bond is subordinated to self-interest when a father and daughter (a primary school student) try to out-manoeuvre one another in a deal to exchange stamps. The news that an old man has a priceless stamp sends the main characters into a frenzy of greed, but their schemes to get the stamp into their own hands are foiled by the housemaid, who has cut the picture of a dragon out of the stamp and sent it home to be used as a pattern. Like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, who wait for someone who does not appear, they vie with one another for a stamp that no longer exists. Ironically it is only the unsophisticated country girl who sees stamps as what they really are - little pieces of paper printed with pretty pictures to be used to aid human communication. Her innocence and purity stand out as a contrast to the moral and spiritual degeneration of the city people corrupted by modern urban society.

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94 Zhang Xinxin, "Feng, pian, lian" ("Philately"), *Shouhuo*, No 2, 1985, pp 4-92. (Writing completed in June 1984.)
"The Mad Amaryllis" and "Philately" marked the peak of this phase of Zhang Xinxin's very critical depiction of Chinese society. After 1986 her fiction switched away from portraying characters who epitomise modern social maladies to depiction of the frustrations and hardships of ordinary intellectuals. These later works are very loosely structured, have little or no plot and usually have no central character around whom the work develops. There is little depiction of individual psychology. Instead descriptions of the everyday activities of groups of characters combine to present a general view of the lives of urban intellectuals in China.

"Searching for the Appropriate Character to Die" 95 (1986), is thematically very similar to Shen Rong's "At Middle Age." A playwright wants to choose one of her drama academy teachers as the character to die in her play, but as she considers the circumstances of each in turn realises none of them deserve to die because they have never yet lived well. All live in cramped conditions, barely managing to support their families on their meagre wages. Even the man considered best off lives in two small rooms with his wife and children, and must take on the whole burden of housework and cooking as his wife, also an intellectual, has been made a permanent invalid by being overworked.

Like Dr Lu Wenting, the heroine of "At Middle Age," these dedicated, self-sacrificing people are powerless to improve their circumstances: new apartments are monopolized by the personnel services department; government restrictions on household registration transfer keep one family permanently separated; a woman studies day and night for examinations for study overseas, only to find someone with good connections had been chosen before the examinations had even been held. Though life offers them little hope that their hardships will be alleviated, they carry on with courage and forbearance. Like Shen Rong, in this

95 "Xunzhao heshi qu si de juzhongren" ("Searching for the Appropriate Character to Die").
mixture of "life and drama, fiction and reality," Zhang Xinxin is calling attention to the plight of intellectuals and implicitly making a plea for their situation to be improved.

"Let's Play Robbers" (1987), looks at the lives of young university graduates assigned work in the storeroom of a natural history museum. Whereas in the older writers' works central characters are usually dedicated to their careers, in "Let's Play Robbers," the young intellectuals are condemned to idleness by official job assignments. Dedication to their work is impossible, because they have no work to do. Instead they play endless games of bridge or chess, or chat on the phone to wile away their time. Unlike their older counterparts, they have no firm political beliefs or lofty pursuits. To fill their spiritual vacuum, as different fads appear in society, they take them up and follow them enthusiastically for a while, but then drop them - ballroom dancing, buying lottery tickets, applying to study in America: each of these seems to offer a way out of their meaningless existence, but hopes are rarely realised. They win nothing in the lotteries, one woman is refused an American entry visa, and a second woman who is offered a Ph.D. scholarship to study at Harvard is prevented from leaving by a sudden Chinese government clampdown on privately-funded students. A woman who attempts to transfer out of the museum to more meaningful work is told she cannot because the museum does not exist. Ultimately, the story is a portrayal of the political and social alienation of modern youth. Whatever they try to do or to achieve, they are frustrated by formless, impersonal forces over which they have no control. Most have little choice other than to resign themselves to an existence that has less significance than that of the stuffed animals in their museum.

96 Quoted from Zhang Xinxin's afterword to "Searching for the Appropriate Character to Die", "Zuozhe zhuiyu" ("Superfluous Words from the Author"), Beijing wenxue, No 1, 1986, p 13.

With "Which Half Will You Act This Time?," published in 1988, Zhang Xinxin returned to her earlier interest in educated women trying to cope with the pressures of modern society. But whereas her earlier works on the subject, such as "How Did I Miss You?" and "On the Same Horizon" had been direct portrayals of individual psychology, this work follows the style of her 1986 and 1987 works and presents the condition of her characters through the external depiction of daily trivia.

Unlike her earlier pieces which analyse the social environment and personal history of characters to explain their psychological development, in "Which Half Will You Act This Time?," little attempt is made to look beyond events for causes. The reader is simply presented with a seemingly unprocessed slice of the lives of two divorced women and a little girl. Practicalities dominate their lives: for the narrator it is the problem of finding somewhere to live - as a childless divorcee, she is not entitled to even a room of her own, but her borrowed flat has to be returned to its owner. For the little girl’s mother it is the economic hardship of trying to raise a child on insufficient wages, and the physical hardship of daily travelling long distances on crowded buses as she takes her daughter to school or piano lessons. Laid before the reader is a fairly joyless existence in which harsh reality leaves the individual little time or energy to ponder on her own needs and emotions.

Both the strength and weakness of this and Zhang Xinxin’s other fiction published since 1986, is its apparently unrefined realism. The frustrations, injustices and minor irritations of life are conveyed with great detail and precision. But while life may be composed of unrelated, trivial events, translated directly into writing, they do not necessarily make good fiction. The extreme looseness of structure, lack of internal cohesion and scanty characterisation of these works make them technically greatly inferior to outstanding earlier pieces such as "On the Same Horizon" or

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98 Zhang Xinxin, "Zhe ci ni yan na yi ban?" ("Which Half Will You Act This Time?") in Shouhuo, No 4, 1988, pp 42-89.
"Dreams of Our Generation." These later works are also marred by the author's dwelling at length on minute sensations that contribute little to the work except padding. In "Which Half Will You Act This Time?," for example, she uses over forty lines to describe her irritation at an artist dropping cigarette ash all over her flat. Likewise in "Stage," one long paragraph gives an elaborate description of fountain pens scratching over paper and her reaction to it. Her earlier clear, straightforward language has been replaced with long, very complex sentence structures that sometimes seem unnecessarily convoluted. The previous naturalness of her portrayal of the anguish of individuals striving for ideals in a hostile environment, has been largely lost as she has come increasingly to present characters with a cold cynicism that often gives the reader a sense of being too self-consciously clever. One cannot but feel that Chinese critics such as Wu Liang who have expressed regret at the direction Zhang Xinxin's recent fiction has taken, are basically justified in their criticism.

Wang Anyi

Wang Anyi's writings on contemporary society show neither the strong interest in political problems of the older writers and Zhang Kangkang, nor the emphasis on the exposure of modern social maladies so prominent in Zhang Xinxin's works. Instead, her works are studies of Chinese society and of human nature: the way individuals cope with fate, post-Cultural Revolution period issues, or the search for identities in tens and fates.

99 Zhang Xinxin, "Women zhege nianji de meng" ("Dreams of Our Generation"), Shouhuo, No 4, 1982, pp 95-120.

100 "Zheci ni yan na yi ban?" ("Which Half Will You Act This Time?"), pp 44-45.

101 Zhang Xinxin, "Wutai" ("Stage"), Shouhuo, No 5, 1988, p 55.

102 See for example, Wu Liang, "Shao yidian zasui tang" ("Less of the Hash"), Zhong shan, No 1, 1987, p 74, reprinted from Wenhui zhoubao.
the nature of interpersonal relationships, and the basic drives that motivate human behaviour.

Even more than the other younger writers, her works look at the lower strata of Chinese society. Particularly since 1981, she has chosen most of her main characters from among ordinary Shanghai residents and country people from small villages and country towns. These are people who have nothing to distinguish them from millions of other Chinese: they have little education, no outstanding talents and no lofty ambitions, but it is precisely this that makes them more typical representatives of Chinese society as a whole than the intellectuals and high-ranking cadres who dominate the works of Zhang Jie or Shen Rong.

Like Zhang Kangkang, Wang Anyi's years spent in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution have given her a special interest in the fate of her generation of rusticated city youth. As we have seen above, Zhang Kangkang has tended to tell the stories of the successful: those who succeeded in entering universities when examinations were reintroduced (such as Cen Lang in the "Summer" series of stories), or whose outstanding achievements eventually gained them social recognition despite their lack of formal tertiary training (for example the heroes of "In the Hills and Beside the Lake" and "Information Explosion"). Wang Anyi, in contrast, rarely presents characters who achieve or aim at any kind of social success. Her protagonists are either not trying to get ahead, or find that their years of self-training in the countryside are hopelessly inadequate when it comes to competing for places in university or transferring to more satisfying jobs. Thus Wang Anyi's stories of rusticated city youth in the post-Cultural Revolution period tend to be studies of individuals coming to terms with disappointment and failure.
Several of Wang Anyi's earliest works are set in run-down theatrical troupes. These were often local opera troupes greatly expanded during the Cultural Revolution to perform model operas. Wholly government funded, they employed large numbers of youth as performers and musicians. In the new economic climate after 1978, however, the troupes were obliged to support themselves. As more talented performers left for colleges or better jobs, or returned to the cities, the troupes' standards declined, and competition from cinemas and commercially-oriented productions drove them to the brink of economic disaster. But the remaining performers and musicians, denied an education by the Cultural Revolution and trained only for the stage, had little choice but to cling to their jobs.

One of Wang Anyi's favourite characters is the passionate music lover who joined a local theatrical troupe as a self-taught composer/conductor after being sent to the countryside, and then finds himself trapped there by his own lack of proper training or natural talent. This character appears in early works "Destiny" (1980), "This Damnable Troupe" (1981), "Coda" (1981), and "Destiny"

103 Apart from the works mentioned below, see also "Xiao yuan suo ji" ("Life in a Small Courtyard"), 1980 Duanpian xiaoshuo xuan, pp 602-23; "Dang changdi SOLO de shihou" ("When the Flute Plays Solo"), Qing chun, No 11, 1980, pp 4-8; "Xiao jia huo" ("Little Rascal"), Liu shi (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp 228-250; "Wutai xiao shijie" ("The Small World of the Stage"), Liu shi, pp 362-390. "Xiao cheng zhi lian" ("Love in a Small Town"), Zhongguo nuxing zuojia hunlian xiaoshuo xuan (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1988), pp 512-582, is also set in a rural cultural troupe.

104 All of this type of character in Wang's works are males.

105 Wang Anyi, "Mingyun" ("Destiny"), Yu, sha sha sha, pp 53-76.

106 Wang Anyi, "Zhege gui tuan" ("This Damnable Troupe"), Yu, sha sha sha, pp 220-234.

Symphony" (1982), and is explored in depth in the short novel published in 1986, *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River*.

In each of these stories, the ambitious, dedicated young musician is frustrated by the poor standard of the orchestra under his direction, and by the lackadaisical attitude of the other members of the troupe. But when the fall of the Gang of Four brings the chance to leave for college or a better job, he finds that his own standard is in fact little higher than that of the troupe he despises. The constant threats of the protagonist of "This Damnable Troupe" to quit and find work with a better orchestra are ignored: the troupe knows better than he does that no other troupe will employ him. He eventually recognises this too, and resolves to stay and make the best of a disappointing fate.

In "Destiny," "Destiny Symphony" and *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River*, it is failure in college entrance examinations that makes the self-taught composers realise their own standards are too low. Isolated in remote country cultural troupes, they had shone as musical "geniuses," but compared with the professionally-trained new generation of city youth, they suddenly find their standards are laughable. The contrast between the approaches of Wang Anyi and Zhang Kangkang becomes particularly clear when these stories are compared with Zhang Kangkang's "Seven Notes." This work also portrays a rusticated youth who taught himself composition, but depicts his final triumph when a symphony he wrote inspired by the northern forests becomes an outstanding success.

As the titles of these stories suggest, Wang Anyi is examining how people come to terms with their fates. What is presented as important is not the ultimate success or failure of an individual, but his or her constant


struggle against destiny. Thus the characters she presents in a critical light, are not the unsuccessful, but those who fail to struggle with fate. In "Destiny Symphony," the once brilliant music college graduate of the 1950s who has passively waited for two decades in a country town for his genius to be recognised, is presented as far less admirable than the self-trained composer who will probably fail the college entrance examinations.

Slight variations on this character type can also be found in "Understudy"111 and "The Place Where the Train Stops for Four Minutes."112 "Understudy" presents an aggressively conceited rusticated youth who refuses to recognise his lack of theatrical talent, even after he has failed in his long-awaited first role on stage. His inability to acknowledge the disparity between his self-image and reality makes him a ridiculous, pitiful character. "The Place Where the Train Stops for Four Minutes" presents the opposite extreme. A youth who was despised while in the countryside, but became a celebrated poet on his return to the city, goes back to the remote town he had lived in hoping to win people's admiration. But no one there is interested in his poetry, and as he realises he will always remain a failure in their eyes, his self-esteem plummets. He escapes back to Shanghai unable to come to terms with his past. While in the first story Wang Anyi is warning that one's self-image must be based in reality, in the second she points out that man must affirm his own worth independent of society and environment, and thus attain an independent human dignity.

While these stories are mostly concerned with the disappointments of younger people obliged to remain in the countryside in order to follow their chosen career, other works look at the lives of those who returned to the cities. "The Destination of this Train,"113 a prizewinning story of

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112 Wang Anyi, "Ting che sifenzhong de difang" ("The Place Where the Train Stops for Four Minutes"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 33-49.

113 Wang Anyi, "Ben ci lieche zhongdian" ("The Destination of this Train"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 1-32.
1981, looks at the practical and emotional problems they had to cope with once the initial euphoria of returning home had subsided. Back in Shanghai, Chen Xin not only finds it difficult to adjust to the crowded buses and streets and the strain of working rotating shifts, but discovers that his return creates serious practical difficulties for his family. In taking over his mother's factory job, Chen Xin has deprived his younger brother of employment. The severe housing shortage in Shanghai makes him a threat to his brother and sister-in-law: if he marries they will have to give him half of their single room to live in. They encourage him to marry a girl with a room of her own, but he cannot accept their utilitarian approach to marriage, and clings to ideals of finding love. Overwhelmed with disappointment at the disparity between his dreams of returning to Shanghai and the realities of life there, he begins to think nostalgically of his life in the countryside and decides seriously to reconsider his future. His goals have been too narrow, he realises, he should broaden his outlook and strive to find true peace and happiness. With his pursuit of spiritual goals in an environment that encourages utilitarianism, Chen Xin bears traces of the young women of Wang Anyi's earlier works who cling to ideals of beauty, goodness and truth despite their disillusioning experiences in the countryside. He is a development of the heroine of "Misty Rain," whose faith in love and goodness is restored when a young man gives her a lift through the rain on his bicycle, and his stubborn idealism links him with the idealistic musicians of the works examined above. But at the same time, "The Destination of this Train" marks a turning point in Wang Anyi's early writing. By 1981 she had begun to feel that while her characters were free to pursue lofty spiritual ideals, in real life far more people were still worrying about basic necessities - food, clothes and housing. Thus she began to make a conscious effort to describe and understand the lowest ranks of Shanghai.

114 See pp 67.

115 "Yu, sha sha sha" ("Misty Rain").
society, and affirm the intrinsic value of even the humblest and most
despised among them.\footnote{116}{"Ganshou. lijie. biaoda" ("Feelings, Understanding, Expression"), pp 52-61.}

"Wild Chrysanthemum\footnote{117}{Wang Anyi, "Ye juhua, ye juhua" ("Wild Chrysanthemum"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 103-117.} and "A Commonplace Girl\footnote{118}{Wang Anyi, "Yongchang zhi bei" ("A Commonplace Girl"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 89-102.} both look at the simple practical goals of workers in production teams run by residents committees. The "commonplace girl" saves all she can from her meagre pay so as to make a splendid show of her marriage. Though her aims are not lofty, her wedding day may be the only chance she has in her life to be the focus of attention and admiration. Likewise, the youth in "Wild Chrysanthemum" who sells dolls at a bus stop to supplement his income, only has modest aspirations to attain what he lacks: better food and clothes; a television; a standard lamp; an armchair; a girlfriend. Though the pursuit of purely material wealth may seem shallow and even vulgar, it is the only means available to an "inferior class citizen" (as the man sees himself to be) to assert his value as an individual in the eyes of society, and it is in this light that Wang Anyi sympathises with the pursuits of these people, asking the reader to transcend social and class prejudices and treat them as equals.

The pernicious influence of social prejudice is also looked at in two other works of 1981, "Foundations\footnote{119}{Wang Anyi, "Qiang ji" ("Foundations"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 50-88.} and "Denominator.\footnote{120}{Wang Anyi, "Fen mu" ("Denominator"), Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji, pp 212-243.} Both use the lives of children to look at the continued existence of social barriers, and suggest that with more communication and mutual respect, these barriers can be eliminated. Once more she appeals to readers to recognise
the importance and dignity of every individual in society regardless of class, occupation or scholastic abilities.

The interest in the joys and sorrows of ordinary people that Wang Anyi developed in 1981 set the direction for much of her later writing. A whole series of works written mainly between 1984 and 1986 lays before the reader the world of the residents of Shanghai’s narrow crowded alleys: factory and office workers; housemaids; shopkeepers; teachers; children; retired workers, and so on. These are simple stories of everyday life. The characters have no extraordinary experiences, remarkable talents or profound thoughts, and the stories themselves carry no important social or moral message, but they encapsulate the essence of life in China’s largest city. "Street"121 simply describes the people who come and go around a kiosk on a street corner: children buying sweets; an old man crossing the road; a shoe mender; gossiping housemaids. "Talking of Old Bing"122 describes with great accuracy the laid-back style of work of office workers in a publishing house, and their resentment towards their thrifty accountant. "1001st Alley"123 reflects changes brought to life in Shanghai’s alleys as apartment blocks replace old houses. In the old houses everything from caring for the children to resolving domestic arguments were affairs of the neighbours, who frequently met at communal taps and toilets. But in the new self-contained flats, neighbours remain strangers, the former intimacy of life lost.

Taken individually, few of these works could be considered outstanding, but taken as a whole, they give the reader a sense of becoming part of Shanghai society. The repetition of detail and plot that stood out as a weakness in Wang Anyi’s earlier writing functions in these works to link them together as an organic whole. The old man who works in the kiosk selling daily necessities in "Street" (1985), is the grandfather of

121 "Jie" ("Street").

122 Wang Anyi, "Hua shuo lao bing" ("Talking of Old Bing"), Xiao bao zhuang, pp 68-79.

the main character of *Thirty Chapters of the Flow of Life* (1988).\(^{124}\) Aunt Xiaomei, the housemaid who feels herself a superior being because she worked for a capitalist’s family before the revolution, and her friend ‘The Maid from Number Fifty-Seven’ appear in "Good Mother, Uncle Xie, Aunt Xiaomei and Nini"\(^{125}\) and are the protagonists of "Battle of the Dove and the Sparrow."\(^{126}\) This technique enables the reader to understand more about the characters in a story than could be learned from the story itself. As soon as Aunt Xiaomei appears in "Battle of the Dove and the Sparrow," for example, the reader recalls her old employers, her friends, and the street they live in from the earlier story, so that the new places and people introduced give readers a sense of expanding their knowledge of somewhere already familiar. Aunt Xiaomei’s trip to the outer suburbs with ‘The Maid from Number Fifty-Seven’ to see the latter’s "boyfriend" (an elderly married man) in "Battle of the Dove and the Sparrow," also appears in a slightly different light when one remembers the uncomplimentary remarks she had made about her friend in the earlier work.

As well as capturing the atmosphere of life in Shanghai, many of these stories are studies of human nature. Besides romantic and sexual relationships which will be looked at in Chapter Four, a whole range of relationships and characters are examined. Like Wang Anyi’s earlier works, these stories tend to bring out the regrets and disappointments of life, and the barriers that exist between individuals.

In "Between People"\(^{127}\) a timid middle-aged bachelor school teacher and a worldly-wise child from the slums develop an unusual

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\(^{125}\) Wang Anyi, "Hao muma, xie bobo, xiaomei ayi he nini," ("Good Mother, Uncle Xie, Aunt Xiaomei and Nini"), *Shouhuo*, No 1, 1986, pp 4-55.


\(^{127}\) Wang Anyi, "Ren ren zhi jian" ("Between People"), *Xiao bao zhuang*, pp 22-41.
friendship when the teacher takes on the responsibility of trying to reform the unruly boy. But the relationship ends abruptly when the teacher's new paternal feelings lead him to strike the boy for not keeping his word. He is reported by the boy's grandfather and subsequently loses both his "Excellent Teacher Award" and the chance of promotion. When the pair meet again, they are overwhelmed with sadness and confusion and part without speaking.

The two characters and their relationship are finely depicted. Coming from different social classes and environments, they initially supplement one another's deficiencies, the teacher offering the boy stability and discipline, the boy introducing the teacher to basic social realities. But neither understands what the other expects, so failure is inevitable. Perceptive character portrayal, a clever, logical plot, and natural, concise and vivid depiction of the environment that has created the "problem child" make this one of Wang Anyi's best works.

Other stories set in the alleys of Shanghai look at the changing relationship between local residents and People's Liberation Army troops stationed nearby ("The Army and the People"¹²⁸); the development of the warped psychology of a man deformed by polio as a child ("A Brief Biography of Aqiao"¹²⁹); the disappointment of a barren woman who adopts a baby girl, but becomes more estranged from her the older she gets ("Good Mother, Uncle Xie, Aunty Xiaomei and Nini"); and the tragedy of a simple young peasant who becomes lost in Shanghai's maze of alleys, and, unable to cope, jumps from a rooftop to his death ("The Place of Grief"¹³⁰).

¹²⁸ Wang Anyi, "Jun jun min min" ("The Army and the People") Beijing wenxue, No 12, 1981, pp 45-47.


¹³⁰ Wang Anyi, "Beitong zhi di" ("The Place of Grief"), Shanghai wenxue, No 11, 1988, pp 4-19.
Wang Anyi's depiction of Chinese urban culture was part of a wider examination of Chinese culture in her works, and those of many other writers - the "searching for roots" which by 1984 had become a widespread literary phenomenon in China. Under the influence of this literary current, and stimulated by a trip to the United States in 1983, she was able to reassess her negative feelings towards the countryside, and return for the first time to a village in the area she had been sent to during the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{131} The result was a number of outstanding works depicting the timeless culture of that area of the Anhui countryside.

"Da Liu Village"\textsuperscript{132} and "Xiao Bao Village"\textsuperscript{133} depict places and people imbued with a traditional culture that goes back far beyond modern politics and is untouched by it. Their morality is Confucian: the village children show complete obedience to the wishes of their parents.\textsuperscript{134} A villager refuses to divorce his childless wife because that would not be "benevolent and righteous."\textsuperscript{135} Their music is the Flower-Drum Opera and they sing of "five thousand years of heroic deeds."\textsuperscript{136} A little beggar girl sings 'lianhua luozhi', a folk art traditionally performed by beggars since the Song dynasty.\textsuperscript{137} Their social unit is the village community which enforces its strict moral code with violence and ostracism, but shows great generosity and kindness in caring for the needy: A girl's father beats her with a spade for holding hands with a young man,\textsuperscript{138} but villagers take care of an orphaned beggar girl and a


\textsuperscript{132} "Da liu zhuang" ("Da Liu Village"), \textit{Xiao bao zhuang}, pp 131-242.

\textsuperscript{133} "Xiao bao zhuang" ("Xiao Bao Village").

\textsuperscript{134} For example, "Da liu zhuang" ("Da Liu Village"), p 138 and 181.

\textsuperscript{135} "Xiao bao zhuang" ("Xiao Bao Village"), p 257.

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid} p 253.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid} p 254.

\textsuperscript{138} "Da liu zhuang" ("Da Liu Village"), p 131.
man whose wife is mad. The villagers have no class consciousness or
political understanding, and are bewildered by political vocabulary. In
"Xiao Bao Village," an old revolutionary makes none of the standard
answers when a young writer asks him about his motivation for his heroic
exploits. Similarly when asked by journalists from the county about
their heroic son, his parents answer in terms of their culture. The boy
looked after an old widower, not because the old man was one of the ‘Five
Guarantees Households’, (the explanation sought to make him a
model for emulation during ‘politeness month’), but because they were
“predestined to their relationship.” The search for a diary full of noble
thoughts comes to naught because in that area a dead child’s belongings
must all be burnt or thrown away. All that remains is his name written
on the toilet wall. Modern political jargon and the ideology it represents
prove impotent in the face of traditions handed down unchanged through
countless generations.

Wang Anyi’s ‘search for roots’ is described in more personal terms
in "My Origins" and "Danger in Yellow Dragon Cave." These
works depict her search for family history in Hangzhou, where her
great-grandfather was in the silk business and owned a fine mansion. As
is typical of Wang Anyi’s style, the search ends in frustration for the
characters in "Danger in Yellow Dragon Cave," as the great-aunt they had
been seeking treats them coldly, not allowing them to stay in her house,
and refusing to tell them about their grandfather who apparently lost the

139 "Xiao bao zhuang" ("Xiao Bao Village"), pp 254-256.
140 See p 52.
141 The boy drowned trying to save an old widower during a flood.
142 A term used for childless old people living alone who were guaranteed food,
clothing, medical care, housing and burial expenses by the commune.
143 Wang Anyi, "Wo de laili" ("My Origins"), Xiao bao zhuang, pp 100-130.
144 Wang Anyi, "Li xian huang long dong" ("Danger in Yellow Dragon Cave"), Xiao
bao zhuang, pp 340-400.
family fortune. These two stories are distinctly less well-written than her other works, but they reflect the urgent desire of many young writers to find roots in something more stable and enduring than modern politics.

Conclusions

From the previous discussion it is evident that there are significant differences in the writers’ approaches to depicting contemporary society. Most obvious is the contrast between the strong political involvement of the older writers and the attitude of the younger writers who tend to ignore politics, or even suggest its irrelevance to ordinary people. Thus while Shen Rong examines problems in selection and promotion of Party cadres or in Party work methods, and Zhang Jie examines high-level cadre corruption and resistance to reform within the system, Zhang Xinxin rarely touches on politics, and in "Xiao Bao Village" Wang Anyi shows that politics is insignificant and incomprehensible to tradition-bound villagers. This attitudinal disparity can be traced to differences in the cultural and historical backgrounds of these two generations.

The middle-aged writers had already established a commitment to the Party and the political system in the 1950s, and had completed their tertiary education well before the Cultural Revolution. Though both suffered some hardship during the Cultural Revolution, after 1978 they soon entered the upper echelons of society - Zhang Jie becoming a committee member of the People’s Political Consultative Conference, and marrying a senior cadre and Shen Rong, after resolving problems caused by the fact that Jiang Qing had helped her to publish her first novel, holding office in several organisations including the Writers’ Association, The Chinese Association for International Exchange and the Women’s

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145 See pp 7-8.
Federation. This reinforced their commitment to the system and so made it more likely that they would seek to promote its reform through the exposure of problems within it.

In contrast, the younger writers experienced the Cultural Revolution at a time when they had no firmly established political beliefs. Exposed at an early age to the corruption and hypocrisy of Party cadres, and the poverty and ignorance of peasants who were supposed to be re-educating them, their generation became very cynical. The end of the Cultural Revolution brought little improvement to their situation. Far from being accepted into respected positions in society, as Zhang Kangkang points out in "Pagoda," uneducated and unskilled, they were "despised by society and kicked around like footballs." Thus it is not surprising that these writers whose works show great sympathy for the plight of their generation should feel no strong commitment to the Party and political system, and therefore no moral responsibility to endeavour to reform them.

In terms of literary background, the major influence on Shen Rong and Zhang Jie was the culture of the 1950s and early 1960s. Apart from some classical Chinese literature, their main literary diet was Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Western and Russian literature, works by the Left Wing League of Writers, and pre-1950 Soviet literature. As Zhang Jie recalled: "The Story of Zhuoya and Shula, An Ordinary Soldier, 1 The Gadfly, and How the Steel was Tempered gave our generation the nourishment, water and sunshine it needed for its entire period of growth." 1 Thus when they began to write, their works inherited the critical realist and socialist realist approach, directly exposing social and political problems in society with a view to accelerating social progress. Exposure to modern Western literature after 1978, led the writers to experiment with new techniques, but did not change this basic approach.

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1 I have been unable to trace these first two novels but their content is presumably similar to the second two which are tales of revolutionary heroes.

147 "Wo wei shenme xie Chenzhong de chibang" ("Why I Wrote Leaden Wings"), p 299.
The literary background of the younger writers is much more complex. During her years in the countryside Wang Anyi became familiar with rural folk-culture, while Zhang Kangkang was influenced by the very narrow "proletarian" culture promoted by Jiang Qing. Still young adults when the Cultural Revolution ended, after 1978 they were exposed to a diverse mixture of classical and modern, Chinese and foreign influences. The ideas of Sartre; Freud; and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche hit China in three major waves, and were eagerly drawn on to fill the spiritual and cultural vacuum left by the Cultural Revolution. Modern Western literature with its focus on psychological exploration drew the attention of the young writers away from major political and social themes and onto the individual. Zhang Xinxin's study at the Academy of Drama familiarised her with modern Western drama, including the theatre of the absurd, which clearly influenced her writing.

At the same time, official Marxist indoctrination fell to one of its lowest levels under Communist rule, so that there was no powerful orthodox current to counter the influence of Western thought. The emphasis on collective consciousness, very strong in the 1950s and 1960s, when any consideration of the self was considered an aberration, also weakened considerably as the mass activities and regimented lifestyle of the past largely disappeared. New economic policies also encouraged individuals to think and act for themselves. As a result, the focus of younger people, already disillusioned with politics, moved away from collective concerns (the Party, society, the nation), and onto the individual.

This also largely explains differences in the way in which the middle-aged and younger writers handle their subject matter. In Shen Rong and Zhang Jie's works, themes are just as or more important than character exploration. In Zhang Jie's "What's Wrong With Him?", for example, the numerous characters exist chiefly to expose a huge variety of social problems. Though there is some psychological depiction, this is not important in the context of the whole work. Even in works which depict characters in some detail, the individual is still subordinate to the social
message. Shen Rong's "A Distracting Sunday" presents a clear portrait of an upright Party official, but his thoughts and actions are used not to reveal more about himself, but to express the author's criticism of using connections to obtain special privileges.

In contrast, the younger writers tend to set out from the point of view of the individual and examine social problems in terms of their effect on individual psychology or individual freedom. In the "Summer" series of works, Zhang Kangkang looks at many social problems, but presents them through the heroine's struggle against them to assert her individuality. In "On the Same Horizon," Zhang Xinxin includes a scene where the male protagonist tries to cultivate relations with an editor to ensure his works are published. Unlike Shen Rong, her focus is not on exposing this social malady, but on examining the effect on the man's psychology of having to become involved in this degrading practice.

As noted earlier, Zhang Kangkang shows far more interest in social and political problems than the other younger writers. Works like "The Fourth World" with its overtly political theme, would seem to cast doubt on the arguments put forward above. But an examination of Zhang Kangkang's personal cultural background shows that it is her unique experience that has placed her in a position between the older and younger writers.

The key to understanding the difference between Zhang Kangkang and the other younger writers is the very early age at which she devoted herself to literature. At primary school in the 1950s, she read Russian, Soviet and Chinese communist literature, and began to publish in 1961 at the age of eleven. Thus though she was still a child, she absorbed the same cultural values as Zhang Jie and Shen Rong who were then young adults. Though she continued to publish throughout the Cultural Revolution, her experiences in the countryside finally led her to question her beliefs, so that after 1978 she was as receptive to new ideas and values as the other younger writers. But writing habits she had developed over two decades continued to exert a strong influence, with the result that the
characteristic approaches of both the older and younger writers can be found in her post-1978 works.

Ru Zhijuan’s cultural and historical background is in some ways similar to that of the middle-aged writers, but there are also important differences. While her commitment to the Party was established much earlier, and is probably stronger than that of Zhang Jie and Shen Rong, early literary influences were more diverse. Among the writers who had the earliest influence on her, she lists Lu Yin and Edmondo de Amicis, a Nineteenth Century Italian author who promoted universal love. Her exposure to Russian and Soviet literature came relatively much later.

By the 1950s she had already developed a distinctive style that stood out from the accepted style of the times. Instead of depicting proletarian revolutionaries displaying their heroism in the midst of acute class struggle, she concentrated on depicting the changing psychology of ordinary people in the new society - an approach she stubbornly maintained despite criticism. Thus it is not surprising that she returned to this basic approach after 1980. But whereas in the 1950s and early 1960s she had viewed socialist society with blind admiration, the Cultural Revolution awakened her to serious problems within the Party, so that when she resumed writing in 1977, the same sense of commitment and responsibility that motivated the middle-aged writers, led her to attack social and political problems that she regarded as hindering the advancement of society.
4

Love, Marriage and Sexual Morality

"I feel that what the female protagonists of "The Ark" and "Northern Lights" lack is not marriage based on love, but love based on self-sacrifice . . . Their understanding of love is uncertain, so their idea of marriage is nothing but cold, calculated self-interest . . . The people have reservations about divorce, and are inclined to preserve existing marriages as far as possible. Can this possibly be called worship of feudal morality? No, it can’t . . . Fickleness and promiscuity in marriage will ferment all kinds of social problems, and must be morally condemned." ¹

Although women’s experience of love and marriage, and occasionally women’s sexual feelings had been central themes of the works of women writers during the May 4th period,² the rapid politicization of Chinese literature in the 1930s saw personal concerns such as these become increasingly subordinated to broader political and social causes.³ This trend intensified after the communists took power, and came to a peak during the Cultural Revolution period when love and marriage (not to mention sex) became literary taboos. It is in this historical context that the six women’s post-1978 writings on love, marriage and sexual morality should be viewed.


² See Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, "Women as Writers in the 1920s and 1930s."

³ The development of Ding Ling’s fiction is a clear example of this trend. See Yi-tse Mei Feuerwerker, Ding Ling’s Fiction.
Ru Zhijuan

Considering the strong interest in issues relating to love and marriage shown by most women writers, one of the striking characteristics of Ru Zhijuan’s works, is that she tends not to examine marital or sexual relationships.

In the manner of works of the Cultural Revolution period, the Revolutionary Model Operas in particular, most of her characters are without partners. In "Before the Bulletin Board," four two of the three women teachers seem to be single and the husband of the third does not appear. In "Sons and Daughters," both of the elderly women cadres are widows. In "Family Affairs" the protagonist’s husband is away. The same is true of works in which the main characters are males. Thus Ru’s selection of characters generally excludes even the possibility of examining husband-wife relations.

In addition, while the works of the younger writers also contain many single women (in their case often divorcees), they use these images to examine the specific emotional and practical problems faced by such people - their loneliness and frustration, and the social prejudices they have to cope with. But these issues are almost totally ignored in Ru Zhijuan’s works.

In the few works in which Ru does present married couples, considering the general conservatism already observed in her writings, her

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4 “Sanbang zhi qian” ("Before the Bulletin Board").

5 “Er nu qing” ("Sons and Daughters").

6 “Jia wu shi” ("Family Affairs").

7 For example, in "Chu shan" ("Leaving the Mountains"), jianguo yilai duanpian xiaoshuo (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1987) pp 310-319; "Hongwai qu" ("Infra-red Melody"), Shanghai wenxue, No 12, 1978, pp 16-25; "Xunmi" ("Searching"), Shanghai wenxue, No 12, 1982, pp 4-13; "Lubiao" ("Route Marker"); "Diyige fuyuan de junren" ("The First Serviceman to be Demobilized").
attitude to marriage is surprisingly negative. Apart from "I Can’t Leave You," a short piece of reportage written in 1978 eulogising a woman for helping her husband to return to a useful working life after he has had both arms blown off in an industrial accident, the other three marriages she presents are all unhappy. In "Wedding Feast" (1985), the groom feels such detestation for his new bride that one wonders why he is marrying her at all. In "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" and "Boat Without a Rudder" (both 1981), intellectual women endure loveless marriages with workers whom they married to give their children good political status during the Cultural Revolution.

These last two stories are particularly interesting because first, they are the only works in which Ru Zhijuan looks at the issue of divorce and the problems faced by women who remarry, and second, because "Boat Without a Rudder" is a rewrite of "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" which has been changed to bring it more in line with traditional morality.

"A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" strongly attacks traditional prejudices against women. When the widow Dong Yude marries worker Lu Acai, her neighbours (significantly all women) condemn her as "a bad mother" and "cheap hussy." In their eyes, the reasons for her marriage are irrelevant - all that matters is that she has broken the Confucian prohibition on the remarriage of widows. Her new husband also denigrates her as a "second-hand wife" (er huntou), telling her he only married her because his poor material and social circumstances meant he was unable to marry a virgin. Yude bitterly reflects that this is "the most ancient, most thorough and most traditional evaluation of a woman's morality, and feel the courage to carry on." The story takes a direct attack on "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," p. 321.

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9 "Xiyan" ("Wedding Feast").

10 "Zhuo nuanse de xuedi" ("A Warm-Coloured Snowscape").

11 "Diule duo de xiao chuan" ("Boat Without a Rudder").

12 "Zhuo nuanse de xuedi" ("A Warm-Coloured Snowscape"), p. 321.
worth." In the face of the traditional obsession with female chastity, her artistic talent and personal qualities count for nothing.

While Yude’s marriage to Acai brings physical and political security for her son, she is left intellectually and emotionally unfulfilled. As a result, when she meets Zhang Min, a man who shares her love of beauty and respects and values her as an individual, she decides to divorce and marry for a third time. Now the attacks on her come not only from her neighbours and colleagues, but also from her teenage son, who goes on hunger strike to force her to change her mind. Here Ru Zhijuan points out that traditional concepts of morality are still firmly entrenched in the minds of the young - at least where the morality of their parents is concerned. The young man cannot accept that Yude has any needs or rights beyond acting out her traditional role as wife and mother, and tries to use her maternal affection to manipulate her. But Yude asserts her right to personal happiness by deciding to marry Zhang the following year.

Ru Zhijuan presents Yude and Zhang Min with great sympathy, and in doing so expresses her support for divorce where one partner finds a relationship spiritually unfulfilling. She condemns the tendency to judge women solely on the basis of Confucian concepts of chastity, and demands that an individual’s spiritual needs be given priority over traditional concepts of social duty and responsibility.

Though Ru makes her attitudes clear, she ultimately backs away from actually depicting divorce and remarriage by having Yude die of cancer before she even initiates divorce proceedings. It is as if Ru suddenly realised the enormity of her attack on traditional and socialist morality, and lost the courage to carry on. The ending brings to mind "A Badly-Edited Story," in which she appeared unable to face up to the

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13 Ibid p 322.

14 This theme also appears in Bing Xin, "Ganshe" ("Interference"), Renmin wenxue, No 9, 1988. The best known story on the theme of children preventing their parent’s remarriage, also by a woman writer, was Wen Shan "Xin ji" ("Sacrifice to the Heart"), Zhongguo nuxing zuojia hunlian xiaoshuo xuan, pp 123-158.
frightening conclusions she had drawn about the Party, and found it necessary to add a final paragraph assuring readers (and perhaps herself) that everything was now normal again, and that the Party's past mistakes had been made out of idealism. That her resolve had begun to waver is further evidenced by the fact that she had scarcely finished writing "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" (dated April 28, 1981) when she began the rewrite which she completed in May.

"Boat Without a Rudder" uses the same characters and the same basic storyline as "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," and even takes whole sections directly from the earlier work, but its iconoclastic spirit is gone. The nasty, gossiping neighbours and colleagues have disappeared. Yude's son has been changed into a small boy who plays no part in the story, let alone tries to interfere with his mother's personal life. Zhang Min has been supplied with a devoted girlfriend (Xiu Zhen), and Acai's role as a dutiful husband has been enlarged on. Thus Zhang Min and Yude's decision to part seems inevitable. Zhang Min finally realises that social duty must come before personal happiness: "You [ie Zhang Min himself] will be responsible to Xiu Zhen, and she [Yude] will be responsible to Acai. They have done nothing wrong. It wouldn't be fair to make them the cornerstone [of our happiness]. It's too late." Thus the conclusions of "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" have been completely reversed to conform with conventional social morality. Divorce is no longer an acceptable solution for people dissatisfied with loveless marriages. They must resign themselves to a life of loneliness, (Ru makes it clear they will be lonely), in the interests of others. The contention that in the earlier work Yude's death was designed to enable the author to ultimately dodge the issues she had raised, is confirmed by the fact that in "Boat Without a Rudder," Yude remains in good health throughout the story.

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15 See p 59.

16 "Diu le duo de xiao chuan" ("Boat Without a Rudder"), p 411.
This modified attitude to divorce brings Ru in line with other women writers of her age-group. Zong Pu’s "Sacrifice to the Heart" depicts love between a single woman and a married man. Though it is common knowledge that the man’s marriage is unhappy, the single woman strongly opposes his wish to divorce his wife and marry her, taking the stance that divorce on the grounds of lack of mutual love is not morally acceptable. Wei Junyi, another veteran writer, does actually depict divorce as moral in "Baptism," but this is on purely political grounds. The heroine divorces her husband in the late 1950s because he follows the ultra-left political line. After his experiences in the Cultural Revolution have led him to correct his political mistakes, she re-marries him. Thus Wei presents marriage as based most importantly on a concurrence of political ideals (love is not mentioned), and presents divorce as acceptable if one partner diverges from political correctness.

"Boat Without a Rudder," also includes one of Ru Zhijuan’s few references to the sexual aspect of human relationships. In a surge of uncontrollable lust, Zhang Min kisses Xiu Zhen. The incident leaves him with a deep sense of shame and self-loathing, and is a vital link in the chain of events that leads to his conclusion that he must marry her. The equation of a kiss with the obligation to marriage is significant when compared to the attitudes of the younger writers as shall be seen later. Apart from this, the most demonstrative that any of Ru’s characters become is in "Small Path Through the Grasslands," where the rather negative central male character grasps the hands of the girl he loves. Though she is considering marrying him, both times she withdraws her hands immediately and leaves. When he puts his arm around her waist in a moment of joy at his father’s rehabilitation, Ru describes his action as

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17 Zong Pu, "Xin ji" ("Sacrifice to the Heart"), Zong Pu daibiao zuo, (Zhengzhou: Huanghe wenyi chubanshe, 1987), pp 100-113.
18 "Xili" ("Baptism").
Thus all physical contact between the sexes is described with disapproval. Zhang Min’s kiss is presented as a sign of the depths to which he had degenerated before meeting Yude. In his relationship with her they never so much as hold hands.

Connected to the subject of marital relations are two works on the question of selecting a husband. "Small Path Through the Grasslands" and "Trainee," were both written with the specific aim of educating modern youth, whom Ru Zhijuan felt "lack noble sentiments, and have inferior qualities." By providing ideal characters for emulation she hoped to encourage youth to become less materialistic and utilitarian in their approach to marriage and pay more attention to their own feelings and the personal qualities of their prospective partners.

However, because Ru’s "ideal" young women observe rather Confucian standards of propriety in their meetings with young men - for example, avoiding meeting the man alone once he has indicated his interest, and turning the conversation away from any discussion of their relationship ("Small Path Through the Grasslands") - in both stories the protagonists are basing decisions on love and marriage on a very superficial knowledge of the individuals involved. In "Trainee," by the end of the story, the heroine has basically committed herself to a young proletarian hero with whom she has only exchanged a few words because she admires his courage and dedication to his work. In "Small Path Through the Grasslands," a young woman is seriously considering marriage after only a couple of very inhibited conversations with her suitor. Though Ru Zhijuan’s attitude is clearly that she should refuse him,

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19 “Caoyuanshang de xiaolu” ("Small Path Through the Grasslands"), p 162.

20 Ru Zhijuan, "Shixisheng" ("Trainee"), Fu rong, No 3, 1980.

21 Ru Zhijuan, "<<Caoyuanshang de xiao lu>> de chuangzuo ji qita" ("On the Writing of ‘Small Path Through the Grasslands’ and Other Things"), Ru Zhijuan xiaoshuo xuan, pp 352-366.

this has nothing to do with the fact that they are little more than strangers and can have no idea whether or not they would find themselves compatible. Thus though Ru theoretically advocates marriage based on mutual affection, in practice she presents the ideal as marriage based on an assessment of one’s partners attitude to society and dedication to his career, assuming that people’s behaviour in wider society is identical to what it will be in a close personal relationship. The traditional concepts of sexual morality of her characters place them in a position where they cannot really get to know potential partners until they are already committed to marriage, a situation that middle-aged writer Shen Rong points out often leads to marital problems.23

While marital relationships are rarely discussed in Ru Zhijuan’s works, she has written several stories in which parent-child relationships are examined. "Sons and Daughters"24 shows how an elderly woman’s obsessive love and traditional sense of parental responsibility erode her own revolutionary ideals. Her insistence on running her son’s life creates a rift between them, but in the end maternal love proves strongest as on her death bed she leaves her savings to him instead of contributing them to the Party. The story suggests that parent-child bonds are weakening as young people place more stress on loyalty to a partner than to parents. This is borne out by the relative importance of parent-child bonds in Ru’s works compared to the works of younger writers who rarely depict them in detail and usually concentrate on relations between spouses or lovers. The fact that some of Ru’s other works (looked at below) depict children who place great emphasis on parent-child relations, probably reflects her own attitudes more than actual social trends.

"An Ancient Song"25 and "Family Affairs" both look at the sense of guilt and unfulfilled duty that parents felt over children they were forced

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23 See p 153.

24 “Er nu qing” ("Sons and Daughters").

25 “Yizhi gulao de ge” ("An Ancient Song").
to neglect during the Cultural Revolution. In "An Ancient Song" the desire to make up to his daughter everything she was deprived of in her youth, leads the protagonist to try to persuade her to break with her boyfriend and move back to the south. Despite the girl's clearly stated opposition, none of the three considers it wrong that he should try to arrange the transfer anyway. Her fate is decided for her in a series of meetings between the two men during which the father comes to like and respect the boyfriend. She is finally allowed to stay, but the implications are that should the father have disapproved, the girl would have been obliged to break her engagement and return to the south. Thus a father is depicted as having the right to make major decisions on behalf of an adult daughter, without regard to her wishes. The boyfriend also acknowledges the primacy of the parent-child bond by supporting the father's action without her knowledge.

In "Family Affairs," while the closeness of the parent-child bond is emphasised through the mother's anxiety over one child who is sick and her visions of the other child who has left for the Heilongjiang countryside, her absent husband does not enter her thoughts until he sends her some money. In "Wedding Feast" too, Ru makes it clear that the main character feels far more respect and affection for his mother than for the woman he is marrying. Parent-child relationships also play an important part in "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," and are the subject of "After the Time was Ripe."26

Although the views on love, marriage and sexual morality presented in Ru Zhijuan's works show the strong influence of traditional values, occasional flashes of iconoclasm suggest that these are not necessarily her personal views. The character of Yude in "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" indicates Ru's attitude to divorce may be more liberal than she is willing to publicly admit, and despite the very traditional attitude to sexual morality she generally espouses, in "The Path

26 "Tiaojian chengshu zhi hou" ("After the Time was Ripe").
She Trod," she gives great sympathy to an unmarried mother. However, Ru’s basic unwillingness to disturb the moral order is evident even in these characters. Yude, as we saw above, dies of cancer, and the young mother dies in childbirth, using her last moments to smother her illegitimate child.

The Middle-Aged Writers

In contrast to Ru Zhijuan, approximately one third of the works of Zhang Jie and Shen Rong are specifically concerned with questions of love, marriage and sexual morality. While Ru tended not to examine marital relationships and showed some apprehension in broaching the subject of divorce, the middle-aged writers directly confront these issues: Zhang Jie focusing on the plight of divorced and single women, and Shen Rong making an in-depth study of problems related to marriage in China, in both its traditional and modern forms. But while the iconoclastic current in their works is stronger than in the fiction of the older women, the works of Zhang Jie in particular still show the powerful influence of traditional concepts of sexual morality. In addition, while the middle-aged writers share an unwillingness to examine the physical side of relationships that forms a strong contrast to their male contemporaries, they present very different attitudes to sex, love and marriage that can be attributed to differences in the personalities and personal histories of the two writers.

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"Ta cong natiao lushang lai" ("The Path She Trod").
Zhang Jie's earliest works on love and marriage, "There is a Youth" (1978), "Flowers For Da Jiang" (1979), and "The Sixth Poplar" (1980), are simple stories of courtship, in which young men patiently pursue and finally win the women they have adored for years. While in each story courtship forms the main thread of the plot, the relationships are depicted in a very superficial manner, and the main aim of the works is to eulogise patriotic self-sacrifice ("Flowers For Da Jiang" and "The Sixth Poplar"), or young people's struggle for self-improvement ("There is a Youth"). Nevertheless, the ideal of love presented - purely spiritual devotion that can be maintained indefinitely without hope or encouragement - is that which Zhang Jie continued to espouse in later works.

With "Love is Not to be Forgotten," published in 1979, Zhang Jie turned away from depicting happy love stories of youth, and focused her attention on the middle-aged women who were to dominate many of her more important works from then on. These stories are interesting not only for their open criticism of traditional morality, but also because despite their superficial iconoclasm, the women presented maintain traditional attitudes and self-perceptions that contribute significantly to their misfortunes and to the maintenance of the traditional social attitudes and inequalities that Zhang ostensibly sets out to attack.

Zhang Jie's criticism of traditional morality is made chiefly through the suffering of her middle-aged women characters. Through the

28 Zhang Jie, "You yige qingnian" ("There is a Youth"), Ai shi bu neng wangji de, pp 26-39.
29 Zhang Jie, "Han xiu cao" ("Flowers For Da Jiang"), Ai shi bu neng wangji de, pp 40-57.
31 "Ai shi bu neng wangji de" ("Love is Not to be Forgotten").
sympathetic depiction of Zhong Yu in "Love is Not to Be Forgotten," and Wan Qun in *Leaden Wings,* she attacks the separation of love and marriage and the preservation of marriages that are held together only by "duty and the law." Yet these women who flaunt traditional morality by loving married men ironically themselves become modified versions of the chaste Confucian widow. They both remain faithful to an unobtainable and unrealistic love until the day they die. Zhong Yu in particular has a love that comes close to a religious fanaticism. What she adores is not a man but a fantasy, for she and he had spent a total of less than twenty-four hours together and have never even so much as shaken hands.

Zeng Lingr, the heroine of "Emerald," is a more extreme development of this character. Although in contravention of traditional morals she spends a night with her boyfriend, Zuo Wei, she rationalises it in her own mind by considering herself married. She tears up the letter of introduction he has prepared for their marriage, saying: "We have already married,... We can part with an easy conscience." She then leaves for the remote countryside to do labour reform as a Rightist in his place, remaining in love with and faithful to him all the time she is there. On her return to the city twenty years later, she buys herself a pearl ring and wears it on her ring finger: "She was a married woman, she would never forget that." She completely discounts the possibility of ever establishing another sexual relationship even after she realises she no longer loves Zuo, and even though this is what she yearns for. She buys

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32 *Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings).*

33 "Ai shi bu neng wangji de" *(Love is Not to be Forgotten)*, p 103.

34 "Zumulu" *(Emerald).*

35 Before a couple can marry in China, each has to obtain a "letter of introduction" approving the marriage from their work place or school, or from the local street committee. The letter gives personal details and states that the individual is eligible to marry.

36 "Zumulu" *(Emerald)*, p 211.

a pair of dragon and phoenix candles like a pair she had once planned for her and Zuo Wei's wedding: "Unfortunately, in this life she would never again have any use for such a pair of red candles."\(^{38}\) Later, encouraging Zuo Wei's wife to value her relationship with him, Zeng says of herself: "A woman may have a Ph.D. in maths, but she hasn't necessarily won love, can't experience the happiness of being a wife, has no choice but to forget she's a woman."\(^{39}\)

Why? One of the main obstacles to Zeng Lingr's "experiencing the happiness of being a wife" is the strict Confucian morality which she impose on herself. To justify her one night with Zuo Wei, she mentally equated sex with marriage and then required herself to live the life of a chaste Confucian widow. The irony of this is that in the end, by insisting that she is married to Zuo Wei, though realising she no longer loves him, Zeng Lingr has created in herself the separation of love and marriage which is one of the important targets of Zhang Jie's criticism. Yet the work praises the purity and nobility of her soul.\(^{40}\)

One Chinese critic has interpreted "Emerald" as reflecting the maturation of Zhang Jie's views on love - because Zeng, in contrast to the heroine of "Love is Not to be Forgotten," finally transcends her infatuation with Zuo Wei.\(^{41}\) But in fact in the end Zeng simply exchanges blind devotion to him for an even more abstract, purely spiritual devotion to Chinese society, so that while the object of love has changed, its basic nature has not.

\(^{38}\) Ibid p 231.

\(^{39}\) Ibid p 250.

\(^{40}\) For a quite different interpretation of Zhang Jie's stories on love, see Sylvia Chan, "Chang Chieh's Fiction: In Search of Female Identity", Issues and Studies, September, 1989, pp 85-104.

Even in Zhang Jie’s most unconventional characters, the three women in "The Ark," anti-traditional behaviour is largely superficial. Though they all smoke and drink, and Liang Qian swears freely and rides a motorbike - all unacceptable in "respectable" women - their basic attitudes remain conservative. Liu Quan easily fits the traditional model of the quiet, forbearing female fending off threats to her chastity, while the other two, more radical women, though not fitting the traditional concept of femininity, nevertheless maintain many Confucian values that influence their sexual relationships and self-perceptions.

Take for example the marriages of the two women. Though Liang Qian’s marriage has completely broken down, she does not divorce her husband because she wants to protect the reputation of her father who is a high-ranking cadre. Thus out of consideration for her parent, Liang remains legally tied to a man she despises and whose only interest in her is to make use of her father’s status to further his own prospects. Cao Jinghua’s motives were similar. She married a forestry worker, not out of love, but so that she could financially support her father and sister who had been labelled "reactionary." On becoming pregnant, she had an abortion without consulting her husband because the financial burden of the child would mean she could no longer afford to support her family. Her husband angrily divorced her. There are two points to be made here. First: Cao’s marriage and abortion were sacrifices of first herself and then her child on the altar of filial piety. Both were carried out on behalf of her father and sister. Second: Cao did not divorce her husband, even though she suffered beatings, insults and political denunciation at his hands, but was divorced by him.

Though the women are all lonely and long for a man to love and be loved by, they have no relations with any men outside their work.

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42 "Fang zhou" ("The Ark").

43 Ibid p 23.

44 Ibid p 4-5.
Their anger over gossip that speculates on their sexual relationships does not stem from their belief that as single women it is natural and blameless for them to form new relationships with men, but from the fact that they cannot escape slander even though they have been living celibate lives in total conformity with traditional morality. They are not objecting to Confucian morality, only to unjust criticism.

The conservative attitude to sexual morality presented in Zhang Jie’s works is reinforced by her presentation of negative characters. Two of the women whom Zhang Jie condemns most strongly are both depicted as having transgressed traditional sexual morality. While in "The Ark," the three positive women characters never willingly talk to men except to discuss their work, the negative female character is depicted, with evident authorial disapproval, flirting with her male colleagues. In Leaden Wings, Xia Zhuyun, wife of the central character, has her baseness proven beyond doubt by the revelation that in the early years of her marriage she was unfaithful to her husband and bore her first child by another man. Thus while "Love is Not to be Forgotten" presents love outside marriage as morally acceptable, the figure of Xia Zhuyun indicates that once translated into a physical relationship it becomes morally unacceptable.

Zhang Jie not only presents sex outside marriage as unacceptable, but has a very negative attitude to sex in general, even within marriage. Throughout her works, sex is associated with the abuse and humiliation of women. Wu Tong in "Bohemian Vase" and the two divorcees in "The Ark" all have terrifying memories of sexual abuse at the hands of their husbands; Jin Naiwen in "Tangram" was raped to force her into marriage; Liu Quan in "The Ark" is constantly humiliated by sexual advances from the office manager; Zeng Lingr in "Emerald" has to suffer sexual insults from a cook; and Ding Xiaoli in "What’s Wrong With Him?"

45 Zhang Jie, "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), Hua cheng, No 4, 1981, pp 75-82.
46 "Qiqiaoban" ("Tangram").
is subjected to examination of her hymen by crowds of doctors to prove her virginity to her suspicious husband.\(^{47}\)

While this attitude to sex borders on the morbid, it must also be recognised that Zhang Jie is making a bold and powerful protest against the abuse of women in marriage, a problem which results from the traditional attitude that a married woman is the property of her husband to be treated however he pleases. She is also condemning the sexual harassment of divorced women that results from the related attitude that a divorced woman belongs to no one and therefore could belong to anyone.\(^{48}\)

In the light of this attitude to sex it is not surprising that the love relationships and happy marriages Zhang Jie presents are almost all very non-sexual in nature. Most resemble guardian-ward relationships in which the husband protects and guides a childish, helpless and adoring wife. Emphasis is given to the non-physical nature of the relationships: in "Love is Not to be Forgotten," the pair of lovers have never even so much as shaken hands, and in *Leaden Wings*, Fang Wenxuan kisses the woman he loves for the first time only when she is already dead. In "Bohemian Vase," Wu Tong's second husband tells her before their marriage that they will not have a sex life. Wu Tong replies that she only wants to cuddle against his shoulder.\(^{49}\)

The peculiar characteristic of Zhang Jie's love relationships, that the men are always considerably older than the women,\(^{50}\) tends to reinforce their unequal, parent-child nature. Yimei in "Tangram" is seen by her

\(^{47}\) "Ta you shenme bing" ("What's Wrong With Him?"), pp 258-260.

\(^{48}\) Quoted by Liu Quan in "Fang zhou" ("The Ark"), p 12.

\(^{49}\) "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), p 78.

\(^{50}\) Yimei in "Tangram" is mid-late 30s, her husband is about 50; in "Bohemian Vase" Wu Tong is 22 years younger than her husband; in *Leaden Wings*, Yu Liwen married Chen Yongming when she was 23 and he 37; the two pairs of lovers in "Love is Not to be Forgotten" and *Leaden Wings* (Wan Qun and Fang Wenxuan) are both middle-aged women in love with elderly cadres.
husband as "that wilful child-wife who loved to talk a lot of rubbish"; Wu Tong in "Bohemian Vase" is "that adorable muddleheaded wife who was likely to tumble into disaster at any moment if there was no one to guard her . . . He always felt she had never grown up"; and Yu Liwen in Leaden Wings is "a delicate, adorable little wife in Chen Yongming's arms."

The consistent image is of incompetent women totally dependent on men to organise their lives for them. (This image is supported by Zhang's single, middle-aged women whose everyday lives without men are highly disorganised.) Wu Tong in "Bohemian Vase" is "incapable of looking after herself," and "wanted him [her husband] to help her remember everything" - including how many stitches she should decrease under the arm of a jumper she is knitting.

Yimei in "Tangram" cannot cook, and if her husband goes away has to eat from cans. She is so reliant on him that he packs her bag every morning with the things she will need for work, and when they go out together he carries everything she might need in his pockets: handkerchief, toilet paper, toothpicks etc. She feels she has been lucky "to find the sort of husband who will even think of when you ought to go to the toilet for you." 55

The third happily married woman, Yu Liwen, wife of the reformist factory head Chen Yongming in Leaden Wings, is a very traditional wife. When he proposed marriage, she asked: "Am I good enough for you?", thus establishing her sense of inferiority from the start. He issues orders which she adoringly obeys: "No matter what decision her husband made,

51 "Qiqioban" ("Tangram"), p. 124.
52 "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), p. 77.
53 Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings), p. 90.
54 "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), p. 76.
55 "Qiqioaban" ("Tangram"), p. 155.
56 Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings), p. 83.
Yu Liwen believed it was certainly correct. There is never any questioning, any assertion of different opinions. She plays a subordinate, supportive role while he battles on the front lines of the Four Modernizations.

Thus Zhang Jie does not present the ideal marriage as involving two mutually dependent people who perceive themselves as equals sharing equal rights and responsibilities; rather she presents the alternative to traditional roles as being a guardian-ward relationship in which the man assumes responsibility for running the woman’s everyday life and paternalistically tolerates her childish behaviour and shallow perceptions.

Yet if women play a subordinate, dependent role in marital relationships, they cannot expect men to regard them as equals in wider society - but Zhang Jie’s characters would like it both ways. Basically similar character types complain in "The Ark" about the problems they have as women in advancing their careers, but behave like helpless children in "Bohemian Vase" and "Tangram." In its fundamental form this is the contradiction between socialist ideals of women’s equality and productive contribution to society, and traditional views of women’s social role and social position.

Zhang Jie recognises the destructive potential of these contradictory demands on women in the character of Jin Naiwen in "Tangram." Jin, a tragic schizophrenic, has accommodated both roles by alternating between cool, efficient, authoritative surgeon and servile, chaste, loyal Confucian wife as the occasion demands. She reflects in an extreme form the conflicts within many of Zhang’s other women characters, who unable to modify self-perceptions and behaviour based on traditional views of women’s roles, inevitably find themselves treated as social inferiors by men and so are unable to realise their full potential in contributing to society.

\[57\] Ibid p 90.
The basic conservatism of Zhang Jie’s fiction is also evident in the attitude she presents towards divorce. Though she superficially appears to take a liberal attitude to divorce, a close look at the divorces she presents and those she encourages shows her expressed support for divorce has the important qualification that divorce is only acceptable in cases where serious blame can be attributed to one partner. She does not present one couple who have divorced simply because of lack of love. All her divorced women suffered physical or sexual abuse within marriage (Cao Jinghua and Liu Quan in "The Ark" and Wu Tong’s first marriage in "Bohemian Vase"), while the same is true of women who would like to divorce but don’t dare (Liu Yuying in Leaden Wings) and those who intend to divorce (Ding Xiaoli in "What’s Wrong With Him?").

This attitude is actually reinforced by the couples Zhang criticises for maintaining loveless marriages. Fang Wenxuan in Leaden Wings sacrifices his love out of fear of the social repercussions of divorce and remains married to the woman who abandoned and betrayed him in the Cultural Revolution, then returned to him when his official position was restored. Zheng Ziyun, also in Leaden Wings, is married to an arrogant, spiteful woman who was unfaithful to him in the early years of their marriage. On the other hand, Zhang offers sympathy and praise to the old cadre in "Love is Not to be Forgotten" for not divorcing a blameless wife, though he was in love with another woman. Zhang’s stance is not that the cadre should divorce but that he should not have married the wrong person in the first place.

Thus, though Zhang Jie has rejected the traditional attitude of maintaining marriages at all costs, she has not yet supported in her writings the idea of blameless divorce in which partners merely find themselves incompatible or where there is no longer mutual love. This tends to support the perpetuation of a situation in which partners maintain an unsatisfactory marriage until the pressure becomes so great that one partner does something they can be blamed for.
In this respect, she does not go as far as either Shen Rong or Ru Zhijuan. In "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong,"\(^{58}\) Shen Rong examines a marriage that broke down solely because of the differences in personality, attitudes and goals of the partners and did not involve any kind of physical abuse or moral transgression. Ru Zhijuan’s "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," (discussed on pages 126-127), sympathetically depicts a woman seeking divorce because she cannot gain spiritual and emotional fulfilment from her marriage. However, even though Shen and Ru both express support for this kind of divorce in these works, it is significant that both still avoid actually depicting it.

Though the attitude Zhang Jie presents towards divorce shows an underlying conservatism, she is very outspoken on the difficulties involved in trying to obtain a divorce. In "The Ark," she declares that marriage is a private matter between two individuals, and bitterly attacks people who regard it as a virtue and social duty to pressure unhappy couples into remaining married. Through Cao Jinghua, she protests:

"Whoever wants to divorce, must have plenty of courage, abandon all human dignity, and repeat hundreds of times to all kinds of strangers and people who have the power to interfere with their marriage their most secret, most embarrassing reasons why marriage has already become a terror and a disaster, in order to beg their gracious permission... It’s like stripping bare and standing naked before hundreds of thousands of people... Every divorce is a life and death struggle that brings ruin and disgrace! But what has it got to do with anyone else?"\(^{59}\)

This criticism of society’s obstruction of divorce is echoed in the works of Ru Zhijuan and Shen Rong, but is significantly absent from the works of the younger writers. As will be seen below this reflects rapid

\(^{58}\) "Cuo, cuo, cuo" ("Wrong, Wrong, Wrong").

\(^{59}\) "Fang zhou" ("The Ark"), p 9.
changes that have taken place in attitudes to divorce among China’s younger generations.

Zhang Jie’s works also protest against the intense social pressure placed on single women in their late-twenties or above to marry as soon as possible. "Love is Not to be Forgotten" ends with an appeal to society not to force women into hasty marriages on the pain of being treated as neurotics, eccentrics or heretics, but to allow them to patiently wait for the right partner to come along. As with many of Zhang’s works, the criticism of the status quo she makes in "Love is Not to be Forgotten" is far stronger in passionate protest than in analyzing underlying social causes and offering solutions. This creates a certain shallowness in her works. Nevertheless, it was Zhang Jie’s pioneering role in breaking literary taboos on love and marriage with works like "Love is Not to be Forgotten" and "The Ark," that paved the way for writers like Shen Rong to openly examine similar questions in much greater depth.

**Shen Rong**

Shen Rong’s works on love and marriage are far less passionate than Zhang Jie’s, but more penetrating. While Zhang Jie tends to present marital breakdown and the disappearance of love as caused by the unworthiness or brutality of individual men, Shen Rong looks beyond the simple blaming of individuals to seek deeper social and historical causes. In addition, while Zhang Jie tends to present superficially unconventional characters who are in fact strongly influenced by Confucian morality, beneath the traditionalism of Shen Rong’s characters a subtle iconoclasm can be detected.

Shen Rong’s works, like Zhang Jie’s, contain a significant number of middle-aged women who for various reasons are single. In Zhang Jie’s
works, they are generally depicted as suffering emotional anguish and a sense of insecurity because they lack male partners. In "Bohemian Vase," for example, Wu Tong describes herself after divorcing her first husband as "like a kite snapped from its string, directionless and with a feeling of helplessness over her own fate."\(^60\) This only ends when she meets her second husband. In contrast, in Shen Rong's works, release from traditional wifely duties enables women to enjoy new freedom and achieve personal fulfilment that would have been impossible had they remained married. Clear examples of this are the heroines of "Eternal Spring"\(^61\) and "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre."\(^62\)

Han Lamei in "Eternal Spring" was separated from her husband Li Mengyu during the Anti-Japanese War. After the Communists took power, Li remarried, believing Lamei to be dead. The story goes on to follow the fortunes of Li and Han as they are thrown together again as victims of the Cultural Revolution.

Morally, Han Lamei lives out the traditional ideal of the chaste Confucian widow, making no demands on Li because he already has a new family, but maintaining her love for him until the day she dies. But unlike traditional heroines she is physically and mentally extremely tough. She is highly ambitious and devotes her life to building a reservoir to supply water to the people of the mountains where she and Li fought during the war. To a large extent, the depiction of Han Lamei's almost superhuman heroism is a left over from the heroic images of Cultural Revolution "revolutionary romanticism," but when her image is considered as a contrast to that of Li's second wife, Shi Lihua, something more than simply praise for a conventional socialist heroine emerges.

Shi Lihua is presented in the bulk of the story as a kindly, but rather narrow-minded housewife whose entire life is centred around her

\(^{60}\) "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), p 77.

\(^{61}\) "Yongyuan shi chuntian" ("Eternal Spring").

\(^{62}\) "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre").
family. However, considering her political and educational qualifications, she should have had the potential to equal Han Lamei’s achievements. In describing Shi Lihua to Li as a suitable wife, his superior first tells him she is a university graduate, then goes on to say: "Young Shi’s class status is not bad, she has a clear history, is enthusiastic in her work, constantly seeks to improve herself, and recently joined the Party..."\(^63\) Thus initially, Shi Lihua had political qualifications (Party membership) rivalling those of Han Lamei, had a desire to advance herself and had a university degree compared to Han Lamei’s virtual lack of any formal education. Yet she retrogressed while Han went on to brilliant achievements. Though it is not explicitly stated, the story implies through the juxtaposition of these two characters that Han Lamei could succeed because of her freedom from family ties, while Shi Lihua sank into preoccupation with domestic trivia once she married and started a family.

Shi Lihua’s retrogression can be attributed to a large extent to traditional concepts of the role a woman must play as wife and mother. In a telling conversation between herself and Li Mengyu, Shi Lihua reveals her discontent with the limitations of her purely domestic role, but rejects the possibility of returning to work, chiefly because although they have a domestic servant who could care for the children and run the house, she feels she must personally carry out her traditional wifely duties. Her protestation that she is incapable of doing any work and is content to serve Li and the children is belied by both her capability as an unmarried woman and her expression of her sense of entrapment: "I have this happy home, but have shut myself into this golden cage. This is my misfortune."\(^64\)

Han Lamei is just as traditional in her moral outlook as Shi Lihua, but in her case, tradition demands that she remain faithful to Li, even though she cannot continue their marriage. Thus, she is released from

\(^63\) "Yongyuan shi chuntian" (”Eternal Spring”), p 15.

\(^64\) "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" (”Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre”), p 20.
traditional wifely duties and can devote her time to becoming a qualified engineer and then to building the reservoir. The message that the contrast between these two women carries is clearly that marriage, or at least traditional roles demanded of women in marriage, stifle women’s development. In "Eternal Spring" this message remains implicit, but in "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," it is stated quite explicitly.

Yang Yueyue is also a country girl who married a military commissar during the Anti-Japanese War. Forced into the marriage by well-meaning friends before she could gain either a basic education or practical work experience with the army, she found herself obliged to follow her husband wherever the war took him, enduring successive pregnancies and miscarriages which prevented her from doing any meaningful work. Even after the Communist victory and the birth of a son, her husband still refused to allow her to attend adult education classes or resume work, because he demanded that she devote all her time to raising the child. Still longing to do some socially recognised work, Yang decided to remain in the county where work opportunities were greater for her when her husband was promoted to the Provincial Party Committee. He subsequently fell in love with a young university graduate, and requested a divorce.

What is significant is not so much the tragedy of Yang Yueyue giving her youth and opportunity for personal advancement to a man who then abandoned her, but her rather enlightened reasons for rapidly agreeing to the divorce. She explains to Zhang Guifen who is acting as an intermediary: "I’ve thought about it, we’d be better off divorced. He can find someone better than me. I... I’ll be liberated too." She goes on to directly express her dissatisfaction with traditional marital relations: "In every single thing I did, I had to do what he told me. Over the years I’ve often thought: I am a Party member, I really ought to do some work for
Thus Yang Yueyue regards divorce as "liberation" from male domination.

Zhang Guifen also applauds her decision to divorce. She explains:

"I was upset because she would never be young again. If in those ten years she hadn't been an appendage of Old Xu, she could have educated and tempered herself and become an outstanding Party cadre. I was delighted because in the end she extricated herself, and could go her own way. She became the old Yueyue again, constantly striving to better herself and outdo others."\(^{66}\)

In Zhang's view, marriage not only wasted Yang Yueyue's youth, but repressed her personality, while divorce, usually regarded as a major disaster for a woman, is seen as a personal triumph.

So far the attack on marital relations has been restricted to Yang Yueyue's individual case, but Shen Rong extends its significance to cover all traditional marital relations in her narrator's next letter to her husband. She writes:

"As far as women are concerned, for countless years, marital relationships have been relationships of subordination. The spirit of 'the three obediences and the four virtues'\(^{67}\) has not dispersed, but still enshrouds Chinese women. There's no way of knowing how many women's independent personalities have been damaged by concepts like 'marry a chicken, follow a chicken; marry a dog, follow a dog'... [Yang Yueyue] finally threw off all her shackles and took control of her own

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\(^{65}\) *Ibid* p 85.

\(^{66}\) *Ibid* pp 85-86. Contrast this attitude with the helplessness and lack of direction felt by Zhang Jie's character quoted above.

\(^{67}\) The three obediences traditionally demanded of women were: obedience to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her son after the death of her husband. The four virtues were morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work.
fate. I rejoice for her. She should belong to the people, not to Xu Mingfu."  

But despite the congratulatory attitude of the two women, Yang Yueyue’s role has still been essentially passive. Though her marriage was a personal disaster, she only gained release from it by once more obeying her husband and agreeing to the divorce. Her attitude to how a wife must behave within marriage did not change at all, so in fact she did nothing to defy tradition, and cannot be regarded as having thrown off her shackles because they were removed from her by her husband when he abandoned her. What she did do was to break through the traditional concept that marriage should be maintained at all costs and realise that she would be better off divorced than clinging to a restrictive marriage. This in itself was a significant step forward for an uneducated, tradition-bound peasant woman in the 1950s.

In "Eternal Spring" and "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," Shen Rong concentrated on examining the destructive effect on women’s psychology of traditional marital relations, but in later works, she switched to an examination of problems in modern marriages. In "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" and particularly in "Can’t be Bothered to Divorce," she looks not only at the persistence of traditional attitudes that oppress women, but also at contemporary attitudes to love and sex that she sees as contributing significantly to the dreariness of many modern marriages. Both works express pessimism over the viability of the marriage relationship itself.

In "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong," Shen Rong takes pains to present a marriage in which negative external influences (the factors usually seen as the cause of marital breakdown in Chinese literature) have been reduced to a minimum. The couple marry for love; there are no interfering in-laws;

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68 "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre"), p 86.

69 "Cuo, cuo, cuo" ("Wrong, Wrong, Wrong").

70 "Lande lihun" ("Can’t be Bothered to Divorce").
they are financially relatively well-off, and political movements leave them undisturbed. There is no sign of the traditional oppression of women in marriage: the wife has her husband's full support in pursuing her career, and the double burden of work and household duties is willingly shouldered by him, not her. Yet the marriage quickly deteriorates into stony indifference.

By isolating the marital relationship, Shen Rong comes close to examining marriage as an institution. Though she presents only one specific marriage in the story, some of the husband's observations have implications for marriage in general. Thinking back on the reasons why they did not divorce, he lists as the most decisive factor: "What if we did divorce? Could I go and find somebody else?... Who could guarantee that when I was living with a different woman we wouldn't quarrel, wouldn't become indifferent, wouldn't re-perform act after act of our tragedy?" 71 He moves beyond blaming individuals for specific marital failures and sees that any marital relationship is likely to end in mutual tolerance rather than mutual love. So far he has only stated a possibility, but he goes on to confirm that this is the case in many marriages: "The world is full of families from which love has already disappeared, but they still continue to revolve with the earth. Then let this unhappy family of ours join them!" 72 His line of reasoning brings him close to questioning the marital relationship itself, but he backs away from drawing the logical conclusions. Instead of inferring that because his and many other marriages are unhappy there must be something wrong with the institution of marriage in its current state, he perversely concludes that as many marriages are unhappy, unhappiness should be accepted as normal.

Neither can he envisage a life without marriage. The only alternative to his current marriage that he considers is marriage to someone else. Unlike the daughter in Zhang Jie's "Love is Not to be

71 "Cuo, cuo, cuo" ("Wrong, Wrong, Wrong"), p 49.
72 Ibid
Forgotten," he does not conceive of the possibility of remaining single. Thus Shen Rong tentatively probes the basic nature of current marital relations, but does not pursue the implications of what she finds to their logical conclusion, nor attempt to offer any solutions.

"In "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong," Shen Rong's view of what caused marital breakdown seems rather confused. In the bulk of the story, the husband, reminiscing after his wife's sudden death, places the blame for their estrangement on her pursuit of romantic love, her moodiness, petulance and selfishness. The cause of marital breakdown is presented as her failure to accept that marriage consists largely of carrying out mundane household responsibilities. But right at the end of the story, the husband suddenly completely reverses his attitude, seeing his indifference to her emotional needs as the cause of their tragedy. He realises too late that love in marriage needs more than just co-operation in running a household to keep it alive. However, because this sudden turn-about is given little space and directly contradicts the message of the rest of the work, it seems hollow and unconvincing, and leaves the reader bewildered as to what Shen is ultimately trying to say. This lack of clarity and the unusual nature of the relationship presented (the complete reversal of sex-roles) tends to weaken the significance of the work as a comment on marriage in general, a situation that Shen Rong remedied in "Can't be Bothered to Divorce."

"Can't be Bothered to Divorce" is a merciless dissection of the reality that lies behind the stability of marriage in China and the low divorce rate. Fang Fang, a young, unmarried journalist, assigned to write an article on a happy home, discovers only stories of conjugal misery, boredom and indifference. The "ideal couple" that a friendly Residents' Committee Director has taken pains to choose for her, turns out to be merely "making do," remaining married only because of their own inertia. Through the

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73 This is repeated in "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce") where a divorcee who consistently expresses her cynicism about and disillusionment with marriage, finally announces she is remarrying because "everyone has to have a home" (p. 33).
story of Fang Fang’s interviews with this "happy family," interspersed with short sketches from the lives of several other married couples, Shen Rong both examines the state of ordinary marriages in China, and offers suggestions as to how the current situation could be improved.

Like Zhang Jie, Shen Rong squarely faces the issue of domestic violence, but whereas Zhang stops at the level of accusation against men, Shen shows how women’s own internalization of traditional attitudes perpetuates the condoning of violence in the home. In the second section of the work, a woman seeking divorce because her husband "bullies" her is visited by a succession of female neighbours who each cite their own experiences to prove to her that violence against women is a normal part of married life, and not sufficient grounds to demand divorce. "Who decreed we should be born as women," concludes one neighbour, "we just have to put up with things."

Though Shen simply presents these attitudes and makes no direct authorial comment, she is clearly deploring women’s traditional view of their own inferior status in marital relations, and urging women to recognise their right to be treated with respect by their husbands. This section also reiterates Zhang Jie’s protests against the interference of neighbours, colleagues, relatives and legal officers in a couple’s decision to divorce. Social pressure finally forces the couple presented to resign themselves to their unhappy marriage.

While Shen Rong is not unique among the women writers in claiming that most Chinese marriages are unhappy, she breaks new ground in exploring causes, ranging from problems arising from the nature of courtship to sexual boredom in marriage.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, in advising young women on how to make a choice of marriage partner, Ru Zhijuan

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74 Ibid p 9.

75 This is repeated in Zhang Xinxin, “Zai tongyi dipingxianshang” ("On the Same Horizon"); Zhang Kangkang, “Dandan de chen wu” ("Faint Morning Mist"); Zhang Jie, “Ai shi bu neng wangji de” ("Love is Not to be Forgotten").
presented her characters choosing spouses on the basis of a few short meetings and rather superficial knowledge of their performance in the workplace and attitude to society, ignoring questions of personal compatibility. 76 In "Can't be Bothered to Divorce," however, the unhappy husband points out that not getting to know a partner well during courtship can lead directly to discord in marriage. 77 He describes a typical Chinese courtship in which the couple meets for a few hours each week in a park or restaurant. Both are on their best behaviour, instinctively concealing their weak points. Only after marriage do they discover aspects of one another's personalities that cause friction between them: her loud voice and short temper, his garrulousness and dislike of washing his feet - minor factors totally ignored by Ru Zhijuan, but recognised by Shen Rong as creating stress in a relationship. Shen Rong does not offer any solution to this problem. Despite her very critical views on marriage, she does not envisage in her works any morally acceptable sexual relationship outside it, and so does not suggest, for example, that a trial period of living together before marriage might enable couples to get to know each other thoroughly before taking the final step.

But while the attitude Shen Rong presents to sex outside marriage is conservative, in "Can't be Bothered to Divorce" she tries to make readers aware of the importance of sex within marriage, seeing the lack of sexual stimulation in Chinese marriages as one of the causes of their insipidness. Feeling it inappropriate to tackle the subject of sex directly, Shen approaches it through the question of attention to physical appearance. 78 Section Twelve of the work is a conversation between a husband and wife in which he tactfully tries to encourage her to make herself more

76 See pp 130-131.

77 "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce"), p 19.

78 In an interview the author held with Shen Rong on September 26, 1988, she said that in "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce") she wanted to discuss the question of sex, but "could only talk about it in a roundabout way."
physically attractive. Through the husband, Shen Rong warns women against making themselves "slaves of the home" (being fastidious about housework) and neglecting the sexual needs of their partners. The husband's suggestions that she allow him to buy her a pretty nightdress and high-heeled shoes, are rebuffed by her as Western decadence and "bourgeois liberalization." Here Shen Rong is criticising contemporary attitudes towards sex and sexuality in marriage as typified by the responses of the wife. (Interestingly, they are attitudes that can be detected in Zhang Jie's works on love and marriage.) In the wife's view, beautifying oneself is a sign of sexual degeneracy, and "having ideas" about the opposite sex is "wicked" - something no decent woman would be guilty of. She believes: "a husband and wife don't need to have 'ideas' about each other." Thus she denies the sexual needs of both her husband and herself. As her husband comments, this makes marriage "a bore" (mei jin). Related to this is the question of the physical display of affection between husband and wife. Once more Shen Rong is critical of puritanical Chinese attitudes, seeing them as exacerbating discord between partners. In Section Five, she presents a quarrel between a young couple, interrupting the action twice to point out that an affectionate hug from the husband, or the wife simply taking her husband's arm could have prevented the deepening of the rift between them. But as a Chinese couple they regard such displays as "Western style" signs of personal "defectiveness" or "cheapness," with the result that the quarrel escalates, and only ends when both lapse into hostile silence.

Shen Rong's raising of these problems may seem trivial to Western readers, but in Chinese society where the mention of sex and sexuality is regarded with distaste (particularly among the older generations), and

79 "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce"), pp 27-29.

80 That the husband's views represent Shen Rong's own views was made clear from my interview with her on September 26, 1988.

81 "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce"), pp 16-17.
very strict standards of propriety between the sexes are still invoked, she is showing considerable courage even in approaching these questions indirectly.

One of Shen Rong’s main aims in "Can’t be Bothered to Divorce" is to suggest means by which Chinese marriages could be improved, and to this end, she has her main male character put forward three conditions necessary for an ideal home: 1. that there are at least two rooms - so that husband and wife can get away from each other; 2. that a couple invite guests to dinner once a week - to add stimulation and interest to their relationship; and 3. that husband and wife each have separate friends with whom they can discuss anything - to cater to different individual interests and take pressure off a closed relationship. These suggestions are presented in a lighthearted manner, but they are directed against the common attitude that as soon as a couple marry they become "like one person." Shen Rong points out that for a healthy relationship a couple needs to maintain their individual identities and be able to satisfy individual needs.

Apart from encouraging readers to work on improving the quality of their marriages, Shen Rong also castigates those people who remain in unhappy marriages out of apathy, or fear of the difficulties of obtaining a divorce. Throughout the work, her greatest criticism is aimed at couples who are content to "make do," tolerating loveless, insipid marriages because they simply "can’t be bothered to divorce."

Because Shen Rong stresses the importance of love and personal happiness in marriage, she shows sympathy for several characters who would generally be considered to have acted immorally.

In "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," Yang Yueyue’s husband, Xu, divorces her to marry a young university graduate who is already carrying his child. But even though the story is a sympathetic portrayal

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82 This is particularly significant in China where a severe housing shortage means many families - parents, children and sometimes grandchildren - live in a single room.

83 “Lande lihun” ("Can’t Be Bothered to Divorce"), p 9.
of Yang Yueyue's tragic life, Shen Rong offers understanding to both Xu and his girlfriend. Though society censures them both, treating the woman in particular as a social outcast, the narrator discovers after meeting her that she is not a seductress, but simply became infatuated with the former war hero who was then a dashing young provincial official. She herself was an attractive, cultured young woman, who offered him companionship and intellectual stimulation he did not get from Yang Yueyue. Thus, though she disapproves of their actions, Shen refuses to present the couple as the stereotyped faithless husband and cheap seductress, and acknowledges the sincerity and purity of the emotions that led them to offend social morality.

In "The Faded Letter," 84 Shen Rong expresses support and sympathy for a young woman who breaks her engagement to a village boy. Sent to a remote village during the Cultural Revolution, she became engaged to the young man despite strong public opposition. But after returning to the city to attend medical college, she realises her resolve to settle permanently in the countryside was made under the influence of the fanaticism of the era. On one level, the story criticises extreme-leftist politics for creating the atmosphere in which the girl initially made an unrealistic decision over her own future, but more significantly in moral terms, it asserts the right to change one's mind. Though in Chinese society the breaking of an engagement is generally regarded as highly immoral, Shen Rong, while sympathising with the young man's position, clearly indicates support for the girl's decision not to go through with a marriage that would bring her a lifetime of unhappiness.

Compared with the writings of Ru Zhijuan, parent-child relationships are relatively less important in the fiction of the middle-aged writers. Though in Zhang Jie's "The Ark" one can still find characters for whom filial considerations are paramount (Cao Jinghua and Liang Qian),

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for most characters the parent-child bond is secondary to lover/spouse bonds.

Thus the heroine of Zhang Jie’s "Emerald" prefers to risk her son’s life when he is ill, rather than ask for help from the boy’s father, because she wants to protect her former lover’s feelings and reputation. In "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre" (Shen Rong), Yang Yueyue and her ex-husband are so concerned about each other’s feelings that they completely ignore the needs of their son, even when as a prisoner on a labour farm he most needs their support. In "Love is Not to be Forgotten" (Zhang Jie), which depicts a close relationship between mother and daughter, the mother’s love for the old cadre was clearly the most important relationship in her life.

Where works set out to examine parent-child relations, it is often to reveal the tensions and misunderstandings that damage them. Shen Rong’s "A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal" and "Heart," for example, both show how political movements left sons permanently estranged from their fathers.

In contrast to Ru Zhijuan’s characters who happily accept motherhood without question, and whose only problem is being too traditional in relations with their children, Shen Rong’s "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" and Zhang Jie’s "The Ark" (the character of Liu Quan) present women who refuse, or have difficulty coping with, their maternal role. Hui Lian in "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" had no desire for a child, regarded pregnancy as a personal disaster, and left raising the child entirely to her husband. Shen Rong offers her some sympathy for not being permitted an abortion. In "The Ark" and "Bohemian Vase," Zhang Jie depicts women who do have abortions. Though both have altruistic reasons for

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85 "Meiguise de wancan" ("A Rose-Coloured Evening Meal").

86 Shen Rong, "Xin" ("Heart"), Shen Rong xiaoshuo xuan, pp 307-323.

87 For example in "Er nu qing" ("Sons and Daughters") see p 131.

88 This was in the 1950s when couples were encouraged to have children.
not becoming mothers (Cao Jinghua prefers to support her father, and Wu Tong declines to contribute to overpopulation of the world), these stories, along with "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong," affirm women's right to choose whether or not to have children and do not present motherhood as a bounden duty.

While Shen Rong and Zhang Jie express different attitudes towards sex and marriage in their works, their approaches to the general subject also have some points in common. Both observe the same literary taboos on depicting nudity, and on the direct depiction of the physical side of sexual relationships. Both present marriage as the only morally acceptable context for sex.

Though both women strongly attack traditional attitudes that they see as harmful to women, they do so from the safe position of complete moral orthodoxy. The chastity cult is attacked through characters accused of unchaste behaviour who are in fact innocent\textsuperscript{89}; loveless marriage is attacked through couples who do not divorce\textsuperscript{90}; and the oppressive and limiting nature of traditional marital relations is attacked through women who are perfect traditional wives.\textsuperscript{91}

However, while we have already noted that a basic conservatism lies behind Zhang Jie's superficially unorthodox characters, the opposite is true of Shen Rong's works. Though they contain few individuals who consciously or directly challenge tradition, characters' often tragic fates are

\textsuperscript{89} For example, Zhang Jie: the three women in "Fang zhou" ("The Ark"); Ding Xiaoli in "Ta you shenme bing" ("What's Wrong With Him?"); Shen Rong: Qi Wenwen in "Xianshang yishu yelaixiang" ("Present a Bunch of Evening Fragrance"), \textit{Huacheng}, No 1, 1987; the young couple in "Wanwan de yueliang" ("Crescent Moon"); and Zhang Qianqian in "Yige bu zhengchang de nuren" ("A Freakish Girl"), \textit{Shanghai wenxue}, No 4, 1984.

\textsuperscript{90} For example, Shen Rong: the marriages depicted in "Cuo, cuo, cuo" ("Wrong, Wrong, Wrong") and "Lande lihun" ("Can't be Bothered to Divorce"); Zhang Jie: the marriages of Zhang Ziyun and Fang Wenxuan in \textit{Chenzhong de chibang} (Leaden Wings).

\textsuperscript{91} For example, Shen Rong: Shi Lihua in "Yongyuan shi chuntian" ("Eternal Spring") and Yang Yue Yue in "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre"); Zhang Jie: Jin Naiwen in "Qiqiaoban" ("Tangram").
presented as implicit criticisms in themselves. It is this that creates the underlying iconoclasm in her writings.

**The Young Writers**

Though in the early years of the post-1978 period Zhang Jie and Shen Rong played a pioneering role in breaking into previously forbidden zones for literature with works like "Love is Not to be Forgotten" and "Eternal Spring," ten years later, the pace at which the boundaries of the morally acceptable had been expanded, had left them on a middle ground somewhere between the conservatives and the new path breakers. The opposite is true of the three younger women writers. Before 1981, their works presented attitudes to love, marriage and sexual morality that were already widely accepted in society, but by 1986, Wang Anyi and Zhang Kangkang were in the forefront of a literary exploration of sex and sexuality.

In the three years from 1978 to 1980, two themes dominated the young writers' fiction on love and marriage: the right to romantic love (as opposed to class or comradely love); and the right to choose one's own partner, as well as the criteria this choice should be based on.

The right to love was an issue affecting both men and women equally, and one of particular concern to the young. During the Cultural Revolution period, love had become a literary taboo. Love and revolution were regarded as mutually exclusive, and any mention of love in literature was considered bourgeois and pornographic. Thus to affirm sexual love as an individual's right was, in 1978-1979 as much a political statement as a social comment.

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92 One of the reasons why Shen Rong could not get "Eternal Spring" published until 1979 was because of the love triangle it depicts.
Like Liu Xinwu’s "The Place of Love," the 1978 work that reintroduced love as a respectable literary topic, Zhang Kangkang’s "The Right to Love," published in 1979, combines strong political criticism of the extreme puritanism of the Cultural Revolution period and specific criticism of the Gang of Four with the affirmation of love as a basic right. However, while in Liu Xinwu’s work the characters and plot take second place to the polemic, Zhang Kangkang, in the style typical of the young women writers, stresses portrayal of the psychological and emotional wounds left on her heroine by political extremism, and the gradual process of their healing.

By 1980, love was no longer a politically contentious issue, and discussion shifted to the social sphere. In "When the Flute Plays Solo," Wang Anyi protests against conservative attitudes to sexual relations that condemn a man of twenty-eight for having been seen talking alone with a young woman. However, as the man realises, at the root of the accusations of immorality against him lies the social attitude that as a man with neither a permanent job nor an urban residence licence, he is not entitled to a girlfriend. In this work and in "Wild Chrysanthemum," Wang Anyi points out the need to recognise the right of every individual to love, regardless of his or her social status.

The related questions of the right to choose freely one’s own partner and the criteria for doing so particularly concern young women, and as such were a common theme of the young writers’ earlier works.

94 "Ai de quanli" ("The Right to Love").
95 "Dang changdi SOLO de shihou" ("When the Flute Plays Solo").
96 "Ye juhua, ye juhua" ("Wild Chrysanthemum").
97 The fact that Wang Anyi married in 1981 and Zhang Kangkang remarried in 1983 may partly explain the disappearance of this theme from later works. This question concerns women more than men because parental control over daughters’ marriages tends to be stronger than that over sons’ marriages.
surprisingly, the views on the former question expressed in their works differ significantly from those found in the fiction of Ru Zhijuan (discussed in the first part of this chapter). In Ru’s "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," she raised the problem of children interfering in their parents’ personal lives, but in "An Ancient Song," depicts a father as having the right to prevent his daughter’s marriage (even if in this case he eventually decided not to do so). Only in one work, "Sons and Daughters," does she criticise a mother’s attempts to control her son’s life. In contrast, Zhang Kangkang and Wang Anyi both aim their main criticism at parents who interfere in their children’s choice of partners, and make no mention of the opposite problem. Wang Anyi’s "A Girl’s Vexation"98 (1979), and "Destiny"99 (1980), and Zhang Kangkang’s "The Far-off Sound of the Bell"100 (1980), all depict young women whose parents use methods ranging from emotional blackmail to pressuring the man’s family to try to prevent them marrying worthy young men of low socio-economic status.

In contrast to the older women writers, who almost invariably present the result of conflict between the individual and repressive tradition as failure and tragedy, in each of these stories young people successfully defy tradition, either by ignoring parental pressure, or by persuading parents to accept their choice.

In depicting the criteria on which the choice of a partner should be based, the young writers share Ru Zhijuan’s anti-materialist stance. Zhang Kangkang’s "Fly Away, Dove"101 and "Northern Lights,"102 and Wang Anyi’s "The Destination of this Train"103 and "A Corner of the Wide

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98 Wang Anyi, “Yige shaonu de fannao” ("A Girl’s Vexation"), Qingnian yi dai, No 2, 1979, pp 42-44.

99 "Mingyun" ("Destiny").

100 “Youyuan de zhongsheng” ("The Far-off Sound of the Bell").

101 Zhang Kangkang, "Feizoule, gezi" ("Fly Away, Dove"), Xia, pp 216-228.

102 "Beiji guang" ("Northern Lights").

103 "Benci lieche zhongdian" ("The Destination of this Train").
all present positive characters who refuse loveless marriages that would bring high social status and/or better material conditions. However, rather than stressing the importance of the partner's attitude and contribution to society, as Ru does in "Small Path Through the Grasslands" or "Trainee," the younger writers tend to stress romantic love and compatibility. Wang Anyi's "Life in a Small Courtyard" and "A Commonplace Girl" both contrast the happiness of women with poor but loving husbands with the insecurity and loneliness of women who married solely for material gain. In Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?," the narrator rejects her adoring suitor because despite his socially recognised worthiness, she simply does not love him. Thus while writers of both age-groups are unanimous in their criticism of marriage based on the pursuit of wealth and status, the criteria for choosing marriage partners they present with approval, reflect the basic differences of approach that have already been observed in the writers' attitudes throughout this study: stress on the social contribution of partners reflects the general social orientation of the older writer, while stress on love and compatibility reflects the younger writers' concern with the individual.

After 1980, the young writers turned their focus away from the choice of marriage partners onto a much more diverse range of subjects. Marital and love relationships, marital breakdown, divorce, extra-marital sex, the conflict between marriage and career and so forth, all came under their scrutiny. In examining each of these areas, the young writers show fewer inhibitions, and an increasingly more liberal attitude to questions of morality than the older writers.

In their depiction of marital relationships, the young writers show even greater pessimism than their older counterparts. Early stories of pure

104 "Guangkuo tiandi de yijiao" ("A Corner of the Wide World").

105 "Xiaoyuan suoji" ("Life in a Small Courtyard").

106 "Yongchang zhi bei" ("A Commonplace Girl").

107 "Wo zai nar cuoguole ni" ("How Did I Miss You?").
girls seeking ideal love, and couples happily resolving disputes quickly gave way after 1980 to studies of marital boredom, irresolvable conflicts and estrangement. In general, the younger writers directly examine the process of marital breakdown more frequently and in more detail than the older writers, and show a much greater acceptance of divorce.

In their presentation of the factors that lead to marriage, similarities and differences between the three groups of writers become immediately apparent. All the writers, regardless of age, present love as the ideal foundation of marriage, although discussion earlier in this chapter has shown that the young writers and Ru Zhijuan have quite divergent views on what this love should be based on. Writers of different age-groups, however, present their characters as having significantly divergent views on what degree of physical intimacy commits them to marriage.

In Ru Zhijuan's "Boat Without a Rudder," we saw that a key factor in Zhang Min's decision to marry a woman he did not love was the fact that he had once kissed her. In Zhang Jie's "Emerald," for twenty years, the heroine regards herself as married to a man because she spent one night with him, and in Shen Rong's "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," a woman deliberately becomes pregnant so that her lover will have to divorce his wife and marry her. In contrast, in the works of the younger writers, there is no degree of physical intimacy that characters consider obliges them to get married. The actress in Zhang Xinxin's "The Last Mooring Place" has sexual relations with a playwright, but does not consider herself married, and unlike the heroine of "Emerald" goes on to have relationships with other men. In Zhang Kangkang's The Invisible Companion, despite the fact that the heroine and her boyfriend have already had sexual intercourse, he is delighted and surprised when she agrees to marry him. Clearly he did not regard sexual relations as

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108 "Zuihou de tingbodi" ("The Last Mooring Place").

109 Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion).
necessarily leading to marriage. In Wang Anyi’s "Love in a Small Town," the central female character does not even consider that pregnancy obliges her to marry. Although she is carrying twins, she steadfastly refuses to confirm the name of the father because she does not want to marry him. These differences in attitudes presented by the writers reflect the more liberal attitude to sex of the younger writers, and the fact that Zhang Jie and Shen Rong’s stories depict events of the 1950s while the younger writers set their works in the 1970s and 1980s also reflects the rapid changes that occurred in social attitudes to the relationship between sex and marriage in the intervening twenty to thirty years.

Although the younger writers present their characters as pursuing love as the ideal basis of marriage, some of Wang Anyi’s works also indicate that this is still largely an urban phenomenon. "Da Liu Village" (1985), directly contrasts courtship and marriage in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution period with the situation of youth in Shanghai.

The city youth, two young men and a girl, freely associate with one another socially, and the girl agrees to "try out" one of the men as her boyfriend, without committing herself to anything permanent. Her parents are not mentioned and apparently were not consulted. Among the villagers, however, trial relationships are clearly not socially acceptable, and not only the older generation, but also the young people generally regard marriage as something to be arranged entirely by one’s parents. When an offer of marriage comes for Da Zhizi, her parents are hesitant.

110 "Xiao cheng zhi lian" ("Love in a Small Town").

111 Ru Zhijuan’s "Boat Without a Rudder," Wang Anyi’s "Love in a Small Town" and Zhang Kangkang’s The Invisible Companion are all set in the Cultural Revolution and depict relatively young couples from towns or cities, so that the differences in moral attitudes presented reflect differences between authors rather than general social attitudes at different historical times, or urban/rural differences.

112 "Da liu zhuang" ("Da Liu Village").

113 A girl is beaten by her father for having been seen holding hands with a young man (p 131).
because they fear that after his imminent promotion, the boy will drop her. They are reassured that the boy's parents want the marriage and he always does as they wish.\textsuperscript{114} Later, when delays in marriage arrangements do occur, Da Zhizi refuses to go personally to sort them out on the grounds that it is her parents' business not hers.\textsuperscript{115} The few girls who do rebel do not change general attitudes. When Xiao Mianzi refuses to marry a man saying she does not know him, her friends regard her as silly because "all marriages are like that."\textsuperscript{116} A girl who does defiantly marry the man of her own choice subsequently fights with him constantly, and wishes she had left her marriage to her parents.\textsuperscript{117} The picture presented of this area of the Anhui countryside in the mid-1970s is thus one in which traditional marriage practices still predominate, despite twenty-five years of communist propaganda work against arranged marriage. This stands out in contrast to the picture of a countryside where free choice of marriage was already replacing arranged marriages painted in the fiction of early communist writers such as Zhao Shuli,\textsuperscript{118} and the revival of this same theme by writers including Zhang Xian and Gao Xiaosheng in the early years after 1978.\textsuperscript{119}

Though in their 1978-1979 works the younger writers promote love as the basis for marriage, depicting with approval characters who resist

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid p 138.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid p 209.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid p 210.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid p 181.

\textsuperscript{118} For example, See Zhao Shuli, Zhao Shuli xiaoshuo xuan (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1979), "Dengji" ("Registration"), pp 289-317, and "Xiao Erhei jiehun" ("Little Blacky Gets Married"), pp 1-16.

social pressure and the lure of material gain in their pursuit of ideal love, when they began to examine marital relations in their works after 1980, the picture they presented was much less romantic. In the most optimistic view of married life presented by the younger writers, Wang Anyi’s "Life in a Small Courtyard" (1980), of the four loving couples depicted, two have constant quarrels over money and the wife’s jealousy respectively, one happily resolves a major dispute in the course of the story, and a newly married couple recognises they are bound to have problems but believe love will help them through. Thus even in this picture of couples united by love, marriage is depicted as a difficult relationship vulnerable to all kinds of internal and external pressures, that requires much hard work and forbearance to make it succeed. "Life in a Small Courtyard" concludes that these couples are happy because they still have love. Wang’s later works and works by the other young writers show that love is not always sufficient for happiness, and look at the multiplicity of factors that lead to marital discontent and marital breakdown.

In the works of Zhang Jie, marital breakdown is usually caused by domestic brutality against women. In comparison, the younger writers seldom depict domestic violence and are less inclined to apportion all the blame for marital breakdown to men alone. Where they do blame men, it is in protest against men’s attempts to restrict their wives’ freedom and career development. Zhang Kangkang’s "Faint Morning Mist" (1980) sympathetically depicts a woman’s rebellion against this traditional subordination of women. Meimei’s husband, whom she married for love, dictates everything from what she may wear outside the house to who she may maintain friendships with, and prevents her from attending night school, so that after a year of marriage she feels constrained by "formless

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120 For example: Zhang Xinxin, "Zai jingjing de bingfangli" ("In the Quiet Ward"); Zhang Kangkang, "Ai de quanli" ("The Right to Love") and "Feizoule gezi" ("Fly Away, Dove"); and Wang Anyi, "Yige shaonu de fannao" ("A Girl’s Vexation") and "Yu, sha sha sha" ("Misty Rain").

121 "Dandan de chen wu" ("Faint Morning Mist").
fetters." Political events in the late Seventies bring the relationship to crisis point and Meimei decides to leave the husband she now recognises as a ruthless political animal. Chauvinistic male demands on their wives to abandon their careers and play a traditional domestic role also cause major problems for a journalist and her husband in Zhang Kangkang's "Pagoda"122 (1983) and are a factor in leading the central characters of Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon"123 to the brink of divorce, even though they remain fond of each other to the end. Like Shen Rong in "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," in each case, the writers express strong support for their female characters' pursuit of personal development, and criticise the subordination of women in traditional marital relationships. But while in Shen Rong's story, Yang Yueyue only obtained release from a repressive relationship by being abandoned by her husband, in the young writers' works, the women are shown either forcing their husbands to accept their demands ("Pagoda") or where this fails, taking decisive steps to release themselves through divorce.

Zhang Xinxin's "Dreams of Our Generation"124 is a pessimistic study of what may happen if women do limit themselves to a largely domestic role, seeking to gain satisfaction only through their husbands' achievements. The protagonist submitted to social pressure to marry quickly because of her age, and after marriage sank rapidly into the same vulgar habits she had once detested: haggling over prices in the vegetable market; gossiping about unmarried girls; constantly watching jealously to see what other people have; endlessly bickering with her husband; eavesdropping on the neighbour. Once an avid reader, she now only knits and watches television in her spare time. The dreams and ideals of her girlhood fade as domestic trivia dominate her life. All that remains is the

122 "Ta" ("Pagoda").

123 "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang" ("On the Same Horizon").

124 "Women zhege nianji de meng" ("Dreams of Our Generation").
memory of a boy who declared his love for her when they were children. He becomes the ideal husband of her imagination and she constantly compares what her husband does to what he "would have done." But even this dream is destroyed when she discovers that the boy is now the neighbour she detests. Zhang Xinxin's message is clearly that if women have no independent goals and interests, they may become spiritually and intellectually stunted. "Dreams of Our Generation" thus supports by negative example the call for women to reject their traditional, mainly domestic and subordinate role.

Another potential cause of marital breakdown discussed by the younger writers is social and educational differences between partners. This traditionally sensitive issue reemerged in the early years after the communists took power, when a significant number of Party officials divorced rural women they had married during the Party's years based in the countryside and married more sophisticated city women.125 Shen Rong's "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre" is a study the fate of one such country woman that takes the traditional moral stance and criticises the husband's actions. When the younger writers discuss similar problems, however, they concentrate not on the moral issues involved, but on the harsh realities of interpersonal relationships. The central female characters in Wang Anyi's "Glittering Fallen Leaves"126 and Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon," and the central male character in Wang Anyi's "Returning"127 all recognise that if they fall behind their partners intellectually, their partners will soon lose interest in them. In "Glittering Fallen Leaves," a wife who has made great sacrifices to help her husband

125 Traditionally, men who abandoned their wives after their circumstances changed were regarded as villains, as the legendary notoriety of Chen Shimei confirms. The extent of the problem after the communists took power in the cities can be deduced from the fact that internal Party directives tried to control it by designating punishment in the form of restrictions on promotion for offending Party members.


through university, finds him becoming bored with her and taking more pleasure in the company of a female fellow student who shares his new interests. Far from blaming him for their gradual estrangement, she sees it as an unpleasant but inevitable development, and resolves to further her own education to close the gap between them. "Returning" presents a similar situation and outcome. Wang Anyi was criticised by some critics for offering understanding of the husband’s seeming faithlessness in "Glittering Fallen Leaves," but repeated the same views five years later in People of the Old Course of the Yellow River, thus showing her confidence in her own independent assessment of reality over the orthodox moral view.

In Zhang Xinxin’s "On the Same Horizon," it is partly fear of the emergence of an intellectual gulf between herself and her husband that convinces the central female character she must pursue an independent career. The novella, however, suggests that women who do so may still be faced with marital breakdown, for as the heroine becomes preoccupied with the study of film directing, the couple find they have little time or energy to devote to one another. She is constantly disappointed by his seeming lack of interest in her achievements, while he resents her withdrawal of domestic support. As differences between them magnify for lack of opportunity to resolve them, the couple draws inexorably closer to divorce.

The heroine of "On the Same Horizon" finds herself in an unresolvable dilemma: a purely domestic role leaves her intellectually unfulfilled and afraid of becoming boring to her husband, but pursuit of a career and her abandonment of traditional wifely duties also causes marital breakdown, leaving her lonely and emotionally unfulfilled. The conflict between love, marriage and career is thus presented as irreconcilable. The difficulties facing women who try to combine marriage

128 See for example Zhong Jinlong "Wei baihuai daode mingluo kaidao" ("Blowing the Trumpet for Degenerate Morals"), Qingchun, No 4, 1982; and Shao Zhongyi, "Yige bu zhenshi de yishu xingxiang" ("An Unrealistic Artistic Image"), Zuopin yu zhengming, No 9, 1982.
and career are also touched on in Zhang Kangkang's "Pagoda," through the conflict between a journalist determined to succeed in her profession and her husband who wants her to have a baby. She became a journalist after they were married, and reflections by the husband indicate that had he known she would become an ambitious career woman, he may not have married her. 129 In Shen Rong's "At Middle Age" (Lu Wenting), and Zhang Jie's "Tangram" (Jin Naiwen), female characters face similar conflicts between the demands of traditional domestic roles and career, but whereas in the older writers' works the women attempt to shoulder this double burden with tragic results (Lu Wenting has a heart attack and Jin Naiwen becomes schizophrenic), in the works of the younger writers, women demand a reduction in their domestic burden, even at the cost of marital breakdown.

Other works by the younger writers cover a wide range of marital problems. Wang Anyi's "Central Zhulu Road" 130 and Zhang Xinxin's "The Stage," 131 look at the results of wives' jealousy and suspicion from a comic and tragic point of view respectively. Wang Anyi's "Love in Beautiful Gorge," 132 "The Love Connection" 133 and "Thirty Chapters of the Flow of Life" 134 all present couples whose marriages have become insipid through over-familiarity, while her "Love on a Barren Mountain" 135 and "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" 136 both show the

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129 "Ta" ("Pagoda"), p 561.


131 "Wutai" ("The Stage").


134 "Liu shui sanshi zhang" ("Thirty Chapters of the Flow of Life").

destruction of marital relationships by extramarital affairs. Zhang Kangkang's "Pagoda" presents one couple for whom money matters are a constant source of friction. Problems are as many and varied as the couples the writers present, and leave the reader with a strong sense of the fragility of marital relationships not conveyed by the works of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie. This is because overall the older writers present a significant number of happy marriages which act as a balance to those that have broken down, and rarely depict the actual process of marital breakdown, tending to concentrate instead on the problems facing women who are already divorced.

In view of the young writers' pessimistic attitude to marriage, and their relatively liberal attitude to morality, it is not surprising that they also present a liberal attitude to divorce. Earlier discussion showed that the older writers only depicted divorce actually taking place in cases where one partner had committed a serious moral transgression against the other, but in the younger writers' works reasons for divorce are more varied.

Zhang Kangkang's works tend to depict divorces caused by growing differences in the outlook and ideals of partners. In line with the fairly political orientation of her writings, her characters reject their partners because of differences in their political ideals ("Early Morning Mist"), their outlook on society and life ("Northern Lights"), or a combination of all three (The Invisible Companion). Nevertheless in expressing support for divorce in "Faint Morning Mist," the author focuses not on the political differences between the couple as veteran writer Wei Junyi did in "Baptism," but on the resultant loss of love. On doing so she strongly attacks traditional attitudes condemning divorce:

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137 For example the happy marriages of Yimei in "Qiqiaoban" ("Tangram") and that of the narrator in "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre") contrast with the unhappy marriages of Jin Naiwen and Yang Yueyue in the same stories.
"That outmoded era that regarded marriage as a rope, and the family as a cage ought to end. When the conditions that produced love change, those who love each other will change with them and are blameless. Everything is in motion and love even more so. It also needs development and renewal."\(^{138}\)

Zhang Kangkang’s criticism of traditional attitudes to divorce concurs with those of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie, but in actually depicting divorce on the basis of lack of love, she goes further than any of the older writers. Her view of love as a temporary emotion in need of constant renewal,\(^{139}\) also contrasts strongly with Zhang Jie’s view of love in "The Sixth Poplar," "Flowers for Dajiang" and "Love is not to be Forgotten" as being able to be maintained eternally without hope or stimulation.

Zhang Xinxin’s "The Last Mooring Place" and Wang Anyi’s *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River* depict divorce for incompatibility. In Wang Anyi’s novel, a dancer who constantly quarrels with her husband successfully demands a divorce, while in "The Last Mooring Place," a couple who marry after corresponding for years find that neither is what the other had expected, and agree to divorce amicably. In contrast, in "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong," Shen Rong depicted a couple who maintained their marriage through quarrels and finally stony indifference because they feared social censure if they divorced, while in "Boat Without a Rudder," Ru Zhijuan depicts the heroine rejecting the idea of divorce for her husband’s sake, even though she does not love him and is unhappy in the relationship.

In "On the Same Horizon," Zhang Xinxin presents a woman determined to divorce because the traditional role demanded of her as a wife hinders the development of her career. Her husband does not maltreat her, and they remain fond of each other to the end. This forms a sharp contrast with divorces depicted in Zhang Jie’s works, where the

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\(^{138}\) "Dandan de chen wu" ("Faint Morning Mist"), p 52.

\(^{139}\) Also expressed in Wang Anyi, "Jinshanshan de luoye" ("Glittering Fallen Leaves").
women have invariably been physically or sexually abused by their partners.

The younger writers' characters thus divorce much more readily than those of the older writers. In particular, while in the older writers' fiction, couples tolerate loveless marriages unless they deteriorate into physical violence, the younger writers frequently depict couples for whom incompatibility or lack of love are sufficient reasons for divorce in themselves.

The younger writers also depict a more prominent role for women in initiating divorce than their older counterparts. In Shen Rong and Zhang Jie's works, where the initiator of divorce is made clear, it is usually the husband, as is the case with Yang Yueyue's divorce, and that of Cao Jinghua in "The Ark." In contrast in the fiction of the younger writers it is usually women who take decisive steps to end their marriages, the only exception being "The Last Mooring Place" where the couple reach a joint decision. This marked difference between writers of the two age-groups accurately reflects social changes that have occurred in China over the past few decades. Although just after the introduction of the new marriage law in 1950 there was a surge in female-initiated divorces, the conservative reaction to this, which included brutality against women, produced a new clampdown on divorce. Statistical analysis on divorce in the Eighties presents female-initiated divorce as a new trend, indicating that in the intervening period, divorce was probably more commonly male-initiated.

Compared with characters in the older writers' works, women depicted by the younger writers not only decide to divorce more readily, but find the process much less difficult, and the future after divorce much

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less daunting. Both Shen Rong and Zhang Jie depict divorce as a traumatic experience in which intense pressure from neighbours and colleagues must be withstood and exhausting legal processes weathered if success is to be achieved. Once divorced, female characters usually face loneliness, suspicion and discrimination. In the younger writers’ works, however, far from intervening to maintain marriages, peers are depicted actually encouraging divorce. Zhang Xinxin’s "On the Same Horizon," Wang Anyi’s People of the Old Course of the Yellow River, and Zhang Kangkang’s The Invisible Companion, all depict colleagues and friends advising women to leave their husbands, or expressing their approval of their decision to divorce. Difficulties involved in obtaining divorce are given little space, and the process is usually passed over as unimportant. Even in The Invisible Companion, in which the couple’s divorce is an important part of the plot, bureaucratic obstruction is easily overcome.

Outside interference is depicted as coming only from the older generation, as in "Northern Lights," where the protagonist’s mother unsuccessfully tries to make her change her mind.

For divorcees in the young writers’ works, life continues on in a normal fashion. The actress in "The Last Mooring Place" goes on to other relationships with men, and the dancer in People of the Old Course of the Yellow River remarries. Generally the works do not depict women being treated with suspicion or discriminated against because they are divorced. Zhang Xinxin’s "Which Half Will You Act This Time?"142 does look at the hardships faced by a divorced woman raising a child, but these are mainly economic problems, and there is no indication that she suffers from social prejudice. This is not to say that young divorced women no longer face any form of discrimination, but simply that the younger writers do not consider it a serious enough problem to make it an important issue in their works.

142 "Zheci ni yan na yi ban?" ("Which Half Will You Act This Time?").
The overall picture presented is thus of a society in which divorce is becoming much more readily accepted by the younger generations, where women can initiate and obtain divorce more freely and with less fear of being stigmatized than in the past.

Discussion of parent-child relationships by the younger writers looks at both relations between young people and their parents, and at the attitudes of young people - intellectual women in particular - to children.

In presenting characters' relations with their parents, the main focus is on the generation gap. Conflicts over children's political views, moral outlook, their lifestyle, language, hairstyles and clothing, familiar to Western readers, take on particular significance in the Chinese context where traditional concepts of filial piety demand absolute obedience to the wishes of parents. Zhang Kangkang's "Northern Lights" and "Travelling Afar," Wang Anyi's People of the Old Course of the Yellow River, and Zhang Xinxin's "The Son Who Became a Father," all talk of the impossibility of the two generations achieving mutual understanding. Zhang Kangkang in particular puts most of the blame on the older generation. In "Northern Lights," when the heroine's mother attempts to stop her withdrawing from a loveless marriage, the narrator comments:

"Today there are many families like this, where the two generations find it difficult to understand each other. Between the two, apart from the great disparity in knowledge, is the gulf of time and difference in understanding of the meaning of life. Cencen didn't believe that in this gulf it was always the older generation that was wrong. Weren't there some parents who were more optimistic and cheerful, more full of vitality than their children? But Cencen's parents weren't like that, and most of the families she had contact with weren't like that either."  

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143 "Beiji guang" ("Northern Lights"); "Qu yuanfang" ("Travelling Afar").

144 Zhang Xinxin, "Dang le fuqin de erzi" ("The Son Who Became a Father"), Chou xiao ya, No 8, 1983, pp 27-30.

145 "Beiji guang" ("Northern Lights"), pp 154-55.
In "Travelling Afar," the non-conformist heroine, regarding attempts at persuasion useless, appeals to a friend’s disapproving parents for mutual toleration:

"In fact neither of us could possibly convince the other, isn’t that so? You don’t want to live the way we do, so why do you insist that we live the way you do?... Let neither of us interfere with the other, and allow time to give its answer [as to who is correct]."\textsuperscript{146}

Zhang Kangkang thus sees the generation gap as generally caused by the older generation’s lack of knowledge and vitality, and their inability to understand social change. The only solution presented is mutual non-interference. Zhang Xinxin’s "The Son Who Became a Father," which depicts a man re-evaluating his difficult relationship with his father after the birth of his son, is critical of this attitude. While she describes the gap as "of unfathomable depth," she also criticises those people who use the words "generation gap" as "a refuge where the two sides in confrontation can dodge their contradictions," and calls for calm, penetrating discussion between the sides.\textsuperscript{147} Whereas Zhang Kangkang presented the problem as peculiar to the current generation of youth and their parents, Zhang Xinxin depicts her character coming to recognise its universal nature: just as he rejects his father’s values and beliefs, so his father had once rebelled against his father and joined the communist revolution. The discovery that his father feels guilty about his insensitive actions in his youth, makes the protagonist view his own behaviour in a much broader context, and so lose his desire to constantly confront his parent’s beliefs.

Thus while Zhang Kangkang’s works present a narrow view of the problem and offer a negative solution - non-interference, Zhang Xinxin presents the generation gap as part of the universal human condition and

\textsuperscript{146} "Qu yuanfang" ("Travelling Afar"), p 109.

\textsuperscript{147} "Dangle fuqin de erzi" ("The Son Who Became a Father"), p 29.
advocates acceptance of generational differences on the basis of an understanding of this fact.

The younger writers rarely depict their main characters as parents. Most protagonists are either young unmarried men and women, or childless couples. Where attitudes to children are discussed, there is a marked difference between the attitudes attributed to educated women by Zhang Kangkang and Zhang Xinxin and those depicted in women from lower socio-economic strata by Wang Anyi.

The educated women presented generally display a very negative attitude to having children. In Zhang Xinxin’s "On the Same Horizon," the heroine has an abortion so that the child will not interfere with her pursuit of a career, while in Zhang Kangkang’s "Pagoda," journalist, Xiao Run responds angrily when her husband says she must have a baby because she is almost thirty:

"It’s precisely because I’m almost thirty that I have even less desire for a child. Thirty years old and I’ve achieved nothing... Before I can prove that I am a person useful to society, and before I have given full play to my talent, I will absolutely not use a child to hide my own inability! If I am a woman who can achieve something, I shall absolutely not waste my talent in my youth on having a baby... "

Thus while Ru Zhijuan’s works generally emphasised the strength and closeness of parent-child bonds over those between spouses, and the works of Zhang Jie and Shen Rong showed the opposite, these works by Zhang Xinxin and Zhang Kangkang stress concern with the self over that for spouses or children. This egocentric approach that regards children only as utilitarian objects to conceal inability, or simply a waste of one’s talent is perhaps a reaction to the intense pressure placed on women to have children as soon as they are married. It asserts the right of women to choose whether they will have children at all, a challenge to the

148 "Ta" ("Pagoda"), p 565.
traditional view that one of the main functions of marriage is to produce offspring. Further, while Zhang Jie’s characters offered altruistic reasons for their abortions, here the rationale is openly self-centred.

In a related area, Zhang Xinxin’s “Other People’s Sons,” Zhang Kangkang’s The Invisible Companion, examine their intellectual female protagonists’ lack of maternal instincts. The narrator in Zhang Xinxin’s story appreciates other people’s sons, but repeatedly declares she does not want one herself. Her desire to relate to her thirteen year-old god-son is in the relationship of “two he-men or a couple of children,” rather than in a maternal role. In The Invisible Companion, the heroine is "overwhelmed with a feeling close to revulsion" when she sees her newborn son for the first time, and even a month later, still cannot envisage herself as a mother. After leaving the baby to be raised by a wet-nurse, she feels no "so-called maternal grief," and finds the parting "something of a relief." In each work the characters compare their feelings with those commonly attributed to women in stories, and find their own reality quite different.

Both authors thus question common perceptions of how women feel about motherhood, but the protagonist in Zhang Kangkang’s novel feels guilty about her lack of maternal feeling, while in "Other People’s Sons," the narrator mockingly describes herself as "callous and unfit for the position," indicating that they are both uncomfortable about not being able to comply with these perceptions.

149 Zhang Xinxin, “Bieren de erzi" ("Other People’s Sons"), Zuojia, No 4, 1989, pp 48-50.

150 Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), p 186.

151 Ibid p 217.

152 Zhang Xinxin, "Bieren de erzi" ("Other People’s Sons") p 48; Zhang Kangkang, Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), pp 186, 217.

153 Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), p 216.

154 "Bieren de erzi" ("Other People’s Sons"), p 48.
Wang Anyi’s "Love in a Small Town" and "The Love Connection"155 in contrast depict the parental devotion of non-intellectuals. In "The Love Connection," two factory workers whose love for each other has faded, give birth to a long-awaited child. Though love between them is not rekindled, their common delight in and devotion to their son forms a new bond between them. "Love in a Small Town" concludes with a eulogy of motherhood. The heroine, a single dancer, finds the "frenzied sexual desire" that had tormented her disappears after she becomes pregnant, and is replaced by intense maternal love. She refuses to have an abortion, and despite the extreme difficulty of raising twins alone on a meagre salary, resists advice to give one of them up for adoption. Motherhood brings her a new sense of satisfaction and tranquillity. Watching her children play, she feels the "sacred solemnity" of her role as mother.

This contrast in the way women of different social strata are depicted relating to their children can be traced back to the importance that intellectual women place on self-development. Because of the social reality that women are still expected to assume most of the responsibility for child raising in China, an ambitious woman genuinely would find a child a hinderance to her career.

One of the clearest differences between the young writers and the two older groups is in their presentation of and attitude to sex. As we have noted above, Ru Zhijuan makes no reference to sex in her works, while Shen Rong and Zhang Jie usually only approach the subject indirectly. In looking at the importance of sex in marriage, for example, Shen Rong felt it necessary to approach her topic through the vehicle of encouraging women to pay attention to their appearance. Zhang Jie’s very negative attitude to sex is expressed through women’s non-specific memories of abuse and humiliation. Further, the three older writers all present marriage as the only morally acceptable context for sexual relations. In contrast, the younger writers depict sexual relations with

155 "Ai de chuanlian" ("The Love Connection").
increasing directness and an increasingly positive attitude as the period progresses, and extra-marital sex is widely depicted.

In line with their relative conservatism in the early years of the period, the extra-marital sexual relationships depicted by the young writers before 1983 were mostly exposures of female exploitation. Wang Anyi’s "A Corner of the Wide World" (1980), and "Once Around the Commune" (1982), both depict city girls sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution being forced to give sexual favours to local Party officials in return for the chance to be assigned to a desirable factory job. In both of these works the emphasis is on condemnation of male exploitation, and sympathy for the innocent girls who are their victims. The question of sex is not raised in stories of the pursuit of romantic love, except as something to be guarded against. In Wang Anyi’s "Misty Rain" (1980), for example, the young female protagonist is very wary of the young man who ferries her on his bicycle, in case he has sexual designs on her. Thus sex is presented as something forced on women by unscrupulous men, and questions of female desire are not considered.

Nevertheless, even in these early works, the young writers showed a positive attitude towards a lesser degree of physical intimacy. In contrast to the disapproval expressed in Ru Zhijuan’s works, and the distaste shown in Zhang Jie’s for any physical expression of affection or desire, Wang Anyi’s "When the Flute Plays Solo" and "Life in a Small Courtyard" (both 1980), and Zhang Xinxin’s "On the Same Horizon" (1981),

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156 Conservative in the sense that, in line with the traditional view of "good" women, the females involved are all unwilling. This is not to deny the value of these works’ exposure of this kind of exploitation of women.

157 "Guangkuo tiandi de yijiao" ("A Corner of the Wide World") and "Rao gongshe yizhou" ("Once Around the Commune").

158 "Yu, sha sha sha" ("Misty Rain").

159 For Ru Zhijuan, see the discussion on page 129-130. In Zhang’s works, the heroine of "Zumulu" ("Emerald") does kiss her boyfriend and then spend the night with him, but Zhang tells us she has halitosis. She also depicts sexual relations in "Ta you shenme bing" ("What’s Wrong With Him?"), but emphasises their bestial nature.
all depict as acceptable behaviour couples affectionately embracing or kissing. Significantly, in "When the Flute Plays Solo," the kiss is a public act of defiance by two young people against the repressive moral attitudes of the older generation. Thus, the generational differences in expressed attitudes discernable between writers are here directly reflected in fiction.

Between 1983 and 1986, as the overall trend in Chinese society was towards a more liberal attitude to morality, the younger writers gradually began to present sexual relations in a less negative light. In Zhang Xinxin's "The Last Mooring Place" (1983), the narrator recalls a sexual encounter with a young playwright who had shown a strong interest in her, but subsequently failed even to write to her. While the incident is clearly a protest against male duplicity, and so continues the earlier presentation of sex as basically exploitative of women, the role and attitude of the woman is already different from those in Wang Anyi's early stories. First, the experience does not leave her overwhelmed with the shame and despair felt by the girls in Wang Anyi's stories. There is no suggestion that she either has been or should feel degraded, or that she has done anything immoral. Second, the woman acknowledges to readers her own sexual desire for the man. Her love for him was "no longer a pure first love untouched by sexual passion." Thus she is not only "giving him what he wants" (as she describes it), but, by implication, satisfying her own desires as well.\(^{160}\)

A similar presentation of sexual relations appears both in Wang Anyi's "Annals of a Hemp Factory" (1984),\(^{161}\) in which a rusticated city youth evokes the disapproval of his peers by having an affair with a village girl, and in her novella "Da Liu Village" (1985). In the latter, a youth takes advantage of his neighbour's infatuation with him to have sexual relations with her, and then plans to leave for the countryside without telling her. But though this is another case of male duplicity,

\(^{160}\) "Zuihou de tingbodi" ("The Last Mooring Place"), p 337.

Wang Anyi does not condemn him through attitudes expressed by the narrator or other characters as occurs in "The Last Mooring Place" or "Annals of a Hemp Factory," but simply presents events and characters' thoughts objectively. Only her selection of "facts" carries an implicit criticism of the young man.

Wang Anyi's gradual switch to a more neutral authorial stance was completed with the publication of "Xiao Bao Village" (1985). Here for the first time she presents an extra-marital sexual relationship (between Shilai and Fourth Sister-in-law) which, even if unusual, is not exploitative, and in doing so does not offer readers any guidance as to what moral judgement they should pass on the couple. The neutral moral stance Wang adopts here is maintained in her later works dealing specifically with love and sex, and is representative of a trend discernable in the works of the other young women writers after 1986.

1985 saw an unprecedented upsurge of public interest in sex in Chinese society. The theories of Sigmund Freud became very popular among intellectuals, and symposiums and workshops were held to discuss social questions relating to sex. As part of this social trend, literature also began to depict sex much more openly, and the publication of Zhang Xianliang's "Half of Man is Woman" in October 1985, signalled that writers now had more freedom to examine sex in their works than had been previously allowed under communist rule. In this atmosphere of relative tolerance, the years 1986 to 1989 saw the three younger women writers produce fiction that examined sexual relationships with fewer inhibitions than had probably ever been shown by women writers in China.

In works of this period, the young writers reach a complete acceptance of pre-marital sex. In Zhang Kangkang's full-length novel The

162 Unusual because the woman is considerably older than the man.

163 See for example the discussion of Zhang Kangkang's "Yong bu chanhui" ("Never Repent") on page 65.

Invisible Companion, and Wang Anyi's short novel People of the Old Course of the Yellow River, both published in 1986, the main characters both undergo a change of attitude towards sexual morality. Xiaoxiao, the heroine of Zhang Kangkang's novel, moves from refusing her boyfriend's sexual advances with "shame" and "disgust," to initiating their first lovemaking without any indication of guilt or regret. Likewise, in People of the Old Course of the Yellow River, the central character, Yang Sen is appalled and disgusted as a teenager to learn that his brother's girlfriend is pregnant, but later on is unperturbed by sexual relationships between his unmarried friends and colleagues.

Wang Anyi's novel also reflects similar long-term attitudinal changes in broader society. A young girl caught having an affair with a married man in the 1950s, was almost beaten to death by her father, suffered permanent social ostracism, and was never able to marry because she was not a virgin. However, in the novel's present, (the late 1970s), a dancer, also known to be no longer a virgin, is not ostracised by her colleagues, and eventually marries one of them. When a seventeen year-old musician commits suicide because he was discovered in bed with his neighbour's daughter, the members of the theatre troupe react with incomprehension: to them a sexual affair is already of no great consequence. This attitude is also supported by Zhang Xinxin in her 1988 work "Which Half Will You Act This Time?," in which the narrator casually complains at the awkwardness and inconvenience of spending the night with her boyfriend in the lounge when guests are using the only bedroom.

Zhang Kangkang's 1987 work "Never Repent" even goes so far as to offer understanding of one girl's promiscuity. The girl, unjustly

165 Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), p 27.
166 Huanghe gudao ren (People of the Old Course of the Yellow River), p 314.
167 Ibid pp 20 and 70.
168 "Yong bu chanhui" ("Never Repent").
"exiled" to a remote part of the northeastern farm she had been sent to during the Cultural Revolution, slept with any man who went to visit her. But through the narrator, Zhang Kangkang refuses to condemn either her or the men, pointing out that she did it because she was lonely, while they in turn treated her well, helping her with her heaviest tasks. Zhang Kangkang's purpose is not to defend promiscuity as such, but to argue that conventional standards of sexual morality are not adequate to judge the girl's behaviour, and, more generally, that since everyone has made mistakes, no one is qualified to pass moral judgement on others.

As well as treating pre-marital sex as a natural and blameless occurrence, the young writers' post-1986 works also display a matter-of-fact acceptance of extra-marital sexual relationships. As early as 1983, Zhang Xinxin had sympathetically depicted the central character of "The Last Mooring Place" having an affair with a married man. Questions of morality are never raised, and the woman's final decision to end the relationship is based not on moral considerations, but on her own impatience with the secrecy the affair entails. The narrator does not make it clear whether their relationship became any more physical than holding hands as they strolled or dined together, but her basic attitude is obviously quite different from that of Zhang Jie's characters in "Love is Not to be Forgotten," who take pains to stress both the purely spiritual nature of their love, and their self-denial for the sake of social good.

In the few cases where the middle-aged writers do depict extra-marital sexual affairs, it is in connection with the associated morality. In Leaden Wings, Zhang Jie reveals Xia Zhuyun's infidelity in order to condemn her as immoral. In Shen Rong's "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," the adulterous relationship between Yang Yueyue's husband and a university graduate is considered in terms of what moral judgement should be passed on them, the narrator softening her critical attitude when she realises that the girl was motivated by sincere love.

In contrast, when the young writers present extra-marital sex in their works, it is not to discuss questions of morality, but to examine the
nature of relations between men and women, and to examine sex itself as a basic human instinct. This is clearly illustrated by the 1986-1989 works of Wang Anyi.

"Love on a Barren Mountain" (1986), and "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" (1989), trace the development of extra-marital sexual love from mutual indifference to uncontrollable infatuation. Both novellas present sexual passion as an involuntary, irrepressible drive, more powerful than any constraints - legal or moral - that society can impose on the individual, or the individual can impose on him- or her- self. In "Love on a Barren Mountain," a man and woman, both happily married to other people, destroy their reputations, their families, their careers, and finally their own lives in their uncontrollable passion for one another. Social censure from their colleagues, physical violence from the woman’s husband, and their own sense of guilt over letting down their spouses and children, all become unimportant compared to their being together. The narrator comments: "They already had no morality, no shame. They willingly degenerated, no longer regarding themselves as decent people..." In the same way, Yang Guoxu in "The Epoch at Gangshang Village," is socially disgraced, loses the position of village leader his family have held for generations, and is jailed for rape, but is still irresistibly drawn to the student Li Xiaoqin, the cause of his downfall. She had originally seduced Yang in a desperate attempt to be assigned a city job, then accused him of rape when another student was chosen. But her sexual desire for him leads her to risk the chance of a future transfer to the city, as well as her reputation, by secretly keeping him in her room after his release from jail.

Despite the narrator’s comment that the couple in "Love on a Barren Mountain" "willingly degenerated, no longer regarded themselves as decent people," the authorial stance is completely neutral, such negative

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169 This is also true of some of the younger writers’ other works depicting sex published after 1986: Wang Anyi’s "Xiao cheng zhi lian" ("Love in a Small Town") and Zhang Kangkang’s Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), are the clearest examples.

170 "Huang shan zhi lian" ("Love on a Barren Mountain"), p 93.
depictions being balanced out with comments like those of the girl's mother, who after the double suicide of the girl and her lover considers her daughter lucky to have found true love.\textsuperscript{171} In "The Epoch at Gangshang Village," Wang even presents the adulterers in a positive light, describing them as "seeming very pure and beautiful" in their lovemaking.\textsuperscript{172}

"The Epoch at Gangshang Village" provides a fascinating illustration of the extent to which the young writers' depiction of sex changed during the 1980s, for the setting (the countryside in the Cultural Revolution period) and characters (rusticated city girls and local officials) are identical to those in Wang Anyi's early stories, "A Corner of the Wide World" and "Once Around the Commune." Whereas in the early works the girls were the innocent victims of unscrupulous men, in "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" the roles have been reversed. The girl, Li Xiaoqin, not only carefully plans her seduction of the honest brigade leader, but plays the dominating role throughout the relationship. In contrast with the young girls who are emotionally and socially ruined by their experiences in the early works, Li Xiaoqin ruins the social and political life of her lover, but keeps her own reputation and prospects for advancement intact. Within this framework of the relationship based on the dominant female role, however, "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" constantly emphasises the mutual satisfaction the lovers derive from each other's company.

The later works of the young women writers also examines a related subject which is not considered by the older women writers - female sexuality. Ru Zhijuan and Zhang Jie's works both emphasise the spiritual side of male-female relationships to the exclusion of considerations of sexuality, while even in encouraging readers to recognise the importance of sex in marriage in "Can't be Bothered to Divorce," Shen Rong presents the problem from a distinctly male point of view: women

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid p 102.

\textsuperscript{172} "Gangshang de shiji" ("The Epoch at Gangshang Village"), p 42.
are urged to dress attractively to stimulate their husbands, but no mention is made of women having any needs of their own. In this respect they may be influenced by the very negative Confucian attitude towards female sexuality. The fear and disgust associated with female sexual desire, typified by the historical condemnation of Pan Jinlian, was carried through into literature of the communist period,\textsuperscript{173} and has acted as a powerful cultural barrier to literary exploration of female sexuality as a normal phenomenon. The younger writers, however, began to acknowledge female sexuality in the early part of the Eighties, and after 1986 moved on to explore it in detail.

As mentioned above, the earliest works by the young writers presented sex only in the context of the exploitation of women, and questions of female desire were not considered. In 1983, however, Zhang Xinxin's "The Last Mooring Place" and Wang Anyi's "Scaffolding Before the Window" both began to broach the subject. "The Last Mooring Place" simply briefly acknowledges female sexual desire by having the female narrator admit her love for a playwright was tinged with sexual passion, but "Scaffolding Before the Window"\textsuperscript{174} depicts in more detail sexual attraction from a female point of view.

The story follows the increasing attraction a young intellectual woman feels for the head of a maintenance team working in the building where she lives. Though sex is not mentioned, the attraction is purely physical. Drawn by his masculine physique and authoritative manner as he supervises the work team, she "hoped he would order her about." But this desire to be dominated is frustrated, as he always becomes rather timid and restrained in her presence. Thus the sexual attraction fades, speeded by their rapid discovery that they have nothing in common to talk


\textsuperscript{174} Wang Anyi, "Chuangqian daqi jiaoshoujia" ("Scaffolding before the Window"), Liu shi, pp 391-416.
about. Wang Anyi suggests through the story that intellectual and social compatibility is necessary if sexual relationships are to last, but in expounding this theme, she takes an important first step in exploring female sexuality.

Like the young writers' examination of sexual relationships, their treatment of female sexuality became much more frank and detailed after 1986. In Zhang Xinxin's "On the Road," the lonely female narrator longs for someone to embrace her, while in "Which Half Will You Act This Time?," she raises the question of the unfulfilled sexual needs of a young divorced mother. Zhang Kangkang's *The Invisible Companion* uses explicit symbolism to describe the mixture of pain and pleasure the heroine feels during her first experience of intercourse, as well as the awakening of strong sexual desire in her after her marriage. Wang Anyi's "Love in a Small Town," "Love on a Barren Mountain," and "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" all detail the development of sexual passion in their female protagonists, but her most perceptive examination of female sexuality appears in "Love in Beautiful Gorge."

This novella describes, from the point of view of the female protagonist, a brief romance between a woman editor and a middle-aged writer at a conference at the mountain resort of Lu Shan. Bored with a rather insipid marriage, the woman becomes attracted to the writer through accidental physical and eye contact at their first meeting. From then on the affair develops rapidly, though how much is her fantasy and how much reality is not clear and not really important. Awareness of him makes her aware of herself. She becomes intensely conscious of everything she does and says, wanting to present a beautiful image for his contemplation. She spends a long time examining herself in the mirror, and alone in bed at night, she derives a narcissistic pleasure from an

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175 Zhang Xinxin, "Zai lushang" ("On the Road"), *Shouhuo*, No 1, 1986, pp 162-240.

176 *Yinxing banlu* (*The Invisible Companion*), p 74.

177 *Ibid* p 161.
awareness of her own attractive female body. She is filled with the sense that something is about to happen, and this sexual anticipation leads her to fantasize about her heart entering his body. By the time he first kisses her in reality, she feels that "in their hearts they had already kissed thousands of times." Throughout the story the writer remains an indistinct figure, whose main significance is that he acts as the catalyst to her "rediscovery that she is a woman," so that "only now did she have self-consciousness of her sex."

As with the stories discussed earlier, the author makes no attempt to assess the morality of this extra-marital affair, but simply uses it as the framework for exploring female sexuality. Both the ordinary background of the woman, and the fact that she is identified only as "she," tends to give the character a universal significance, thus implicitly challenging the traditional tendency to depict only negative female characters as having any sexual feelings.

As the younger writers became more open in depicting sexual relationships in their writings, the language they used to describe sexual activities and feelings became more explicit. In the older writers' works, the fact that relationships have been sexual is almost invariably only made clear by the resulting pregnancy, as in the extra-marital affair depicted in Shen Rong's "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," and Xia Zhuyun's affair in Zhang Jie's *Leaden Wings*. Zhang Jie, describing the heroine's night with her boyfriend in "Emerald" (1984), simply says they "made love." Even in "What's Wrong With Him" (1986), Zhang Jie's most open depiction of sexual relations, she describes in detail the "bestial" sexual aggression of first the half-wit Hey's wife and then their daughter towards

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178 "Jinxiugu zhi lian" ("Love in Beautiful Gorge"), pp 15-16.

179 Ibid, p 15.


him, but once more avoids depicting sex itself, jumping from the women throwing themselves at him to the birth of their children.

In the younger writers' works, hints and euphemisms gradually gave way to clear symbolism and direct depiction. In Zhang Xinxin's 1983 short story "The Last Mooring Place," the protagonist's sexual encounter with a playwright is euphemistically described as "giving him what he wants." No further details are offered. By 1986, however, Zhang Kangkang was employing elaborate, even if rather clumsy symbolism to describe the male and female experience of sex. Her depiction of the woman's first sexual experience in particular is replete with phallic symbols: She was walking into a cave hung with "strangely shaped stalactites," where she met an elephant that "rolled her up in its trunk... She stroked its legs, like giant pillars, embraced it tightly. Carry me away! she said. I want to!..."¹⁸²

There are frequent images of the sea and the battle ground: The Invisible Companion refers to "that frenzied close combat,"¹⁸³ "those frenzied combats," "that eternal unceasing warfare."¹⁸⁴

In the male sexual experience, "an infinite sea of pounding waves seemed about to swallow them up..." The woman is "a sleek and slippery little fish." The use of fish as symbols for sexual activity is particularly interesting, as it can be traced back as far as recorded Chinese literature itself. The Book of Odes, which dates from the Zhou Dynasty (1100 - 700 BC) includes many references to fish which have been interpreted by some Chinese critics, including Wen Yiduo, as sexual in meaning.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Yinxing banlu (The Invisible Companion), p 74.
¹⁸³ Ibid p 70.
¹⁸⁴ Ibid p 154.
In "The Epoch at Gangshang Village" published in 1989, three years after Zhang Kangkang’s novel, Wang Anyi uses both the image of the battle ground and that of fish, but combines them with direct depiction of the lovers’ sexual play. In the following love scene, the man has just kissed "every inch" of the woman’s naked body:

"Surprised and delighted, she let him do as he wished... She mischievously played lazy, lying flat and not putting in the slightest effort, but his bones creaked and she couldn’t help joyously responding: Oh, oh, oh, oh ah!... Through her thick hair, she saw him swimming elatedly and mystically like a huge fish. In an instant she had become a tiny eel and began to sport with him."\(^{186}\)

Later in the same scene:

"She caressed him from head to foot. He was so tall that she caressed for a long time before she reached the end. As her soft little fingers made their endless march (xing jun) over his body, magma surged beneath its surface... Their bodies engaged in vigourous combat, finally combining two into one."\(^{187}\)

Descriptions like these would have been unthinkable a couple of years previously, and are unlikely ever to issue from the pens of the older writers. The fact that they could be published in a major Chinese literary journal indicates both the high level of official tolerance (or at least lack of control) in the first months of 1989, and the extent to which social attitudes to sex and sexual morality had changed in Chinese society during the 1980s, particularly among the younger generations.

\(^{186}\) "Gangshang de shiji" ("The Epoch at Gangshang Village"), p 36.

\(^{187}\) Ibid p 37.
Conclusions

The differences in attitudes to and presentation of love, marriage and sex in the works of the three groups of writers are most importantly a reflection of changes that have taken place in Chinese society, but can also be partially attributed to the personal experiences of the authors, and in some respects to their marital status.

Ru Zhijuan was born in 1925, and spent her early adulthood in the 1940s with the communist army. Thus the strongest influence on her moral views and values in her formative years was the strict, essentially traditional moral discipline of the communist troops. The fact that her work with the communist army was all in the countryside, also meant that she was not influenced by the less conservative moral attitudes of youth in the large cities. In the literary sphere at this time, liberal literary currents of the 1920s, that had produced Ding Ling's "The Diary of Miss Sophie," a work that frankly discusses a young woman's sexual desires, were already a thing of the past, as most prominent writers had switched away from exploring the self to producing writing to support the revolution. Particularly after Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942, such personal concerns as romantic love and sexual desire were banished from communist writers' works as literature was subordinated to politics. Ru herself began her writing career with the aim of producing works like the opera "The White-haired Girl," one of the most successful of the communists' propaganda pieces.

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188 Ding Ling, "Shafei nushi riji" ("The Diary of Miss Sophie"), Zhongguo nuxing zuojia hunlian xiaoshuo xuan, pp 123-158.

These two influences - traditional morality and Chinese communist literary dogma - helped to determine Ru’s basic choice and handling of subject matter. The Party’s stress on literature serving political ends led her to concentrate on expounding political themes through her fiction - eulogy of the new socialist order in her works of the 1950s and early 1960s, and criticism of social and political maladies in her post-1978 works. Even the few works that do depict marriage or family relations often carry a political message. "Sons and Daughters" for example, examines parent-child relations, but is more importantly a criticism of some communist officials’ loss of revolutionary vigour. The influence of traditional concepts of morality explains Ru’s expressed disapproval of open physical displays of affection or desire, and why she should choose not to touch on the subjects of sex and female sexuality in her works. Although the liberal views on divorce expressed in "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" show that these influences were not absolute, and did not necessarily extend to Ru’s personal attitudes, the fact that she rewrote the story removing its iconoclastic elements immediately after completing it indicates that traditional moral values formed the basic criteria for what she felt were appropriate views to express in her writings.

The situation of the middle-aged writers is in some ways similar to that of Ru Zhijuan. Shen Rong and Zhang Jie both reached adulthood in the morally conservative and politically idealistic atmosphere of the 1950s, and like Ru show the influence of traditional attitudes in their works in areas such as their avoidance of direct depiction or discussion of sex and female sexuality, and their presentation of marriage as the only acceptable context for sexual relations. However, unlike Ru Zhijuan, both women came from relatively less conservative urban intellectual backgrounds, and established their writing careers after the Cultural Revolution period, when Party controls on literature had been relaxed considerably and social attitudes to morality had already begun to change. Thus they tackle sensitive topics more frequently and more frankly than Ru does in her
works: for example, Shen Rong’s series of works examining problems in both traditional and modern marriages.

Personal experience has also played a role in determining Zhang Jie’s choice of subject matter and the attitudes she presents. Her special interest in the plight of middle-aged divorcees, as well as the difficulties they encountered in obtaining divorces is clearly a result of similar experiences of her own, while her very negative attitude to sex can be partly attributed to her unhappy first marriage. Her consistent depiction of love relationships in which the man is considerably older than the woman, could also be seen as a search for the father-figure she herself lost as a child when her parents separated.

While all the older writers reached adulthood in a morally conservative, politically optimistic environment, the younger writers grew up amidst the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution period. One of the aims of political movements of the period was to destroy traditional Chinese culture and establish a new proletarian culture, so that youth of the time learned to despise traditional, family-centred values. However, particularly among youth sent to the countryside (as all of the younger writers were), disillusionment at the disparity between high-sounding theories and the harsh reality of their rural surroundings, led them also to question the socially-oriented ideals and moral values espoused by the Communist Party. According to accounts of and by rusticated youth, sexual relationships became quite common between the young city people isolated from parental control and in despair at the prospect of having to remain permanently in the countryside,\(^{190}\) as well as between city youth trying to exchange sex for a transfer home, and local officials.\(^{191}\) Sexual

\(^{190}\) For example, Wang Anyi’s 69 jie chuzhong sheng (Student of Lower Middle School Class of ’69), Shouhuo, Nos 3 and 4, 1984, talks of a kindly woman cadre who discreetly helped pregnant rusticated city girls to arrange hospital abortions. In Huanghe gudao ren (People of the Old Course of the Yellow River), the hero’s brother’s girlfriend also has an abortion after becoming pregnant in the countryside. In Yige hongweibing de zibai (Vindication of a Red Guard), Liang Xiaosheng also contrasts the puritanical attitudes of idealistic youth in the early part of the Cultural Revolution with the sexual permissiveness of the same youth disillusioned by their experiences in the countryside later in the Cultural Revolution period.

\(^{191}\) Examples have already been noted in Wang Anyi’s stories and can also be found in Lao Gui, Xuese huanghun (A Blood-coloured Dusk) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1987).
relationships without marriage were probably also made more common by the fact that city youth who married in the countryside lost all possibility of transferring back to parents' families in the city (unless they divorced), so that a significant number of them who would otherwise have married, chose not to. Thus the influence of traditional values on this age-group was considerably weakened, but was not replaced with any definite new sets of values. This meant that after the Party instituted its "open door" policy in 1978, and Western ideas and values flowed into China during the 1980s, they were adopted particularly readily by the younger writers' generation, even though they were approaching or already in their thirties.

Besides the influence of Western culture, a further factor that influenced attitudes to marriage and divorce was the reform of the Marriage Law in 1980, which made divorce much easier than it had been previously. Statistics show that most divorces involve young couples, and the degree to which it became acceptable among young urban intellectuals during the 1980s was revealed anecdotally by Zhang Xinxin in 1988, who claimed that it was then unfashionable not to have been divorced. Thus the intense social pressure against divorce that existed in the 1950s and generally continues to exist among the older generations, weakened markedly among younger people in the 1980s.

Another factor seen by Shen Rong as having a significant influence on what the writers may discuss in their works, is their marital history. She and Zhang Jie both consider women in Chinese society - and divorced women in particular - to be highly vulnerable to accusations of immorality - accusations which may be based on the content of a woman's fictional writings. Thus the reason Shen Rong feels that she can examine sensitive problems in Chinese marriage with relative freedom and without ruining her moral reputation is because she herself is known to have had a very stable, uneventful marriage, so that nothing morally controversial in her works can be linked to her personally. She contends that had Zhang Jie or Zhang Xinxin, both of whom have been divorced, written "Can't be

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193 Author's interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.
Bothered to Divorce," it would have aroused great comment.\textsuperscript{194} This may be one reason why the moral attitudes Zhang Jie presents in her fiction are so conservative, and particularly why her personal views on divorce - that it is acceptable when there is no longer mutual love in marriage - are more liberal than the attitude she presents in her fiction.\textsuperscript{195} It could also at least partially account for the fact that among the younger writers, Wang Anyi who married for the first time in 1981, has been the most uninhibited in her depiction of sexual relations, followed by Zhang Kangkang, who married for the second time in 1983. In comparison, Zhang Xinxin, who has so far not remarried, has been much less explicit in her depiction of sex, generally limiting herself to euphemisms or brief, indirect references. Thus the evidence of the writers' works seems to support the view that the more conventional a woman’s married life is seen to be, the greater freedom she has to examine sensitive issues relating to sex and marriage in her works.

This generalization, however, needs to be understood in the context of the overarching generational differences in attitudes to marriage, divorce and sex just discussed. Although, like Zhang Jie, Zhang Kangkang divorced and remarried, the more liberal attitudes towards divorce among the younger generations make this less of a constraint on her writing on sex and marriage than is the case for Zhang Jie.\textsuperscript{196} Hence, while marital history helps to explain differences between writers within the same age-group, it is still the rapid change in social attitudes in China that has had the greatest influence on the women writers' presentation of love, sex and marriage, and has created the marked differences between the age-groups.

\textsuperscript{194} Author's interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.

\textsuperscript{195} Zhang Jie expressed this personal view in an interview with the author, October 10, 1988.

\textsuperscript{196} Part of the pressure on Zhang Jie also resulted from the fact that her second husband was a high-ranking cadre. Their relationship was thus subject to far more public scrutiny and pressure than Zhang Kangkang’s second marriage.
The subordinate position of women in traditional Chinese society is an indisputable fact. Women were denied legitimate access to any kind of political power and the only power they could hope to attain was that over other females and sometimes males of younger generations within their own households. Confucian tenets decreed that a woman should be under men's control at all stages of her life: in her natal home she should obey her father; after marriage she should obey her husband; and on his death she should obey her son. Women's lives were often physically largely restricted to the confines of their own homes. Education was at best limited, and engaging in any reputable profession was virtually out of the question.

The communist revolution promised to change all this, and has undoubtedly brought enormous improvements to the situation of Chinese women. As more than one of the women writers stressed during interviews with the author, women are now legally men's equals in all respects. Women's participation in the workforce is accepted as the norm,
and a basic education is legally compulsory for both boys and girls. The Chinese Women’s Federation has been established specifically to protect the rights and interests of women and children. But despite these legal and social changes, and reports of the increasing numbers of women in the upper levels of state organs of political and economic power, a number of Western studies undertaken in the 1980s have queried this official optimism.\(^2\) This raises the question: How do the six women writers present the role and position of women in contemporary Chinese society? and on a related topic: to what extent is this an issue that commands their attention?

A survey of male and female roles in the works of the writers under discussion presents a society in which almost all positions of political and economic power are occupied by men. In more than two hundred and twenty works of fiction by the six writers, including several novels, with major and minor characters taken together, there are only about twenty women depicted in positions of power. This number drops further if marginal categories such as university class monitor and youth league branch secretary are omitted. In contrast, men in positions of power are common throughout all the writers’ works, and Shen Rong and Zhang Jie in particular depict middle- to high-ranking male cadres in the majority of their works. Zhang Jie’s *Leaden Wings* alone depicts eight highly-ranked male government officials including a minister and three vice-ministers among its principal characters.

Though the younger writers do not concentrate to the same extent on depicting the higher echelons of Chinese society, they also fill most positions of authority with men. Thus all the troupe leaders in Wang Anyi’s stories of cultural troupes, the head of the philatelic society in Zhang Xinxin’s "Philately," the head of the museum in her "Let’s Play

Robbers," and all the commune-level leaders in Zhang Kangkang’s stories of rusticated city youth, are without exception males.

Even in occupations where women are employed in relatively large numbers, such as in hospitals and publishing houses, the chief doctors and editors presented in the women writers’ works are all men. Examples can be found in the senior-ranking doctors and hospital administrators in Shen Rong’s "At Middle Age" and Zhang Jie’s "What’s Wrong With Him?" and "Tangram," and the chief editors in Zhang Xinxin’s "On the Same Horizon" and Wang Anyi’s "Love in Beautiful Gorge."

A number of works depict the selection of personnel for positions of authority: Zhang Jie’s "The Time is Not Yet Ripe" and "Report" both depict the political manoeuvring that goes on before the appointment of a bureau chief and deputy-bureau chief respectively, while Zhang Xinxin’s "Let’s Play Robbers" depicts the selection of a museum director. But in none of these works is a single woman even being considered as a candidate for the post.

Not only are the women depicted in authority so few in numerical proportion as to be almost insignificant, but their ranks in the hierarchy of power are also relatively low. Over half of these characters, most of them in the younger writers’ works, occupy such minor positions as rural commune cultural cadre, commune women’s team leader, neighbourhood workshop director, middle school principal, and the positions mentioned above - university class monitor and youth league branch secretary - all positions with very little real authority, or authority of very limited scope.

A total of only nine women are depicted occupying positions of significant power, with only two of these - a vice-minister and a regional Party committee deputy secretary qualifying for high-ranking cadre status. The remainder are middle-level cadres ranging from a factory union manageress to a bureau section chief and an enterprise manager. Further, as the two positions above indicate, the higher-ranking women are frequently depicted as deputies rather than holding a full rank. Apart

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3 Grade 11 on a scale of 24 grades, with grade 1 the highest grade.
from the factory union manageress who is mentioned but does not actually appear in Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon," the rest of these higher-ranking women are all found in the works of the older writers.

Analysis of the portrayal of these nine women reveals an interesting phenomenon: with only two exceptions, they are all presented in situations in which their power and authority is either irrelevant or in some way devalued, or they are guilty of abuse of their positions.

Zhang Guifen, deputy secretary of a regional party committee depicted in Shen Rong's "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," and Tian Jing, the grade fifteen cadre in Ru Zhijuan's "Son's and Daughters" are both in the upper-middle level of the power hierarchy, but are not depicted at their posts. Zhang Guifen appears first in the role of matchmaker between Yang Yueyue and Xu Mingfu, and then as intermediary to arrange their divorce. We learn nothing of how she functions in her official position. Tian Jing is described as "very capable," but the story focuses on her relationship with her son, criticising her for losing her revolutionary ideals and becoming obsessed with traditional concerns over family status. Thus both women are depicted only in the context of their handling of family relationships, so that their official status is unimportant. In contrast, many men cadres are shown to be preoccupied with their work even when depicted at home. The old cadre in Shen Rong's "A Distracting Sunday," and factory manager Chen Yongming in Zhang Jie's Leaden Wings, for example, both neglect their families for the sake of work-related matters.

The factory union manageress in Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon" and enterprise manager Xiao Jinzi in Shen Rong's "Impasse" are both presented as something of a joke. The factory union manageress is only mentioned because her occupation is used to ridicule her husband, who is described as being "managed by her along with the union." Shen

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4 "Er nu qing" ("Sons and Daughters"), p 227.

5 "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang" ("On the Same Horizon"), p 190.
Rong's "Impasse" depicts several highly successful factory and enterprise managers, including one female, Xiao Jinzi. But though the men are all depicted running "serious" enterprises - a steel piping factory, a television accessories factory and a luxury hotel, the woman manages a company called "Love, Love, Love," a sophisticated, computerized marriage introduction agency. On one hand this makes her achievement seem frivolous compared to that of the men, and on the other, it repeats the images discussed above of women concerned overwhelmingly with marriage and the family.

Three of the remaining women depicted in positions of significant authority are negative characters, all appearing in Zhang Jie's works. He Ting, a ministry section chief in *Leaden Wings*, Vice-minister Zhang in "Magnetic Field" and "Magnetic Field Part Two," and Lu Beihe, a deputy head of a research institute and deputy secretary of its Party committee in "Emerald," are depicted abusing their power to gain material benefits (He Ting and Vice-minister Zhang) or to arrange desirable jobs for their friends and family members (He Ting for her daughter and Lu Beihe for her husband).

Interestingly, apart from Shen Rong and Wang Anyi, the women writers depict a much higher proportion of corrupt or inept women cadres than they do corrupt men cadres. Taking the images of women in power, regardless of rank or status as a whole, approximately one half of the total are negative characters, with the majority of these depicted in the works of Zhang Jie and Zhang Kangkang, neither of whom presents a single positive image of a female cadre in her works. In contrast, both depict numerous positive male cadres. When questioned about this, Zhang Kangkang attributed it to her personal experience, but did not consider it a universal problem in China. Zhang Jie, however, expressed the opinion that very few women are capable of being good cadres, and also that because promotion is often based on the likes and dislikes of a superior

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6 Author's interview with Zhang Kangkang, October 4, 1988.
rather than on personal merit, it is frequently those unscrupulous people who curry favour with superiors who are able to gain office.\footnote{7}

While this second line of reasoning may be valid, it would follow that a similar proportion of male cadres would also be corrupt or inept, but Zhang Jie's works do not reflect this. Her view that women are generally incapable of being good cadres is a commonly held view in China,\footnote{8} and though in the light of Zhang Jie's championing of the cause of divorced and sexually exploited women one might expect her to be more generous in her judgement of women in power, when one considers the basic conservatism of her moral values discussed in Chapter 4, her concurrence with the patriarchal view of women's incompetence as leaders is not entirely surprising.

The two remaining female characters depicted in positions of significant authority both appear in Shen Rong's works. They are the director of the local branch of the Women's Federation in "Weekend," and Han Lamei, who is Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee of the Quan County Reservoir Construction Site, and Deputy Commander in Chief of Project Headquarters in "Eternal Spring." Both are positive characters and are shown acting in their official capacity. The Women's Federation, however, does not employ male cadres, and is solely concerned with issues affecting women, so the fact that this particular cadre is a woman tells us nothing of the penetration of women into the wider power structure. Further, like several of the women above, this character is closely linked with domestic issues, being depicted organizing a mass meeting to promote family planning. Only the last character mentioned, Han Lamei, is depicted functioning competently in a position of authority that is also open to men and that Chinese society takes seriously. She designs and oversees the construction of a reservoir, displaying technical brilliance as an engineer and the leadership qualities of an ideal

\footnote{7} Author's interview with Zhang Jie, October 10, 1988.

\footnote{8} See Margery Wolf, Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China, p 75.
203

communist cadre. "Eternal Spring" was written in 1978, and the character of Han Lamei clearly shows the influence of the Cultural Revolution literary convention of depicting perfect proletarian heroes and heroines. But significantly, even in this eulogistic, idealized portrayal of a woman cadre, she is still depicted holding only deputy positions.

There are a minority of women in positions of political and economic power in China, but they are not proportionately reflected in the works of any of the six women writers. Women are usually depicted holding only middle or low status positions, typically restricted to occupations related to education, caring for people, the arts and services. Thus we find urban women as teachers, students and researchers of arts subjects, low-ranking doctors, nurses, writers, journalists, housemaids, bus-conductresses, shop assistants and so forth. Rural women are usually ordinary agricultural workers. Women are rarely depicted working outside occupations that are extensions of work traditionally considered fitting for women, though the few that are in the older writers’ works are shown to be very competent: Ceng Lingr in Zhang Jie’s "Emerald" is a brilliant mathematician; Han Lamei in Shen Rong’s "Eternal Spring" is an outstanding engineer; and Yang Ming in Ru Zhjuan’s "Small Path Through the Grasslands" is a highly-skilled oilfield technician and scientific researcher. There is also a large number of women who have no identifiable work or profession, and exist only as the wives, daughters or sisters of male characters. Although this role assignment reflects the reality of a male-dominated society, the women writers’ presentation of the few women cadres as negative characters, or in situations where their position is devalued or irrelevant, tends to reinforce the general attitude that women are not capable of competently holding office, thus simply perpetuating common prejudices.

The social position of women in the works of the six writers is typically illustrated by Shen Rong’s "On the Question of Piglets Surviving
the Winter."9 The story follows the path of an urgent directive to protect piglets against the cold which is spuriously issued by Municipal Party Committee Secretary Zhang one evening after the wind rattles the windows of his luxury apartment. Zhang's directive is passed down the bureaucratic hierarchy through the Director of the Municipal Agriculture and Forestry Office, a county Party committee secretary, a commune secretary, and a brigade Party branch secretary, who finally passes it on to the specialized pig-breeding household. Significantly, the officials at the various levels are all men, and the only woman involved in this chain of command is the head of the specialized household whose only role is to receive orders.

While clearly illustrating the overwhelming domination of the upper levels of the power structure by men, the story also lends itself to a humorous feminist interpretation: While men in the bureaucracy rush about preparing documents and issuing orders, the powerless woman at the bottom has already quietly and efficiently carried out the necessary practical work on her own initiative, proving all the flurried activity of the male power-holders to be totally unnecessary! However, it must be pointed out that Shen Rong gives no hint that she intended the story to be read in this way. In fact none of the writers under discussion makes any comment directly or indirectly in their works on the relatively low position of women in the hierarchy of power. It seems to be something that they simply accept, or even see as appropriate in the light of women's inferior capabilities.

Women characters in the writers' works frequently, though not always, regard themselves as less capable and intelligent than men.

In Zhang Jie's "Tangram," the heroine, Yimei, had resented the way her husband "considered her views and explanations of things and life to be merely a child's game,"10 but comes to realise "she was the stupid

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9 "Guanyu zizhu guodong wenti" ("On the Problem of Piglets Surviving the Winter").

10 "Qiqiaoban" ("Tangram"), p 124.
one." He saw everything clearly while she pursued unrealistic goals. She feels he has been justified in treating her perfunctorily as if "coaxing a child." Though he contributes steadily to society, she has done nothing of significance.11

This stereotype of man as practical, realistic and penetratingly analytical, and woman as unrealistic, shallow and governed by emotions is repeated in "Bohemian Vase": "to him life was a well-organized, strictly logical, clearly-argued political essay, but to her it was forever a lyrical poem - either melancholy or infatuated."12

Women in Zhang Xinxin's works also affirm the superiority of men. In "On the Same Horizon" (1981), the principal female character says of her husband: "I feel you have more self-confidence and ability than I, and that's how it really is." Similarly in "How Did I Miss You?", the female playwright considers the male director's interpretation of her play to be more penetrating than her own, and its success is attributed to him by both herself and the leading actress.

Even in the works of Shen Rong who often depicts purposeful female characters, women's sense of inferiority is still palpable. In "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," not only does the uneducated peasant woman Yang Yueyue express a sense of her unworthiness in her rationale for agreeing to divorce her husband: "he can find someone better than me...,"13 but the woman writer who pursues the story of Yang Yueyue and her family with determination and self-assurance, also reveals insecurity in her letters to her husband. She repeatedly precedes descriptions of her ideas and actions with phrases that seek her husband's approval or try to forestall his disapproval: "You will naturally ridicule me for being overly naive..."14 "You will probably snort in contempt..."15

11 Ibid p 185.

12 "Boximiya huaping" ("Bohemian Vase"), p 77.

13 "Yang yueyue yu sate zhi yanjiu" ("Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre"), p 85.

14 Ibid p 2.

"Just as you often ridicule me: I frequently expend energy in vain."16 Though she constantly feels she has to justify and defend herself to him, his letters to her, which authoritatively discuss the theories of Sartre, show no sense of a need to win her approval. Hence, despite there being no direct depiction of their relationship, the woman's subordinate role and her sense of inferiority are unmistakable.

While this represents the general trend, there are some exceptions. In Zhang Jie's "Emerald," the two highly intelligent and capable female protagonists create success for the weak, inept man they had both loved. Between them they protect him from political movements, and engineer his rise to become head of an important computer research centre. Both come to realise that his character and abilities are inferior to their own, but are content to remain unrecognised by society while he enjoys the credit and resulting social status that is in fact due to them. The two women deliberately create the appearance of male superiority both to protect the man's ego, and in the case of his wife, because society will give her higher status as the wife of a successful man, than as the successful wife of an incompetent man.

Though in social position, intellect and capability women are generally presented as men's inferiors, in terms of spiritual and moral strength, they are often portrayed as being superior to men. Examples can be found in works of the writers of each age group. In Ru Zhijuan's "An Ancient Song," a daughter proves to have loftier values than her father when she insists on marrying a peasant instead of opting for the comfortable city life her parent wants for her.

In Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring" the heroine provides a model of virtue and socialist ideals compared to her ex-husband who requires her spiritual support and the inspiration of her example to recover from being disgraced during the Cultural Revolution.

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16 Ibid p 99. Also see p 1, p 11 and p 12.
Several of Wang Anyi's works depict male-female relationships in which the women are clearly emotionally and morally superior to the men. In "Understudy," shop assistant Xiaomei is despised by her conceited, self-deceiving actor-boyfriend, but shows far more wisdom, tolerance and nobility of spirit than he does. In "Love in a Small Town," whereas the female protagonist is purified by pregnancy and childbirth and moves up to a higher spiritual plane, the male protagonist remains unable to release himself from the domination of his uncontrollable sexual desire and steadily degenerates.

A common theme in a significant number of the women writers' works is of men in spiritual decline being saved by the moral purity and virtue of female characters. Zhang Xinxin’s "A Tranquil Evening," depicts a disillusioned young man regaining faith in society after a girl selflessly gives him her ticket to purchase a coveted cassette player. The theme is repeated frequently in Zhang Jie's early works: female characters Xu Wei in "There is a Youth," Tianye in "Who Lives the More Beautiful Life?," and Zheng Yuanyuan in Leaden Wings all cause young men who come in contact with them to completely reform their attitudes and behaviour, Yuanyuan achieving this feat on her first meeting with the former thief and social outcast Mo Zheng.

This eulogizing of women's moral virtue has two contradictory aspects to it. On one hand it is an affirmation of the value of women despite their socially and politically subordinate position, but on the other it sometimes praises women for upholding the same moral values that contribute to maintaining their lower social status. In a scene in "Who Lives the More Beautiful Life?" for instance, bus conductress Tianye painstakingly picks a fifty-cent fine in one cent pieces out of the mud where a male passenger has deliberately dropped it. Her calm acceptance of insult and humiliation is presented to illustrate her spiritual superiority, but it also reiterates a traditional view that it is a virtue in

17 He deliberately invoked the fine by not buying a bus ticket.
women to silently tolerate maltreatment. It makes little difference that in the past this toleration was seen as the duty of a wife and daughter-in-law whereas Tianye sees it as her duty to socialism - the model being held up to women is still that of the woman who accepts without protest her treatment as an inferior being.

The women writers' choice of characters to present important statements on major social, economic and political issues also reflects a sense of women's lack of authority. The older writers, in particular, frequently use their works as a vehicle for expressing what are clearly their own criticisms and ideas, but rarely use female characters to present their arguments. This situation has remained the same throughout the post-1978 period.

In "At Middle Age" (1980), Shen Rong highlights the plight of middle-aged intellectuals overburdened with professional and family responsibilities, and calls for rapid implementation of government policies to improve their living and working conditions. Her sharpest criticisms are presented at a dinner attended by two intellectual couples. In this key scene, Shen's arguments are all presented through long speeches by the two men. The two women do no more than occasionally express simple agreement or disapproval.

"Snakes and Ladders," published two years later, examines problems in the Party's ideological work methods through study sessions at a research centre. Several male characters discuss these problems in the course of the story, which reaches its climax with a major speech by the male head of the research centre that strongly criticises current Party practices. The only woman researcher attending the meeting, Ye Fei, remains silent until compelled to speak, and then merely says she agrees with everything that has already been said. Thus the role of courageous

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18 See the discussion of "Lande lihun" ("Can't Be Bothered to Divorce") on page 152.

19 Consider how different the judgement of Tianye would be in this scene if she were a man.
exponent of the truth is assigned to a man, while that of the timid avoider of trouble is assigned to a woman.

A similar tendency can be seen in "An Undisciplined Man" (1985), in which Shen Rong's criticism of the methods and criteria used for selecting party members is expressed through speeches by the male host and two of the male guests at a dinner party. The wives present do no more than chide their husbands for their outrageous views.

In Zhang Jie's "The Ark," the female Marxist theoretician, Cao Jinghua, does speak out in defence of her views on the future development of Marxism at a meeting held to criticise her, but the actual content of her speech is not given. We are just told: "Cao Jinghua went on to explain briefly the various points of her argument."

In contrast, in Leaden Wings, vice-minister Zheng Ziyun and factory manager Chen Yongming (both men) explain in detail their ideas on how to reform management practices in Chinese enterprises.

The situation is no different in the younger writers' works. In Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon" (1982), for example, analysis of Chinese society in terms of the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest is made by the male, not the female protagonist. In Zhang Kangkang's "Northern Lights" (1980), the heroine's second and third boyfriends knowledgably discuss philosophical theories or expound views on the economy, but her only role is to listen with admiration. Likewise, in The Invisible Companion (1986), it is the protagonist's husband who all along openly denounces Cultural Revolution rhetoric. The protagonist herself remains naive and unenlightened until the final pages of the novel.

The only exceptions to this trend are three young women depicted in the works of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie. Chen Yaomei, a student in Zhang Jie's "What's Wrong With Him?," ridicules official government propaganda in front of her class teacher; Qin Tongtong in Shen Rong's

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20 "Fang zhou" ("The Ark"), p 49.

21 For Zheng's speech see Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings), pp 215-219; for Chen's ideas see pp 181-183.
"Snakes and Ladders" publicly heaps scorn on her superiors during political study sessions; and teenager Jingjing in Shen Rong's "Roommates" makes clear her contempt for high-ranking Party officials and the campaign against bourgeois liberalization. But whereas criticism from male characters comes in the form of serious speeches by characters who command the respect of those around them, these young women's criticisms are made through flippant remarks (or in the case of Jingjing simply through scornful facial expressions) from characters whom nobody takes seriously. Hence although these women's criticisms are more scathing, they nevertheless carry much less weight than those of male characters.

Interestingly, the character of the rebellious, politically-outspoken young woman appears only in the works of the older writers. The only character who bears any resemblance to this persona in the young writers' fiction is Cen Lang in Zhang Kangkang's "Summer" series of stories. Cen Lang, however, only speaks out against restrictions on individual freedom and does not comment on political issues. This suggests that the character may be more a devise used by Shen Rong and Zhang Jie to express otherwise unacceptable views than an accurate portrayal of contemporary young Chinese women.

The consistency with which important speeches expressing strong views on political, economic and social issues are assigned to male characters makes it highly improbable that this is simply coincidence. But why should these women writers choose men to speak for them and generally present women characters only as listening in admiration or timidly attempting to restrain their husbands from speaking out? One possibility is that the writers may feel that in order for their arguments to be most readily accepted by readers, they must be presented by characters whose opinions are respected by society. That women are regarded as

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intellectually inferior to men in China has been well-documented, so the writers may feel obliged to speak through men if their views are to carry any weight. It follows logically that if women characters cannot be used to express these views, the only way they can be shown to hold them is by admiring the men who do express them. The women characters who chide their husbands can be seen as serving two purposes: First their words act as a counterbalance to the bold statements of the men, thus affording the author some protection (this is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, see page 80), and second, the fact that men are rebuked by socially and intellectually "inferior" women for their views may even lend strength to their arguments.

There is also some evidence in the writers' works to suggest that not only would the same speeches delivered by women characters be less convincing, but that the women who made them would be considered at best unfeminine and at worst mentally ill. As noted above, Cao Jinghua in "The Ark" publicly defends her controversial views on Marxist theory, but even she regards herself as "masculinized." In Zhang Jie's "What's Wrong With Him?" the rebellious young woman student Chen Yaomei who makes stinging attacks on official propaganda is labelled "unbalanced" and "unsound" by her teachers. A similar young rebel, Qin Tongtong, in Shen Rong's "Snakes and Ladders" only escapes censure because her father is a powerful official.

If this analysis is correct then one could logically expect that women writers whose works make major statements on political, social or economic issues would face similar problems - even if they attribute these statements to male characters. An article in the Guangming Daily of July

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23 See for example Margery Wolf, Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China, pp 130-131; and Elizabeth Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao, p 4.


25 Ibid p 57.
11, 1989, "The Strengths and Shortcomings of Contemporary Women Writers," confirms that this is in fact the case.  

The article summarizes appraisals of several contemporary Chinese women writers by the prominent male literary critic Wang Gan. Wang praises Shen Rong and Zhang Jie’s earliest works for their feminine characteristics, but says: "The shortcoming of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie’s later works is that they are too masculinized." This comment is then extended to "all Chinese women writers" (ie not only their works). Zhang Jie’s early works were mostly love stories, but her later works are powerful attacks on maladies in the social and political system, while Shen Rong’s social and political criticism also intensified throughout the 1980s. Thus Wang Gan’s comments can only mean that women writers who express strong views on social and political issues are unfeminine. Interestingly, he sees this not as a sign of strength, but as an indication of weakness:

"This is probably related to women’s sense of inferiority. They lack self-confidence, and cannot give full play to female superiority in [certain aspects of] literature. They feel they want to be rational and dynamic like men. Thus Zhang Jie’s writing has been unbridled."  

Here Wang Gan clearly devalues both women writers who make powerful statements on major issues, and their works. He does not contemplate the possibility that women writers might be "rational and dynamic" of their own accord, but can only perceive them as trying to be so in order to appear more like men. If this is the case, then the views the women writers present are only imitations of men’s views, and therefore intrinsically not to be given much weight.

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26 Shen Qiang, "Dangdai nuxing zuojia de zizu yu buzu" ("The Strengths and Shortcomings of Contemporary Women Writers"), Guangming ribao, July 11, 1989, p 3. The article this summarizes was published in Wenyi bao, June 17, 1989.

27 Ibid.
In an interview in August 1988, Zhang Xinxin revealed a second type of devaluation of women writers and the ideas they present. She was arguing that women writers are treated more leniently for unorthodox views than their male counterparts:

"In some ways women have more rights than men - so I am indifferent to criticism. If criticised, I openly express my opinions, at worst people will just say, 'she's a bit crazy'. Men don't dare to state their views on controversies over criticism [of their works]. As a woman, I get off very lightly, being just regarded as having a very 'independent' personality. Men would get into deep trouble."  

Though Zhang Xinxin claims that women writers have more freedom to express themselves than men writers, her words also clearly imply that this is because women writers’ views are not regarded as seriously as those of men writers. While men’s opinions get them into "deep trouble," women’s opinions are attributed to quirks in their personalities ("a bit crazy," "very independent"), suggesting that women are not in control of what they say and therefore cannot be held entirely responsible for it.

Thus the women writers’ experience tallies exactly with that of the characters they portray. Given that women who express strong or controversial views are regarded as either trying to be like men or at worst "a bit crazy," it is not surprising that the writers under discussion rarely voice their ideas through female characters.

Though we have seen that in the women writers’ works women characters rarely occupy significant positions in the economic and political power structure, this does not mean that they are entirely powerless. Having the same desire for power and status as men, they find alternative ways of obtaining it. One way is through their husbands or fathers. The "Marxist-Leninist Old Woman" (Qin Bo) in Shen Rong’s "At Middle Age," and Xia Zhuyun in Zhang Jie’s Leaden Wings, both gain power through...

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28 Author’s interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.
their husbands who are vice-ministers. Both of these authors are very critical of this type of woman, but as long as women are denied power in their own right, and only accorded the status of their husbands, they will continue to exist. Qin Bo has no legitimate means of satisfying her desire for authority, so resorts to making excessive demands on behalf of her husband. She openly questions the competence of hospital staff, and lectures them with cliched political rhetoric, not so much out of concern for her husband’s health or her political ideals as from her desire to exercise power. Her husband can afford to be affable and undemanding in this situation because his power and status is already fully recognised by society, but Qin Bo has no other means of tasting power. Her actions may be despicable, but they are also understandable.

Qin Tongtong in Shen Rong’s "Snakes and Ladders" gains a different kind of power through her father, who is Deputy-director of the Provincial United Front Department. As one of her colleagues reminds her: "No matter what you do or say, no one would dare lift a finger against you." Qin Tongtong uses her immunity from censure to express strong criticism of the leadership of the research centre where she works, to ridicule the academy’s director, and to openly antagonize the director of the academy’s Party office in front of his subordinates. Though her father’s position does not actually enable Qin Tongtong to control other people, it allows her openly to challenge and defy established authority.

Another source of female power is feminine charm and beauty. Women have probably always used their physical attractions to obtain power and privilege of various kinds, ranging from the acquisition of political power and social status gained through attracting a powerful or wealthy husband, to enjoying privileged treatment from males in general. As Shen Rong writes: "Beautiful women have a slight superiority that

29 "Zhenzhen jiajia" ("Snakes and Ladders"), p 203.

enables them to despise all authority and rank." 31 Where men are concerned, a charming woman can get away with many things that would be unacceptable in another man or in an unattractive woman. Qin Tongtong understands this, so precedes her most critical and antagonistic remarks with disarming smiles. 32 They reinforce the protection from criticism that she gains from her father's status.

In Shen Rong's "Present a Bunch of Evening Fragrance," section Chief Shen, believing he is dealing with sexual impropriety between two of his subordinates, calls them in separately to his office for interviews. In dealing with the man he is "cold" and "stern" and questions him "as if interrogating a criminal," but when beautiful young Qi Wenwen arrives for her interview, he does his utmost to be "amiable," "approachable" and "unbureaucratic." Qi Wenwen, however, not only shows no respect for his senior rank, but secure in the power of her beauty, arrogantly orders him about "as if she were at home ordering about their housemaid from Anhui." His tactful questions are met with scorn barely concealed by her off-hand banter. The narrator comments: "She wouldn't have changed her tone of voice if it had been a minister before her, let alone a section chief." 33 Thus Qi Wenwen's beauty enables her to exercise power over a superior, even if only at a personal level. Female beauty, however, though effective in dealing with men, may be a negative asset in dealing with other women, as the following discussion will show.

A far more insidious form of power is exercised by women through their role as moral policewomen. This is a role that carries no political or economic power in itself, but functions to preserve traditional morality and hence, ironically, the traditionally subordinate position of women. In Chinese society, a moral blot on one's record may remain for life. Society

31 "Xianshang yi shu yelaixiang" ("Present a Bunch of Evening Fragrance") p 26.
32 "Zhenzhen jiajia" ("Snakes and Ladders"), pp 200, 201 and 202.
33 "Xianshang yishu yulaixiang" ("Present a Bunch of Evening Fragrance"), pp 24-27.
is relatively stagnant and most people spend their lives surrounded by the same neighbours and colleagues. In this environment, gossip - the main tool used to control moral behaviour - can influence people's lives as much as, or even more than political or economic factors. The antagonism of a superior in the power hierarchy may hinder an individual's obtaining promotion, pay rises or housing, but the antagonism of a "moral policewoman" can result in the individual becoming a social outcast - something psychologically far more damaging. Thus the moral policewoman's power is very real.

In the works of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie, these moral custodians are usually middle-aged or elderly women in whom the internalization of traditional moral values is reinforced by the respect and status traditionally afforded older people in Chinese society. Director Jia in Zhang Jie's "The Ark" is the epitome of this type of character. As director of the local neighbourhood committee, she keeps a close watch on the two divorced women living in her building, constantly finding excuses to check their flat to make sure they have no men inside. In "The Ark," Director Jia is only a minor character whose moral zealotry is attributed to simple boredom, but in "Present a Bunch of Evening Fragrance," Shen Rong examines in detail the methods another such moral custodian employs to cast a slur on the reputation of a young woman, and the complex motives that lie behind her championing of traditional morality.

In brief, the story tells how elderly Li Shouchuan impulsively buys a bunch of flowers, but is afraid to take them home because his wife will complain. He takes them back to the office where beautiful young Qi Wenwen, studying after work, asks if she can have them. She puts them on a vase on her desk. Next morning, office gossip and self-appointed upholder of morality, Zhu Xifen insinuatingly questions her about the flowers and spreads the story that Qi and the old man had sexual relations in the office the night before. When Section Chief Shen returns from a meeting a few days later, she informs him, embellishing the story with her own details. Shen criticises Li and tries to seduce Qi. Everyone in the
government organ where they work believes the two have had illicit relations, and with few exceptions treat them as social outcasts. As a result Li falls ill and almost dies. Qi Wenwen defiantly takes him flowers in hospital.

Among Zhu Xifen’s motives for fabricating the scandal are her desire for attention and her sexual jealousy. She has refined her technique of gossiping to a fine art. She always arrives at the office last (so that a full audience will be present), and immediately begins to broadcast the latest "news," captivating her listeners with provocative questions and answers that gradually lead up to her most titillating revelations. These are invariably followed by a righteous criticism of the offender. Shen Rong says of her: "This was the moment in Zhu Xifen’s day that she found most exciting, most satisfying... Everyone listened to her and her alone, like an actress on stage with all the spotlights focused on only her."34 Zhu gossips because she wants to feel important. By keeping her audience in suspense, she gains a sense of power over them, it is she who controls the situation as they hang on her words. Her final moral judgements serve simultaneously to discredit her victims and manifest her own moral virtue. Until Qi Wenwen arrives, Zhu feels secure in her ability to occupy the limelight. But Qi Wenwen changes all this. Qi is young, beautiful and vivacious: almost everything that society values most in women, and everything that Zhu Xifen is not. Unable to compete with Qi for male attention, Zhu uses the most effective weapon she knows to devalue her rival: the accusation of immorality. Without acknowledged chastity, Qi’s beauty and youth are worthless in the eyes of society.

In the only direct analysis of Zhu’s psychological motives presented in the novella, a colleague attributes Zhu’s desire to vilify Qi to her urge for self-glorification. He tells her: "If you don’t curse other people as hookers, you cannot sufficiently manifest your own chastity." While the desire for self-glorification is an important element of Zhu’s psychology,

34 Ibid p 10.
the obvious pleasure she derives from describing the immorality of others and then condemning it can also be seen to result from her own sexual desire and the repression and denial of that desire. Zhu Xifen’s gossip invariably involves sex. Gossip about a meeting Section Chief Shen is to attend ends with her revelation that he had several extra-marital affairs when he was young.\(^{35}\) Her gossip about Li Shouchuan and Qi Wenwen becomes increasingly sexually explicit, making one suspect that she is embellishing it with details from her own sexual fantasies. Because traditional Chinese morality does not permit her to express her sexual desire in word or action, she does so through fantasising about other people and then denying that she shares those desires to assure herself of her own virtue. Reporting Qi and Li to Section Chief Shen, she gives her imagination free rein: “It was right there in our office, in the middle of the night. Li Shouchuan knelt on the floor proffering the bunch of flowers, saying to Qi Wenwen...the most shameless things, some tripe about love...”\(^{36}\) Later she complains: “There are more and more young people in the organization now, and every time they open their mouths it’s nothing but sex, sex, sex. It makes one embarrassed to even talk about it.”\(^{37}\) She obviously relishes talking about it, but feels she has to pretend she does not. Zhu’s repressed sexuality is also evident in her desire to be considered sexually attractive. She lies about her age so as to present a younger, more desirable image,\(^{38}\) and tries to make Shen agree that in her youth she was just as attractive as Qi Wenwen.\(^{39}\) Zhu uses traditional morality to satisfy the demands of her own warped psychology. In her hands it becomes an instrument to simultaneously express and deny her sexual desires, and an instrument to destroy anyone she considers a sexual threat. It should be noted however, that Zhu Xifen can only wield power through her combination of slander and a righteous moral stance because

\(^{35}\) Ibid p 13.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid p 22.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid p 23  
\(^{38}\) Ibid p 10.  
\(^{39}\) Ibid p 23.
she has an avid audience willing to believe anything she says and equally willing to ostracise her victims. This suggests that the kind of psychology she typifies is a widespread phenomenon in Chinese society.

In general, there is little difference in the way women writers of different age-groups present women’s position in society. The writers’ common goal of reflecting reality accurately largely explains why they depict so few women in power, but also indicates that they do not feel the same commitment to promoting women’s cause in this area as they do in the area of moral standards applied to women.

The high proportion of negative images among women characters who wield power of any kind, and the irrelevance or devaluation of their position in the case of most positive characters, suggests that all the writers are influenced by traditional Chinese attitudes of fear and abhorrence towards powerful women. This is clear in the traditionally negative assessment of Wu Zetian and the Empress Dowager Ci Xi, and is probably one reason why Jiang Qing was easily accepted as a scapegoat for all the evils of the Cultural Revolution.

That the older writers depict more high-ranking women than their younger counterparts can be understood as resulting from the older writers’ stronger commitment to examining political and economic issues, which logically leads them to depict the upper echelons of the power structure including higher-ranked women. It is also a simple reflection of the fact that their own greater age and higher social position means that they have more contact with and experience of middle- and high-ranking cadres, and are hence more likely to depict them in their works than the younger writers.
The Women Writers and Feminism

"Now politically and economically, women are men's equals, but traditional concepts of morality still exist: that is, the idea that women should be discriminated against. We must resolutely struggle against this." 1

The second half of the 1980s saw an upsurge of interest in feminism and feminist literature in China that focussed its attention chiefly on contemporary literature by women. 2 Considering the strong concern for women's issues evident in the works of the women writers under discussion, it is relevant to look at both how Chinese feminist critics assess the women's fiction, and what the women writers' views are on feminism. This chapter first examines these two questions, and then goes on to draw evidence from the writers' works to answer the focal question - are the writers feminists? 3

Feminist criticism emerged in China in the mid-1980s. This was partly in response to the remarkable rise in quantity, quality and

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1 Zhang Jie, quoted in Jin Tao, "Yibu hongdong zhengge xide wentan de lizuo" ("A Powerful Work that Rocked the Whole of the West German Literary World") Zhong shan, No 5, 1986, p 199.

2 I use the term "feminist" in its broadest sense as that which takes a definite anti-patriarchal, anti-sexist stance and promotes women's social, political, economic and spiritual equality.

3 In Chinese two terms are used for "feminist": "nuxingzhuyizhe" (literally "female-ist") and "nuquanzhuyizhe" (literally "female-power-ist"). The connotations of the latter are probably more radical than those of the English term, and carry over into the common understanding of the former term with which it is used interchangeably. The writers' understanding of the term "feminism" is discussed further on p 252-53.
popularity of women writers' fiction in the post-1978 period, and partly as a result of feminist theories being introduced into China from the West along with the general influx of new ideas. At the same time, women's problems came to the fore as the loosening of social and economic controls that accompanied reform policies allowed deep-seated traditional prejudices against women to re-emerge: females began to require higher marks than male students to qualify for entrance to key educational institutions; women, particularly those with young children formed a disproportionately high percentage of workers laid off by most urban industries, and female university graduates had trouble finding work simply because of their gender. In the countryside, the single-child policy led to the reappearance of female infanticide, and even in the less traditional cities, women who gave birth to a female child were likely to be despised or even maltreated. All these factors converged at a time of unprecedented intellectual freedom in communist China, leading a number of mainly young female literary critics to begin to use feminist ideas to interpret literature, and focus in particular on women's literature.

Perhaps not surprisingly, feminist criticism, and to a large extent articles that are not feminist but discuss women writers' works, were initially ignored by the major literary journals in Beijing and Shanghai. This has been attributed by one female critic (probably quite accurately) to both the fact that editorial boards are dominated by conservatives, and

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4 Sun Zhaoxian, *Nuxingzhuyi wenxue (Feminist Literature)* (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1987), p 111.


6 Women are popularly believed to be responsible for determining the sex of a child, so the birth of a girl is regarded as their "fault." The extent of this problem can be gauged by the fact that a propaganda film explaining that a child's sex is determined by the father not the mother, and that girls are just as good as boys anyway, was repeatedly shown on prime-time Beijing television in the mid-1980s in an attempt to remove these prejudices. For a discussion of the effects of the one-child policy on women also see Lucien Bianco and Hua Chang-ming, "Implementation and Resistance: The Single-Child Family Policy," in S. Feuchtwang et al (eds), *Transforming China's Economy in the Eighties* (London: Zed Books, 1988), Vol 1, pp 156-159.
the generally low quality of early articles. The majority of influential articles have been published in regional journals, most importantly *Exploring Contemporary Literature and Art* (Fuzhou), *Literature and Art Review* (Harbin), *Review of Contemporary Writers* (Shenyang), *Critics* (Taiyuan), *Trends in Contemporary Literature and Art* (Lanzhou), and *Wide Angle on Literature and Art* (Shenyang), as well as minor journals in Hangzhou, Chengdu, Nanjing and Changchun. Only in 1988 did the influential journal *Reading (Dushu)* carry an article on women’s literature and feminism, and it was not until 1989 that *Shanghai Literature* and *Shanghai Literary Review* published on the subject. To my knowledge, the major Beijing journals, *People’s Literature* and *Literary Criticism* had still not published any feminist criticism by mid 1990. A mark that it was finally becoming more accepted in the conservative capital, however, was the inception of a new course on feminist literary criticism at Beijing University in September 1988, and a conference at Beijing University in September 1989 on feminism and literary criticism.

The majority of articles on literature by women published between 1985 and 1987 show little knowledge of and rarely use or discuss existing Western feminist theory. With the exception of a few passing references to the works of Simone de Beauvoir or Virginia Woolf, analysis of women’s oppression tends to be limited to a repetition of Marxist theory, particularly that found in Engels’ "The Origins of the Family, Private

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8 *Dangdai wenyi tansuo*.

9 *Wenyi pinglun*.

10 *Dangdai zuojia pinglun*.

11 *Pipingjia*.

12 *Dangdai wenyi sichao*.

13 *Wenyi guangjiao*. 
Property and the State." As a result of this relatively weak theoretical base, the general quality of writing is fairly low, and arguments frequently fall into "patriarchal traps" (looked at in more detail below).

Articles written after 1987 generally show a much better understanding of recent Western feminist writing. Unfortunately, to the time of writing, these articles have been only records of interviews or conference notes, so that attempts to analyse contemporary literature and women writers using the theories of feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray or Toril Moi have necessarily been brief and undeveloped. Nevertheless, if the political climate permits, more mature and systematic feminist criticism is sure to appear and is awaited with interest.

These differences between earlier and later feminist critics can be seen even from the terminology they use to describe the aims of feminist literature. In 1986, Wu Daiying saw the goal as "women's liberation," while a year later, Yi Qing talked of "comprehensively realizing female self-worth." By 1989, however, feminists were using much more sophisticated concepts, and demanding that feminist literature "deconstruct patriarchal culture and the power structure of patriarchal society."

Debates in which feminist critics have become involved centre on three major areas of women writers' fiction: subject matter and modes of

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14 See for example Han Jianfen, "Cong xinshiqi xiaoshuo kan funu jingshenshang de zhuiqiu" ("From Fiction of the New Period Observe Women's Spiritual Pursuits"), Dangdai wenyi tensuo, No 6, 1985, pp 38-41; and Qian Yinyu, "Tamen shi quanbu shijieshi de chanwu" ("They are Products of the History of the Whole World"), Dangdai wenyi sichao, No 2, 1987, pp 19-23.

15 For example Hu Ying and Tang Xiaobing, "Wo bushi nuquanzhuyizhe" ("I am Not a Feminist"), Dushu, No 4, 1988, pp 72-78.

16 Wu Daiying, "Nuxing shijie he nuxing wenxue" ("Women's World and Women's Literature"), Wenyi pinglun, No 1, 1986, p 63.

17 Yi Qing, "Yige chongman huoli de zhidian" ("A Fulcrum Full of Vigour"), Dangdai wenyi sichao, No 2, 1987, p 18.

18 See conference notes from the Beijing University conference "Nuquanzhuyi yu wenxue piping" ("Feminism and Literary Criticism"), Wenzue ziyou tan, No 6, 1989, p 21.
expression, the phenomenon of "masculinization," and the development of female consciousness.

**Women Writers and Women’s Experience**

In the debate over subject matter and modes of expression, the conservative view (here not surprisingly represented by a man and an older woman), considers women’s writing on women to be merely "female nagging" or "self-indulgence," a manifestation of women’s narrow group consciousness that must be transcended if women writers are to enter the realms of real literature. Proponents of this view are critical of the early works of Zhang Jie, Zhang Xinxin and Wang Anyi that explore women’s lives, but give strong approval to their later works including Zhang Jie’s "What’s Wrong With Him?," Wang Anyi’s "Xiao Bao Village" and Zhang Xinxin’s "The Mad Amaryllis" that at most only touch on women’s problems. Though some of the criticisms offered by these critics are valid, for example the claim that much women’s writing on women has greater sociological than literary significance (a criticism equally valid for contemporary Chinese literature in general), the conclusion they draw that women should stop writing about women’s experiences is unjustifiably extreme.

Opponents of this viewpoint see it as blindly traditional and damaging to women writers. In "The Bewilderment and Searching of Educated Women," Zhao Mei, one of the most influential of the young, feminist-oriented critics, argues that far from being narrow and limited,

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women’s fiction has broken through "traditional fetters" to expand the content of literature beyond utilitarian political and social subject matter to the world of the mind and the emotions. They have also developed unique styles and techniques that particularly suit their new subjects and themes. Zhao praises the works of Zhang Jie, Zhang Kangkang and Zhang Xinxin for depicting women’s struggle for independence. She considers that their images of modern women supplement the "static, colourless and monotonous" aesthetic judgement of women found in men’s writing, and hence expand readers’ understanding of the whole of humankind. Zhao believes that trying to force women writers along the path of Jiang Zilong or Liu Xinwu only causes bewilderment, and cites Zhang Jie’s *Leaden Wings* and Zhang Xinxin’s "Philately" as unsuccessful works that have resulted from such pressure.

In "A Path of One’s Own," Jin Yanyu supports this view, expressing regret that in recent years women’s writing rarely manifests a strong female consciousness. Like the conservative critics she considers women’s writing on women too limited, but she sets out from an essentially feminist viewpoint, arguing that having broken out of traditional female consciousness, women writers must now expand their horizons beyond the world of independent urban educated women to examine the lives of all kinds of Chinese women.

Though most critics holding this view take a distinctly feminist stance, they often justify their arguments on a biological or essentialist rather than a feminist political basis. Xu Ping’s "The Special Mood of

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23 Ibid pp 33-34.


26 Ibid p 94.

27 In feminist terms, essentialism is the belief in a given female nature, biologism is
Women Writers," lists special "female" psychological traits that women should fully utilize in their writing. She sees women as "meticulous, sensitive, melancholy and emotional," and even likely to be the ones having "major unsightly hysterical outbursts in public," characteristics she considers "are probably related to their physiology." While on the positive side this offers strong justification for women writers breaking away from conventional "socialist" subject matter and using a more subjective, emotionally-intense style to explore women's experience, the danger of this line of reasoning is that it can be utilised not to "liberate" women writers, but to define a new set of restrictions for them. In "Women Writers' Women's Literature Since 'May 4th'," Li Xingmin does just this.

In essence, Li argues that if women's writing does not embody "gentle, charming, moving young women" it is transgressing "inherent female nature." Hence he considers even works depicting independent single modern women, including Zhang Jie's "The Ark" and Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?" to be unnatural. Taken to the extreme as it is in Li's article, the stress on "special female traits" becomes a tool to limit women writers to subject matter and a style that conforms with the traditional, patriarchal ideal of femininity.

A third, minority view steers a course between the first two, advocating that women writers concern themselves with both women's inner world and the "outer" world of wider society. Zhang Kangkang's

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28 Xu Ping, "Nuzuojia chuangzuo de teshu qingxu" ("The Special Mood of Women Writers"), Zhejiang xuekan, No 2, 1988, pp 67 and 69.


30 Ibid p 90.
"We Need Two Worlds"\(^{31}\) argues that the liberation of women cannot be achieved in isolation, but will follow as a consequence of the liberation from inequality of the whole of society.\(^{32}\) Hence women writers' primary task is to focus on broad social and political issues. At the same time, however, she refers to women writers as "the spokeswomen for women" and considers "the real responsibility of women's literature is to improve women."

In "On Women's Literature of the New Period in the Midst of Observing 'Two Worlds',"\(^{33}\) Ma Aru uses Zhang Kangkang's concept of two worlds to analyse the historical development of Chinese women's literature. She regards women's literature of the May Fourth period as too narrowly focussed on women's inner world, and that of the seventeen years from 1949 to 1966 as ignoring women's issues on the mistaken premise that women's complete liberation had been achieved with the establishment of communist rule. Only in the New Period,\(^{34}\) she believes, have women writers achieved the ideal of simultaneously promoting the cause of women's liberation and fulfilling their responsibility to the people and the Chinese nation. Ma singles out Zhang Jie, Shen Rong and Ru Zhijuan as writers who have been particularly successful in depicting both women's special world and the wider world of which it is an inseparable part.

Zhang Kangkang's concept of two worlds was immediately

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\(^{31}\) Zhang Kangkang, "Women xuyao liangge shijie" ("We Need Two Worlds"), \textit{Wenyi pinglun}, No 1, 1986, pp 57-61. While the term "two worlds" seems to be borrowed from Juliet Mitchell's \textit{Woman's Estate} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), Zhang Kangkang's ideas bear no resemblance to Mitchell's. Mitchell's thesis was that it is necessary to analyse women's oppression in the worlds of both production and reproduction.

\(^{32}\) This is the argument that has kept the women's movement subordinate to leftist political goals since the 1930s.


\(^{34}\) The "New Period" or "New Era" (Xin shiqi) is the name commonly used in contemporary China for the post-1978 period.
challenged by feminist critics. In a letter to Zhang, Wu Daiying asserts that women’s liberation is a prerequisite to the liberation of mankind, and on the basis of this premise sets out the feminist political goals she believes women writers should serve:

"If you understand this truth, you will be strongly conscious of your responsibility as a female writer to the women's liberation movement of our country, and from now on consciously struggle for women's benefit."  

While this theoretical debate may seem somewhat removed from the reality of women writers (who are not necessarily feminists) deciding what and how to write, it should be remembered that in the early 1980s literary critics led the attack on Zhang Xinxin that led her to turn from examining women's lives to her generally less successful journalistic literature. Hence the importance to women writers of feminist critics should not be underestimated. By establishing the validity on a theoretical level of women writers' examining women's experience in their fiction, the feminists provide a counterbalance to conservative views. Even if one considers any attempt to proscribe specific subject matter and forms of expression as potentially damaging to creativity, it should be recognised that the growing tolerance for the feminist position brings with it more freedom for Chinese women writers to write about female experience if they so choose.

The Masculinization of Women's Fiction

Concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" as used by Chinese critics tend to follow closely the traditional Chinese ideals. Few critics attempt to define these terms, reflecting the fact that most regard them as identical.

35 Wu Daiying, "Nuxing shijie he nuxing wenxue" ("Women's World and Women's Literature"), p 63.
with a given male and female nature, and assume a common understanding of their meaning. In Feminist Literature, however, Sun Zhaoxian lists the qualities traditionally associated with "the yielding beauty of the yin" as: timidity, circumspection, dependency, narrowness, self-deprecation, blind obedience, forbearance, gentleness, compliance and frailty; and those associated with the "vigorous beauty of the yang" as arrogance, courage, impetuousness, coarseness, lack of emotion, vanity and exclusionism. As the negative slant of these lists suggests, Sun is one of the few critics who challenges their validity, but in general they are a good guide to the basic cultural assumptions behind most other critics' use of the terms. Other frequently cited "feminine" qualities are sensitivity, kindness, self-sacrifice and restraint; while resoluteness, confidence and rationality are often regarded as "masculine" attributes.

Among feminist and other critics of women's literature, one of the most widely-debated questions has been how to appraise the phenomenon of "masculinization" in women writers' fiction. Out of a sample of eight critics' views on this subject, three regard it as entirely negative, four have serious reservations, and only one sees it in a positive light.

All of those who oppose female masculinization do so on the grounds that it transgresses female nature. Zhang Kangkang in "We Need Two Worlds" considers that "if female beauty and inherent female qualities of gentleness, warmth, toughness and tactfulness are destroyed, it is no different from destroying our lives." Yu Qing in "Sublimation of Bitterness," sees characters such as the three single women in Zhang Jie's "The Ark," the female protagonists of Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?" and "On the Same Horizon," and the heroine of Zhang Kangkang's

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36 Nuxingzhuyi wenxue (Feminist Literature), p 141.
37 Ibid p 145.
38 "Women xuyao liangge shijie" ("We Need Two Worlds"), p 61.
39 Yu Qing, "Ku'nan de shenghua" ("Sublimation of Bitterness"), Dangdai wenyi sichao, No 6, 1987, pp 50-55.
"Summer" as having been forced by social circumstance to replace "female gentleness and weakness" with male intrepidity and staunchness. The clash between male qualities and the "female essence," she argues, creates only a sense of internal imbalance in these women, and is neither the correct direction for female literature, nor a mark of the maturation of female consciousness. Li Xingmin puts the case in more extreme terms. He considers that the female characters in "The Ark" and "How Did I Miss You?" have "an artificial and even abnormal, strengthened female psychology" which "puts women into a position they physiologically cannot endure. It is a morbid psychology that transgresses women's inherent nature."\(^{40}\)

With only one exception, critics who give masculinization qualified approval also argue in terms of female nature. Wu Daiying believes masculinization is "an unavoidable link in the process of women's liberation," a form of alienation which females must endure so as to win real equality with males. "Only then under the premise of male-female equality can the original nature of females be restored."\(^{41}\) Zhang Qing in "The Weakness, Masculinization and Genderlessness of Women's Literature," sees masculinization as "inevitable in a society that only recognises male standards," but ultimately expresses disapproval on the grounds that women "should be women."\(^{42}\) Zhao Mei also regards the phenomenon as "a kind of unavoidable alienation" caused by women's struggle in real life.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) "Wu si' yilai nuzuojiaqun de nuxing wenxue" ("Women Writers' Women's Literature Since 'May 4th'"), p 90.

\(^{41}\) "Nuxing shijie he nuxing wenxue" ("Women's World and Women's Literature") p 65.

\(^{42}\) Zhang Qing, "Nuxing wenxue de jiaoruol, xionghua he wuxinghua" ("The Weakness, Masculinization and Genderlessness of Women's Literature"), \textit{Dangdai zuojia pinglun}, No 5, 1986, pp 40.

\(^{43}\) "Zhishi nuxing de kunhuo yu xunqiu" ("The Bewilderment and Searching of Intellectual Women"), p 33.
The common problem with these arguments is that all are premised on a confusion between culturally-defined femininity and female nature. As with the view already discussed that women writers must utilise their female traits, this argument ultimately serves to confine all women to the mould of being "gentle and weak" on pain of being labelled "abnormal" or "unnatural." Among the characteristics Wu Daiying lists as "masculine" are "initiative" and "the desire to win." But clearly if possessing such qualities is unacceptable in women, they can never attain anything other than a subordinate position in society. Far from promoting women's liberation (the espoused goal of most of these critics), this argument only hinders it.

It is from this angle that Sun Zhaoxian attacks this traditional concept of female nature. In Feminist Literature, she draws on sociological and anthropological studies to argue that there is no innate female or male nature other than a common human instinct to imitate. "Female nature" is merely the result of socialization that begins at birth. Sun believes that the path to true equality lies in developing an "androgynous culture" in which both male and female move towards an "androgynous personality." Hence she considers feminist literature should support both the masculinization of women and the feminization of men.\(^44\) Li Xiaojiang takes a similar stance in Eve’s Exploration, regarding women developing male resolution and men becoming more gentle as good things, historically inevitable results of evolution. However she considers sudden changes such as the forced masculinization of women that occurred during the Cultural Revolution to be harmful and therefore gives only qualified support to the phenomenon as it appears in the works of contemporary women writers.\(^45\)

This theory of Sun Zhaoxian and Li Xiaojiang has received little support. Most Chinese feminists firmly believe that traditional femininity

\(^{44}\) Nuxingzhu yi wenxue (Feminist Literature), pp 76 and 159-167.

\(^{45}\) Li Xiaojiang, Xiawa de tansuo (Eve’s Exploration) (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988), p 288.
equals female nature, a fact that indicates the extraordinary continuing strength of China's traditional patriarchal culture.

The Development of Female Consciousness

Feminist critics have used a variety of viewpoints to analyse the development of female consciousness in contemporary women's fiction. In "Father, Totem and Disillusionment," for example, Zhao Mei uses the Freudian concept of Oedipal love to trace the path of women's writing from the search for the ideal of pure fatherly love established in childhood, through the invention of ideals (as in Zhang Xinxin's "Dreams of Our Generation") and pursuit of the unattainable (Zhang Jie's "Love is Not to be Forgotten"), to disappointment. In Zhao's view, this disappointment leads women to discover the irrationality of their existence and stimulates them to throw off their spiritual enslavement to men, thereby achieving a new inner balance.

Yu Qing's "Sublimation of Bitterness," sees contemporary women writers' development as a shift from the awakening of female consciousness in works such as "Love is Not to be Forgotten" and "Northern Lights" to an overemphasis on subjective female consciousness manifested by animosity towards men in works including "The Ark" and "On the Same Horizon." This eventually becomes the new mature, scientific female consciousness that combines self-respect and self-strengthening with co-operation with men which is found in the works of Liu Suola, Liu Xihong and other "fifth generation" writers.

Whatever their approach, most critics agree that the general trend has been one of rapid progress from spiritual and emotional dependence on men, through a period of disappointment and disillusionment in which they reject men, to the stage of realising self-worth and spiritual

46 Zhao Mei, "Fuqin, tuteng ji huanrnie" ("Father, Totem and Disillusionment"), Wenyi pinglun, No 3, 1986, pp 43-47.

47 "Ku’nán de shenghua: ("Sublimation of Bitterness").
independence - finding the female self. Sun Zhaoxian, however, raised a lone, dissenting voice by declaring that women writers have made no progress at all, and that "from the birth of literature about women to the present [1986], it has always been literature about looking for a man." 48

Based on her concept of an "androgyrous culture," Sun argues that the phenomenon of ridiculing men that permeates contemporary women's literature is a sign of educated women's continued spiritual and emotional dependency. The progress educated women have made has brought them to a position equal to if not surpassing most men, yet they can still only conceive of loving a man who not only surpasses them in culture and intellect, but also preserves qualities of the "wild he-man." As a result they despise all the men around them who do not live up to this near-impossible ideal. The misery of the women in "The Ark," Sun considers, is caused mainly by the fact that they cannot tolerate men who do not exude traditional masculinity. Zhang Jie and her female character's disgust at Manager Wei's revealing "the sort of flowery underpants that only women wear," is a reflection of their fear of men becoming feminized. That they are still "searching for a man," Sun concludes, can be deduced from the fact that they devote themselves to their careers not through choice, but because they cannot find the ideal husband. 49

Sun's argument, though a little overstated, is valid for many of the works discussed in this study. Characters in the works of Shen Rong and Ru Zhijuan are not depicted in their search for men, but their husbands or lovers often fit Sun's description of the unrealistic ideal macho-scholar. In Ru Zhijuan's "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," Zhang Min is both a labourer and an artist and intellectual. In Shen Rong's "Eternal Spring," Li Mengyu a heroic former guerilla leader is also able to discuss literature with the narrator. This image also appears in Zhang Kangkang's "The

48 "Wenxue chuangzuozhong funu diwei wenti de fansi" ("Reflections on the Question of the Position of Women in Literary Works"), Dangdai wenyi sichao, No 4, 1986, pp 95-96; and Nuxingzhuyi wenxue (Feminist Literature), pp 67-81.

49 Nuxingzhuyi wenxue (Feminist Literature), pp 69-70.
Right to Love" as the heroine's boyfriend, a farmhand and philosopher, and in "Northern Lights" as the plumber/economist Ceng Xu. It is only fair to point out, however, that since communist political movements including the Anti-Rightist Campaign in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution sent many educated men to labouring jobs in the countryside, the intellectual "he-man" may not be as rare as Sun claims. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate her argument that educated women are not prepared to tolerate anything but this ideal.

The scorn for feminized men, and rigidity with which the authors present their concept of masculinity is most palpable in the works of Zhang Xinxin and Zhang Jie. Of particular relevance is the agonized heroine of Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?": though most critics and the work itself concentrates on sympathising with the heroine for losing the ideal man because she lacks traditional femininity, all ignore the fact that she already has an adoring boyfriend who accepts her as she is, yet whom she rejects. From her contemptuous descriptions of Li Ke, it is clear that her main objection to him is that he is considerate, gentle and attentive - in other words, feminized. Thus it can be argued that the major problem exposed in this work is not that of the masculinization of women, but the failure of the new independent modern woman to tolerate a new feminized man.

Another example is the heroine of "On the Same Horizon," who chooses divorce when the demands of a traditional husband threaten her career. Though this indicates she is not merely "looking for a man," and she does come to question the concept of an ideal husband, she fails as a consequence to challenge traditional concepts of masculinity. The heroine reflects that before her marriage, hearing some women boast that their husbands did all the cooking and washing, she was not at all envious: "I didn't want my husband to be weaker than me, to mollycoddle me, to have no ambition." She sees men taking on part of the housework as a

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50 See for example Jin Yanyu, "Yitiao zijide guidao" ("A Path of One's Own"), pp 90-91.
sign of weakness and lack of ambition, a sign of lack of masculinity. But her conclusion is that "now I know that a he-man does not necessarily make a good husband." She realises that marriage could be more fulfilling for women if men assumed part of the household duties, but does not change her concept of a "he-man," thus keeping men in the position where to share household tasks is still to compromise their masculinity. While she appears to have modified her concept of femininity from the traditional ideal espoused by the heroine of "How Did I Miss You?" and suggests new sex roles in marriage, she does not see that this also requires a reassessment of her concepts of masculinity.

Sun Zhaoxian's critics do not deny her basic thesis, but seek to justify it. In "A Fulcrum Full of Vigour," Yi Qing takes the view that "men really are a fulcrum through which women understand and create the world." Hence it is inevitable that women's literature has always been about "searching for a man." Nevertheless, she argues, the search for a man to provide economic support and a family in May Fourth writers' works has in the New Period become a search for a trusted companion. Women now seek to find their own self-worth reflected in the image of a man. Yi Qing points out that dependency in male-female relationships is mutual, and blameless as long as it does not involve the loss of the self. While this is true, she ignores the fact that Sun Zhaoxian's main concern is that women are still seeking men with whom they can play a subordinate dependent role.

The strongest challenge to Sun's criticism of female intolerance for feminized males comes not from the theorists, but from the evidence of the works of Wang Anyi. Particularly in her fiction published since 1986, the male protagonists in Wang's fiction have often been emotionally and spiritually weaker than their female partners. Yet neither Wang nor most

51 Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang" ("On the Same Horizon"), p 177.
52 "Yige chongman huoli de zhidian" ("A Fulcrum Full of Vigour") pp 16-18 and p 85.
53 The mixed metaphor is in the original Chinese.
of her female characters despise them for this. In *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River*, the hero is less successful and talented than his girlfriend and becomes increasingly emotionally dependent upon her, but Wang never suggests that he lacks "masculinity" because of it. In "Love on a Barren Mountain," the extra-marital love relationship depicted is marked by the strength of the woman’s willpower and resolution, and the spiritual weakness and timidity of the man. The woman however, does not despise him, but appears happy to take a dominating role. Even in earlier works, Wang Anyi tended to depict men sympathetically as ordinary fallible beings that struggle against failure and disappointment just as women do (for example the heroes of "This Damnable Troupe" and "Destiny Symphony"). Though some stories do depict women seeking Sun’s ideal male ("Misty Rain"; "Destiny"), other stories show women consciously choosing men who are their equals instead of their intellectual and economic superiors ("A Commonplace Girl," "Returning"), suggesting that from early in the 1980s, Wang’s general attitude to men has been more balanced than that of Zhang Jie or Zhang Xinxin.

The Writers’ Attitudes to Feminism

The writers themselves are something of a riddle. All those who have discussed the subject specifically deny being feminists, yet without exception their works contain criticisms and attitudes that have strong feminist significance. All believe in the principle of true equality for women, yet in interviews and articles and in their fiction, one can find attitudes that serve primarily to keep women subordinate to men. Further, while it might be expected that the strength of the writers’ feminist consciousness would decrease with their age, the evidence indicates that this is not the case.
Ru Zhijuan

To my knowledge, Ru Zhijuan has made no statements on her attitude to feminism, but her works show contradictory elements common to all the writers under discussion. Ru’s female protagonists are generally capable, intelligent, independent women either with successful careers behind them (eg the two older women in "Sons and Daughters"), or in pursuit of a career (eg "Path Through the Grasslands"). Her women characters are not only nurses or actresses, but also competent cadres and oil-field technicians. In feminist terms, this is clearly a positive step away from the traditional image of the docile, dependent woman whose life revolves around her husband, such as is found in the works of some contemporary male writers, notably Zhang Xianliang and Zhang Chengzhi.

Ru also takes a strong stand against the Confucian chastity cult. Through the heroine of "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape," she protests against the traditional criteria for appraising women, expressing anger that their talents and abilities are ignored and only their virginity is valued. The work also supports the right of widows to remarry, and women’s right to divorce - issues that are still quite contentious among Ru’s generation. On the other hand, "An Ancient Song" acknowledges the right of a father to determine whom an adult daughter will marry and where she will live, while "Boat Without a Rudder" reverses the anti-traditional stance Ru had taken in "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" (see page 128).

Considered as a whole, Ru’s works display an underlying confidence in women’s courage, spiritual strength and capability, and show occasional flashes of feminist iconoclasm. But the general conservatism of her attitudes and the fact that her social and political criticism generally aims to restore an idealized past rather than create a new future, make it unlikely that she would openly and vigorously support a feminist cause that fundamentally challenged the status quo.
All of the remaining five writers have expressed definite opinions on feminism, disassociating themselves from the women's liberation movement for a variety of reasons. At the same time all have also put forward views that to varying degrees support a feminist position.

In an interview in 1988, Shen Rong declared she had "always disagreed with feminism," on the grounds that:

"I believe you [American feminists] are trying to make women become like men...It is precisely by using special female attributes to establish an independent place in the world that women manifest their self-respect and self-confidence. The special characteristics of woman are that first of all she should be very gentle, very delicate, very meticulous."\(^\text{54}\)

While Shen's view that women should be gentle, delicate and meticulous shows her acceptance of patriarchally-defined femininity as being female nature, her general statement is not entirely inconsistent with feminist theory. According to Julia Kristeva's analysis, the second of three simultaneous and non-exclusive tiers of feminist struggle is that in which women extol femininity and reject the male symbolic order.\(^\text{55}\) Shen is not rejecting the whole "male symbolic order," but she is asserting the difference between male and female, and stressing the value of "female qualities" devalued by patriarchal culture. Thus her stance does have some positive feminist significance. Even more clearly identifiable feminist aspirations are revealed in her rationale for depicting women oppressed by traditional marriages: "I ardently hope that women's social status will genuinely improve, that they will achieve true equality."\(^\text{56}\)

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\(^{54}\) Author's interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988. Shen was repeating to the author what she had said to some American feminists.


\(^{56}\) Author's interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.
Like Shen Rong, Wang Anyi opposes feminism on the grounds of female-male difference. Wang asserts that the situation for women in China is different from that in the West. In her view, "equality" in China has in fact meant that Chinese women have had to add work outside the home to their domestic work. The liberation they require is therefore that from their heavy double burden, and can be achieved by women returning to a purely domestic role.57 She explained:

"For decades we have been required to be the same as men, so now we want to stress that we are different from men...we want to wear beautiful clothes, we want to use make-up, we want more time in the kitchen and with the children."58

Two Chinese feminists have interpreted Wang’s views as a feminist "strategy" that "deconstructs traditional concepts of equality, and deconstructs the metaphysical understanding of special female characteristics."59 This, however, seems an exaggeration. Wang does represent women’s interests by exposing the inequality of "equality" between the sexes in China, but her solutions are a surrender to patriarchy. Why for example does she not consider men taking on an equal share of domestic work to alleviate women’s double burden? Why does she encourage women to return to being simply sexual objects for men’s appreciation? Wang’s fiction suggests that women are dominant in the field of intimate interpersonal power relations (see p 235), but if women are to control their own lives, emotional and spiritual power over a husband or lover (which is ultimately dependent on the emotional attachment of the man) cannot substitute for social and economic


58 Author’s interview with Wang Anyi, October 12, 1988.

59 Hu Ying, Tang Xiaobing, "Wo bushi nuquanzhuyizhe" ("I am Not a Feminist"), p 77-78.
independence. What Wang advocates could only lead women back to a position of economic dependence on men, and inevitably a position of spiritual dependence and economic, social and political inferiority.

Wang Anyi acknowledges that a return to the home would lead to a fall in women’s status, but does not change her argument because of it. In contrast, Shen Rong, who also stresses special female characteristics, emphasises the direct relationship between woman’s position in society and her status in the home, regarding work outside the home as essential for women if they are to be respected.

The views of Shen Rong and Wang Anyi show the positive and negative aspects of focussing on the male-female difference. In Shen Rong’s view, special female attributes are the vehicle women use to gain an independent place in wider society. It implies the partial feminization of society. In Wang Anyi, they dictate that women should limit themselves to the home, a view that denies their universal value and could only reinforce the traditional value system that regards women and "female" qualities as inferior.

Zhang Jie’s opposition to feminism is in part based on an opposition to the radical feminist ideal that women should dominate human society. When asked at an interview in 1986 if she was a feminist, she replied:

"Western feminists have thrown down the gauntlet to men, I don’t agree with that. I don’t believe that this world only belongs to men, neither do I believe it only belongs to women. The world belongs to everyone."

Her objections also centre on weaknesses in women themselves. She considers women’s inferior status is caused at least in part by their

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60 Wang Anyi, Li Ang, "Funu wenti yu funu wenxue" ("Women’s Problems and Women’s Literature"), p 77.

61 Author’s interview with Shen Rong, September 26, 1988.

62 "Rang wenxue he shidai tongbu tengfei" ("Let Literature Soar With the Era"), p 163.
own failings. These include basing their self-respect solely on having a male partner; lacking confidence in their own abilities; and regarding themselves as sex-objects. Because of this she believes "male-female equality is not just a social problem, it is also a problem in women's education that urgently needs solving."

Though Zhang Jie disassociates herself from feminism, her criticisms have positive feminist significance, for they see these "women's weaknesses" not as innate, but as a question of education, and therefore affirm women's potential. Further, the very fact that Zhang Jie considers them to be "weaknesses" shows that she sets out from the liberal feminist position that women should be independent and self-confident. Zhang's criticism that some women do not understand that "as long as women struggle ceaselessly and devote themselves to practice, their value can be recognised by society," is also essentially a call to women to realise their full potential, something liberal feminists would concur with. What most feminists would object to is Zhang's overemphasis on blaming women for their inequality, and her underemphasis on the role of men and society. That Zhang in an 1988 interview with the author shifted the blame away from men and society, and in 1986 described women who hate both as "shallow" is particularly interesting because these same tendencies are clear in her fiction on women of the early 1980s, particularly in "The Ark." It indicates that either her views have changed over the last few years, or that there is a major discrepancy between her stated theory and her practice.

Zhang Kangkang and Zhang Xinxin show the same contradictory tendencies. As we saw earlier in the chapter, Zhang Kangkang on one hand sees women writers as "the spokeswomen for women" and considers

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63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.
that "the real responsibility of women's literature is to improve women," but on the other places women's struggle for equality in second place behind the struggle for equality throughout society. In "We Need Two Worlds," she also states that she does not write women's literature (here meaning literature questioning traditional moral standards applied to women) because it would involve her in endless disputes that would waste her time. Zhang Kangkang is therefore clearly not primarily a feminist, yet feels a strong concern for feminist issues.

Similarly Zhang Xinxin expressed the belief that "as far as intelligence and physical strength go, women are often superior to men." She also stated her dissatisfaction that women do not really participate in government and politics, all views that could be interpreted as liberal feminism. Yet she also claimed that "feminism has no future because women naturally have a strong desire to be dependent," and expressed a sexist view of women's images in literature. Discussing her depiction of female masculinization as a negative phenomenon in "How Did I Miss You?," she explained:

"The image of women in literature must not be damaged. Men can represent strength, and a writer can use all different kinds of thought to depict them. Sometimes women abstractly represent a concept of beauty and goodness. Humankind's basic aspirations always include some particularly pure and beautiful things - [so] we need images of children, or images of particularly pure, beautiful women."

There is, of course, nothing wrong with women being presented as "pure and beautiful," but Zhang Xinxin's description threatens to limit literature to presenting women only as the stereotyped traditional ideal - an image

66 See p 227.

67 "Women xuyao liangge shijie" ("We Need Two Worlds"), p 59.

68 Author's interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.

69 Ibid.
that as Zhao Mei has pointed out, has already become "static, colourless and monotonous," and cannot represent the experience of modern Chinese women as they strive to establish an independent place in society.\textsuperscript{70} That Zhang Xinxin should have made this statement is quite surprising as few of her own images of women bear any resemblance to this ideal. Perhaps more than anything it exemplifies the inconsistencies and contradictions both within the women writers' attitudes and between their stated views and their fiction in the area of feminist issues.

The writers' works are as contradictory as their stated attitudes. As numerous examples earlier in the thesis and particularly in Chapter Four have indicated, all the writers have attacked traditional attitudes that oppress women both physically and spiritually. The older writers not only expose the oppression of women in marriage and the discrimination against women who do not conform with traditional marital and sexual morality, but also examine prejudices against women that hinder their development in wider society. In "Can't Be Bothered to Divorce," Shen Rong expresses the frustration of women whose talents are ignored because they are women. Fangfang, a young female journalist reflects bitterly on her popularity with her male colleagues:

"...[E]everyone liked her, simply because she was a likable woman, a young woman, nothing more. No one really valued her, no one seriously regarded her as a competent journalist. No one assigned her articles to write, no one appraised her work. Her worth seemed to be only her gender, her glory seemed to be only her youth.

She really felt like crying."\textsuperscript{71}

Shen Rong's protest against women being viewed only as sex-objects is echoed by Zhang Jie in "The Ark," both through her sympathy

\textsuperscript{70} See p 225.

\textsuperscript{71} "Lande lihun" ("Can't be Bothered to Divorce"), p 7.
for a very capable woman (Liu Quan) whose job is threatened because she rebutts the sexual advances of a superior, and through her critical depiction of a second woman (Qian Xiuying) who is secure in her job despite her incompetence because she willingly plays the role of sex-object.

In general, the younger writers' criticism of the oppression of women by traditional attitudes and values has been much weaker and less sustained than that of Shen Rong and Zhang Jie. From a feminist point of view, their main contribution has been to establish a new image of the modern young woman.

In Zhang Kangkang's works this is typified by the figure of Cen Lang, the heroine of the "Summer" series of stories. Cen Lang is lively, intelligent, courageous, and independent, a strong contrast to the qualities traditionally valued in women. In Zhang Xinxin's works, particularly "On the Same Horizon" and "The Last Mooring Place," we find the new woman rejecting marriage and motherhood in favour of her career. She is ambitious and competitive, and more comfortable with her new authority than middle-aged women in the older writers' works. In "The Ark," film director Liang Qian feels she is despised by her cast and orchestra because she is a woman, and as a result is afraid even to demand that they arrive at work on time.72 The heroine of Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon" has no such qualms. Also a film director, she confidently asserts her authority at the slightest sign of dissent from her cast: "I am the director..."73

Whereas the modern woman in Zhang Xinxin and Zhang Kangkang's works strives to realise her self-worth and assert her independence as the equal of men in a male world, in Wang Anyi's works, she is a celebration of being female. The female protagonist in "Love in a Small Town" is uplifted and purified by pregnancy and childbirth, while without this experience, the male protagonist degenerates. The celebration

72 "Fangzhou" ("The Ark"), p 18.

73 "Zai tongyi dipingxianshang" ("On the Same Horizon"), p 220.
of motherhood is, of course, not necessarily a feminist act, but in Wang's story, motherhood has been separated from its traditional association with marriage and its function of continuing the male family line. The girl insists on becoming a mother and keeping her children in the face of intense pressure from representatives of patriarchal morality first to have an abortion and then to adopt one of the children out. Using the terminology of Adrienne Rich, she has rejected the institution of motherhood while deriving joy and enrichment from the experience.74

Wang Anyi and Zhang Kangkang's exploration of female sexuality is also significant in the context of a traditional culture that regards women's sexual desire as destructive and evil. By affirming the normality and universality of sexual feelings in women, the two writers can be seen as making a positive contribution to the sexual liberation of Chinese women.

The significance of the challenge they present to tradition can be gauged from literary critics' views on their works celebrating female sexuality. Writing on Wang Anyi's "The Epoch at Gangshang Village," Li Xia considered the main problem with the work was not that it depicted a woman obliged to give sex in exchange for a factory job, but Wang's "enthusiasm" in depicting it.75 He cites a similar work which he considers "handled the theme with a greater sense of beauty."76 According to his outline of the plot, the main difference between the two works is that in the favoured work, the woman "remains completely cold and unresponsive" throughout her relationship with a local official. Hence Li's "sense of beauty" hinges on the traditional attitude that "good women" show no sexual desire, and his main objection to Wang's story is that the

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75 In fact in Wang's story, the relationship continues, dominated by the woman, long after the man is disgraced and in no position to control job assignments, so it is not simply a story of exchanging sex for a job.

76 "Xing yao xie, dan bu neng diu le mei" ("You Can Write About Sex, But Not at the Expense of Beauty"), p 25.
woman should have enjoyed herself. Yet it is precisely this attitude to female sexuality that Wang and the other young writers are implicitly attacking in their works.

These examples show that a wide variety of feminist attitudes can be identified in the works of the writers. Yet at the same time, none entirely escapes the influence of traditional patriarchal culture. This can be seen in the persistence of rigid concepts of women's nature and women's roles, as well as traditional double standards applied to sexual morality and social behaviour that serve to control and limit women.

Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?" and Zhang Jie's "The Ark" clearly illustrate the way in which female characters devalue changes in their personalities that have enabled them to cope independently with modern society.

In "The Ark," the figure of timid, forebearing, reticent Liu Quan shows that traditional feminine virtues cannot win women the social equality they seek, yet her bold outspoken friend Cao Jinghua, mourns her own loss of these same qualities, regretting her "masculinization." Despite the fact that the three female protagonists all agree that they must strive to strengthen themselves in order to achieve recognition for their work and equality with men, they do not see that this must involve a reassessment of their own traditional concepts of femininity. They have partially adapted themselves to cope with a new social role, but are hindered by their own traditional perceptions of their ideal selves.

The heroine of "How Did I Miss You?" also agonizes over her lack of femininity. One of the reasons she gives for her "masculinization" is that to organise things for her family during the Cultural Revolution, she had to strip away "frailty and bashfulness" which are "inevitable weaknesses in the perfect female nature." She does not examine these qualities and conclude that they prevent women functioning effectively in

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77 "Fangzhou" ("The Ark"), p 16.

78 "Wo zai nar cuoguole ni" ("How Did I Miss You?") p 101.
society and should therefore be challenged, but implies that because it requires the loss of an essential part of female nature, women should not have to organise things in society. Likewise, she recalls how she became emotionally self-reliant after losing a boyfriend, and that "in politics, on the path of life, in moments of crisis, in all matters of choice, I had to rely on myself to make decisions." But instead of celebrating this new self-reliance, she asks rhetorically "Can I be entirely to blame for this?," implying that women making their own decisions about their lives is an abnormal and culpable act. To complete the negation of her personality, she resolves "to change myself as much as possible and become a real woman." By deduction "a real woman" implies frailty, bashfulness, emotional dependence and the relegation of decision-making to others. Not surprisingly, she finds it impossible to revert to this dependent and subordinate state, but still fails to question her own concept of femininity and so cannot solve her psychological dilemma. Characters in Zhang Xinxin's later works do not seem troubled to the same degree over being "unfeminine," but in an interview in 1988 Zhang Xinxin indicated that she had not changed her views on this question.

Of all the writers under discussion, Shen Rong has most consistently used a feminist viewpoint to discuss women's issues, but even she occasionally contradicts her own arguments. In Chapter Four, analysis of the role of Shi Lihua in "Eternal Spring" suggested that Shen saw a purely domestic role as limiting to women, while in "Yang Yueyue and the Study of Sartre," she praised a peasant woman for escaping the confines of a traditional marital relationship and struggling to realise her self-worth through work outside the home. In "At Middle Age" however, Shen uncritically presents her heroine expressing the same views that kept both Yang and Shi spiritually fettered within their homes.

At a dinner party, Lu Wenting, a dedicated and outstanding

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79 Ibid p 102.

80 Author's interview with Zhang Xinxin, August 29, 1988.
ophthalmologist is praised by friends for "sacrificing herself to save mankind." Lu however, points to her husband and retorts:

"You ask him if I'm not selfish, driving my husband into the kitchen and turning my children into ragamuffins... the fact is I'm neither a good wife nor a good mother." 81

Lu's attitude infers that her true value can only be measured by how adequately she has performed domestic duties. Saving mankind is irrelevant if her husband is obliged to do the cooking.

Her husband reinforces this attitude that household tasks should be exclusively women's duties by citing the difficulties of being a doctor's husband:

"She comes back so exhausted from the operating theatre that she can't raise a finger to cook a meal. That being the case, if I don't go into the kitchen, who will?" 82

Shen also sympathetically depicts him making "embittered jokes" about being a "househusband" during the Cultural Revolution. Thus men taking on domestic duties is presented as unreasonable and a cause for guilt in women.

Wang Anyi's works also show an uncritical acceptance of traditional concepts of female nature and women's roles. Her women characters are generally neither ambitious nor successful, nor do they show any desire for independence or self-determination. In "Glittering Fallen Leaves," the heroine's decision to further her education is motivated by the fear of losing her husband, not by an intrinsic desire to improve herself. Further, the strength and courage of many of her female characters is manifested

81 "Ren dao zhongnian" ("At Middle Age"), translated by Yu Fanqin and Wang Mingjie in At Middle Age (Beijing: Chinese Literature Panda Series, 1987), p 41.

82 Ibid.
only in their relationships with their husbands and lovers or their children (eg in "Love on a Barren Mountain" and rural women in "Xiao Bao Village"), and is rarely a challenge to male authority in wider society.

Wang also presents a very conventional view of the ideal marriage partner. Young female characters in '69 Lower-middle School Graduate for example, advise that girls should choose husbands who are taller, older and better-educated than themselves - the same phenomenon of searching for a man to be subordinate to that Sun Zhaoxian criticised so strongly.83

Finally, since 1984, Wang Anyi has worked hard to eliminate any sign of authorial gender or attitude from her works.84 Though this does not detract from any feminist significance that may be read into the works, it does imply that the author herself is consciously avoiding active promotion of a feminist viewpoint.

In line with Zhang Kangkang’s view that the liberation of society must precede the liberation of women, little of her considerable output of fiction has examined women’s issues. Even works that focus on the lives of women are more concerned with spiritual liberation of the individual than with women in particular. Zhang Kangkang in fact believes that the messages conveyed in her works would remain the same if all her female protagonists were replaced with males.85 This is clearly untrue. In "Northern Lights," for example, though Zhang Kangkang claimed to be depicting young people’s search for a new philosophy of life,86 the way she has presented the theme makes use of the traditional view that women do not define themselves, but are defined through men. Dissatisfied with her philistine boyfriend, the heroine becomes attached to first a cynical,  

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83 During an interview in 1988, when the author questioned Wang Anyi on this specific point, she expressed the view that this was "natural," affirming that these characters represent the authorial voice.

84 "Funu wenti yu funu wenxue" ("Women’s Problems and Women’s Literature"), p 79.

85 "Women xuyao liangge shijie" ("We Need Two Worlds"), p 58.

disillusioned university student, and then an idealistic, intellectual plumber. Hence though each man has independently developed his own philosophy of life, the woman can only find hers by swapping partners until she finds the man/philosophy she admires the most. The men may only be symbols of particular ideas and lifestyles, but the work still reiterates the traditional image of women as passive, spiritually dependent and intellectually inferior. Clearly if the roles were reversed in this story the message would be quite different.

Male-female double standards can be found in the works of women from both the younger and the middle age-groups. These double-standards are of two types: (1) behaviour acceptable in men is regarded as unacceptable in women, or vice versa; and (2) behaviour unacceptable in men is regarded as even more unacceptable in women.

In Zhang Jie's "Emerald," Zhang Lingr considers herself married to Zuo Wei because she had once slept with him. She completely discounts the possibility of ever establishing a relationship with anyone else, even after she realizes she no longer loves him, and even though she yearns for marriage. But when she learns that Zuo Wei is married she thinks: "Zuo Wei naturally ought to marry."87 She does not consider that their one night together should mean a lifetime of celibacy for him as it does for her. Here Zheng Lingr has completely internalized traditional sexual double-standards which allow a woman sexual relations with only one man in her lifetime, but allow men multiple relationships. The continuing strength of these traditional attitudes is evidenced by the fact that Zheng Lingr's conformity to tradition is completely self-imposed, and Zhang Jie makes no comment on Zeng's attitude in the work.

Zhang Xinxin's "How Did I Miss You?" reveals double standards derived from traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity that serve to limit women's ability to compete in society as men's equals. The central characters, a female amateur playwright, and a male director with whom

87 "Zumulu" ("Emerald"), p 241.
she falls in love, are both described at different times as "self-confident" and "stubborn," but whereas the woman uses these terms to express her admiration for the man, when he uses them to describe her, she interprets them as negative qualities. The man reinforces this by telling her he hopes she will change herself by becoming more feminine.

The effect of these double standards are revealed in microcosm in a scene where the playwright and director argue over changes he wants to make in the play which she strongly opposes. The woman consciously stops arguing with him because she is afraid he will think her "stubborn and competitive," and he immediately interprets this as capitulation on her part. Thus the woman finds herself in a position in which she must either compromise her views or lose her "femininity." The story seems to indicate that the former is preferable, as it ends with the heroine's silent plea to be forgiven for her masculinized personality.

That deviant behaviour is considered worse in women than in men can be illustrated with the example of He Ting, the female section chief in Leaden Wings. Though He Ting has been caught out fabricating lies about an affair between two staff members, she refuses to admit any error, and the narrator comments: "There are some people who don't blush even when their lies are exposed to their faces. But for this to be the case with a woman really made one's hair stand on end." The implication is that women are supposed to be more morally perfect than men, so that deviations from the norm are more reprehensible in women.

From a feminist viewpoint, despite the fact that the influence of patriarchal values is still palpable in the works of the women writers under discussion, there is nevertheless cause for optimism: With the

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88 "Wo zai nar cuoguole ni" ("How Did I Miss You?"): "self-confident": he: pp 94, 95 and 97; she: p 95. "Stubborn": both: p 97.

89 Ibid p 100.

90 Ibid p 103.

91 Chenzhong de chibang (Leaden Wings), p 348.
exception of Wang Anyi's writing, most of the negative examples cited above come from works written in the early 1980s, while the examples of positive feminist attitudes are taken from works written and published throughout the post-1978 period. This is representative of the general trend, and may indicate a genuine rise in the level of feminist consciousness among China's leading female intellectuals.

In the course of discussion and analysis of the writers and their works two interesting phenomena have emerged: first, all the women writers who have expressed views on feminism disassociate themselves from it, despite their clear interest in women's issues; and second, feminist tendencies are stronger in the middle-aged writers than in the young writers. This raises the question of why this should be so.

On the question of the writers' attitude to feminism, a number of factors may be involved. One interesting explanation was offered at the 1989 Beijing University conference on feminism and literary criticism by Yao Xiaomeng. Using a feminist deconstructive approach, she suggested that it is only the women writers who reject the feminist label that are the genuine Chinese feminists. "Feminist criticism in China," she reasoned, "is entirely controlled by male critics and male journals. Men are arranging women's liberation." By disassociating themselves from "masculinized feminism," the women writers refuse to become part of the male symbolic order and preserve their genuine feminism by retaining their position of marginality. While this may be an explanation attractive to feminist critics, however, more substantial reasons are probably much simpler.

Most important is the stigma attached to the word "feminist" in Chinese society. Speaking at the 1989 Beijing University conference, Dai

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92 Yao Xiaomeng is an editor of the journal Dangdai Dianying (Contemporary Film).

93 "Nuquanzhuyi yu wenxue piping" ("Feminism and Literary Criticism") p 20.
Jinhua\textsuperscript{94} claimed that in China men could freely become feminists and would be regarded as enlightened and liberated, but for women the word "feminist" is derogatory. Public opinion, she considered, made it very difficult for women to become radical feminists.\textsuperscript{95} Interestingly, Wang Meng, then Minister of Culture, jokingly expressed a similar view at an interview in London: "If Chinese women admit they are feminists, they will become unmarriageable."\textsuperscript{96} Undoubtedly, intense social pressure in a conservative and close-knit society that keeps tight control over its members makes it unlikely that the women writers would acknowledge any association with feminism.

A further factor may be the writers' understanding of feminism. Zhang Jie, for example, equated feminism chiefly with the radical aim of women taking over the world, while Shen Rong associated it with the adoption of male values and the denial of the worth of "female" qualities. Hence their objection to feminism may be simply an objection to some of the more extreme aspects of radical feminism, and even a misunderstanding of liberal feminism.

There may also be a connection between the writers' rejection of feminism and their experiences during the Cultural Revolution. The young writers in particular, are resentful of having spent their youth wearing drab, sexless clothes, and trying to compete physically with men in labouring work in the name of equality for women.\textsuperscript{97} Hence the feminist goal of equality for women holds little attraction for them. This may also help to explain why the young writers are less feminist-oriented than the older writers.

\textsuperscript{94} Dai Jinhua graduated from Beijing University Chinese Department in 1982, and is now a lecturer in Chinese literature at the Beijing Institute of Film.

\textsuperscript{95} "Nuquanzhuyi yu wenxue piping" ("Feminism and Literary Criticism"), p 22.

\textsuperscript{96} "Wenxue, shehui, minzu, shijie" ("Literature, Society, the Nation, the World"), \textit{Wenyi bao}, September 10, 1988, p 3.

\textsuperscript{97} This is a paraphrase of Zhang Xinxin, "Wo zai nar cuoguole ni" ("How Did I Miss You?")}, p 101.
Other social and historical factors may also contribute to this. Since the older writers reached adulthood in the relatively strict traditional atmosphere of the 1950s (for Ru Zhijuan earlier), they would have directly and sometimes personally experienced the oppression of women by traditional culture to a far greater degree than the younger writers. The latter were still young adults during the relatively liberal years of the Eighties. By then divorce had become more acceptable, and for young urban intellectuals, the status of women in marriage was probably higher than it had been at any time in Chinese history. There was therefore less stimulus for young women to produce feminist fiction. Hence it is not surprising that the most powerful feminist statements have been criticisms of traditional morality and traditional prejudices in the older writers' works.

In addition, under the influence of an intellectual trend to search for the roots of Chinese culture, many young writers began to seek the value in their cultural heritage rather than highlighting its failings. This is particularly noticeable in the works of Wang Anyi of the mid-1980s.

Finally, the older writers' commitment to exposing and analysing social and political problems in the interests of promoting reform,98 has probably made it inevitable that the situation of Chinese women would become and remain a topic of considerable importance to them. Zhang Kangkang also has a strong sense of social and political responsibility, but she has made it clear that she regards women's issues to be of secondary importance to broader social and political issues, and hence has given them only a minor place in her works. Zhang Xinxin's increasing tendency to journalistically relate her personal activities, means that she only touches on women's problems when traditional prejudices affect her personally. As a successful and popular young writer, this is probably less frequently than is the case for most Chinese women. Wang Anyi's interests in the late 1980s lay in exploring basic human instincts that

98 In contrast to Ru Zhijuan whose stated purpose has been to restore the glories of the past.
remain outside the control of traditional concepts of morality and traditional values. Hence she has focused on the level of human existence at which not only feminist but all social and political issues are irrelevant.

Perhaps what this chapter reveals is most importantly a society in the midst of rapid change, a society in which new ideas are challenging old values and old prejudices, yet have not fully displaced them. Considering the weight of Chinese cultural traditions, and the intense pressure on individuals in China to conform with orthodox thought and practice, it is important to recognise the courage that is needed by women writers to raise their voices against the oppression of women, for by doing so they are challenging the very basis of patriarchal power.
Conclusion

The effect of the unprecedented political and literary freedoms of the years 1978 - 1989 on the six women writers was rather like that of liberating bound feet.

In veteran writer Ru Zhijuan the bindings of socialist and Confucian orthodoxy had in 1978 already shaped her writing into a fixed, narrow mould. Literature was to serve current Party politics, to eulogise and restore the Party's past glory, and to teach the populace to become selfless, community-minded socialist citizens. Releasing the bonds brought a few tentative steps towards freedom, but Ru was already incapable of striding in new directions. Condemnation of the Party's betrayal of the peasants who brought them to victory in "A Badly-Edited Story" was followed by a quick retreat at the end of the work that attributed excesses to misplaced idealism and proclaimed that all was right again now the new era had started. Iconoclastic attacks on the Confucian chastity cult and support for women to divorce and remarry in pursuit of personal happiness in "A Warm-Coloured Snowscape" were immediately reversed in "Boat Without a Rudder." Ru had barely loosened her bindings when apprehension and uncertainty led her to replace them. To deny the value of her three-inch lily feet was to deny a lifetime of beliefs and dedication. Yet she seems to have been conscious that her ideals were at odds with reality. Her later works on contemporary society were pervaded with a sense of melancholy and even desolation. Seemingly disillusioned with the present, she returned to recalling nostalgically the Party's former glory and exposing the evils of the old society, her writings increasingly an anachronism in an era when bound feet were rapidly going out of fashion.

For the middle-aged writers, the binding cloths were loosened before the reshaping process had been completed. At first they trod cautiously within the old restrictions, criticising the Cultural Revolution,
and eulogising the new era, but as they became more confident on their newly liberated feet, they boldly moved into new territory. Throughout the Eighties, their literature became increasingly sharp in its criticism of the status quo. Examination of social and political problems moved quickly from relatively innocuous issues such as using the "back door" and cadre privileges to highly sensitive areas including Party work methods and membership selection criteria. Confucian morality came under attack as Shen Rong explored the oppression of women in traditional marriages and exploded the myth of the happy Chinese family. Zhang Jie took up the cause of single women and abused wives. However, these same works also revealed the continuing influence of tradition. Literature was still primarily political and social commentary, with characters and plots functioning as a vehicle to expound the author's message. Themes often echoed official policy demands: both authors wrote on economic reform and the problems of a cumbersome bureaucracy. Confucian morality still exerted a powerful influence, particularly on Zhang Jie's fiction. Though the middle-aged writers walked on their "liberated feet" with increasing assurance, the marks of their bondage still remained.

In the three younger writers, the bindings of orthodoxy went on early, but the intensity of the pain led them to loosen their bonds surreptitiously, like girls secretly removing their binding cloths at night. When the chance for freedom arrived, they turned their backs on the old ways and took entirely new directions. Their literature turned away from the political and social issues that occupied the older writers and focussed on the personal and the psychological. Instead of seeking external reasons for their political bondage, they looked for causes within themselves. Self-questioning led to a new self-awareness, and a critical re-examination of the beliefs that fettered the individual. They challenged the orthodox interpretation of the Party's past and its present, devaluing its achievements, ridiculing its adherents, and even suggesting that it was leading China to disaster. In Zhang Xinxin's eyes, contemporary society was not a socialist paradise but a boxing ring. The young writers rejection
of Confucian morality combined with their concern for the self took them to areas still taboo to the older writers: female sexuality; pre-marital and extra-marital sex; divorce for the sake of personal development. Increasingly they came to deny all the traditions that had guided socialist literature in China prior to 1978. Nevertheless, particularly with Zhang Kangkang, old habits were not entirely eliminated, and an albeit weakened sense of social responsibility still linked them to their older counterparts.

Perhaps with the passage of time, the literary achievements of the six women writers will be relegated to a position of insignificance. They will eventually be surpassed by writers for whom bound feet were just an historical aberration - writers such as those just beginning to emerge in the latter half of the Eighties: Liu Xihong; Zhao Mei or Jiang Zidan - but how long this may take will depend entirely on the vagaries of Chinese politics. If the current tightening of political control is sustained, the six women's fiction may come to be representative of the heyday of Chinese socialist literature, a hint of what Chinese writers might achieve if allowed to develop freely.

Whatever the historical verdict on their works, the undeniable significance of the writers' fiction lies in its reflection of the rapid development of both literature and society from monotonous cultural and intellectual homogeneity to lively diversity. One cannot but feel that the freedoms tasted will not willingly be abandoned by the young. The ruling authorities may well find that six-inch feet cannot be forced back into three-inch shoes.

The findings of this thesis raise questions that point to avenues for further research both within the field of Chinese literature and in the field of women's studies: How does the writing of these women compare with that of their male contemporaries? What distinguishes it as female? How does it compare with that of May 4th women and the new generation of women writers that emerged in the mid 1980s? Can a Chinese female literary tradition be identified? How does Chinese women's writing compare with that of women from other cultures? Are there universal
characteristics common to all women’s writing? The rich potential of this largely unexplored field of research indicates that rather than reaching an end, this study is just a beginning.

*Interviews with the Women Writers*

The following are edited transcripts of interviews I held in Beijing with the writers between August and October, 1980. The transcripts have been made from tapes I recorded of the interviews. Some sections that are not relevant to the general area of research covered in this thesis have been deleted.

*Shen Bang*

I interviewed Shen Bang at her home on September 26, 1980.

**WB**: Do you have an aim in writing?

**SB**: I’ve never written with a particular aim in mind, never felt that by writing a work in a certain way I would change life, but a writer ought to have an artist’s conscience. Primarily this should intuitively reflect life. Life is a process of hope, disappointment and renewed hope. I think literature should give people hope, but life also contains many unpleasant things which should on no account be avoided. It’s only when these things are portrayed fairly realistically that literature can have the effect it ought to. I’m very much opposed to indiscriminately educating people.

**WB**: Do writers have any specific responsibilities?

**SB**: A writer’s sense of responsibility is self-centered. As a writer you should have definite ideas of what you will and won’t do. Don’t consider
Appendix

Interviews with the Women Writers

The following are edited transcripts of interviews I held in Beijing with the writers between August and October, 1988. The transcripts have been made from tapes I recorded of the interviews. Some sections that are not relevant to the general area of research covered in this thesis have been deleted.

Shen Rong

I interviewed Shen Rong at her home on September 26, 1988.

RR: Do you have an aim in writing?

SR: I've never written with a particular aim in mind, never felt that by writing a work in a certain way I would change life, but a writer ought to have an artist's conscience. Primarily one should truthfully reflect life. Life is a process of hope, disappointment and renewed hope. I think literature should give people hope, but life also contains many unpleasant things which should on no account be avoided. It's only when these things are portrayed fairly realistically that literature can have the effect it ought to. I'm very much opposed to literature educating people.

RR: Do writers have any specific responsibilities?

SR: A writer's sense of responsibility is - self-respect. As a writer you should have definite ideas of what you will and won't do. Don't consider
any criteria but your own. For example, on the question of sex: I have not depicted it in my stories, but that doesn’t mean I believe it shouldn’t be depicted in fiction, it simply means that I haven’t found the best way of depicting it so as to accord with Chinese habits of appreciation. I don’t think one should write whatever is the fashion. In this respect I’m extremely self-confidant.

RR: So you don’t oppose the depiction of sex in fiction?

SR: I don’t oppose it. Why not? In fact it’s only recently that Chinese literature has avoided the question. In the beginning it appeared a great deal in Chinese literature, and was depicted very undisguisedly, some of it was also written very well: in Tang Xianzu’s "The Peony Pavilion" for instance, the depiction of sex is very beautiful. *The Golden Lotus*, however, is just a sex manual, it’s no longer literature.

RR: What do you think of Wang Anyi’s recent works?

SR: Her stories don’t contain real depictions of sex.

RR: It’s more sexual psychology.

SR: Sexual psychology - like Zhang Xianliang’s works. I don’t like Zhang Xianliang’s works much. I told him direct to his face: "Of course you have presented very real, personal things, but I don’t think you have the right" - because a lot of it is his own personal experience, including some of the women. He’s presented the male character as extremely deserving of sympathy, extremely perfect, but do they [the women he depicted] agree with his depiction? You can’t do that. I strongly disapprove of revealing other people’s private affairs. Writers must take care to preserve their integrity.
RR: Should a writer consider social effect?

SR: I've never considered social effect when I was writing. If writers tried to consider the effect of every sentence they write, they couldn't write anything. I rarely take any notice of what other people think. I prefer to use my own eyes to look at things.

RR: When you write do you consider any external limitations - the political situation, critics, readers?

SR: I want readers, so I consider readers in deciding what form and techniques to use in a story. "The Secret of Crown Prince Village" for example contains a variety of techniques like deductive reasoning, designed so that peasants and grass-roots level cadres can also understand it. "At Middle Age" was written for intellectuals, so I was able to use more sophisticated, complex techniques. Also you will have noticed I don’t use obscure characters in my works, I deliberately use language that everyone can understand.

RR: How about the political situation?

SR: I don’t usually consider it. Even though we have many problems and my works are in fact very incisive in their criticism, I have a clear conscience because I hold the basic view that our nation is progressing. I haven’t said that I’m criticising you because I want to overthrow you, have I? Then it’s perfectly alright for me to state my views. So no political movement can have any effect on me.

RR: I hope not.
SR: I never declare where I stand [in political movements]. If meetings are held during movements I don't go. I don't see any need. Why should I go to a meeting and say this is bad and that is bad? I won't go.

RR: Do you think critics use the same criteria to evaluate the works of male and female writers?

SR: They ought to, but I hear they particularly lavish praise on women writers.

RR: What about on moral questions?

SR: My family is a typical Chinese family. I haven't divorced or anything, so there's nothing newsworthy about it. So I don't have this problem. As a result I dare to write "Can't be Bothered to Divorce" and "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" because the content can't be linked to my personal life. But if Zhang Jie or Zhang Xinxin had written "Can't be Bothered to Divorce" it would have aroused great comment. So I'm fairly free, I can write anything. Just going back to political influence: I think one sometimes can't discount it. It's not entirely without influence - for example when there was suddenly criticism of bourgeois liberalization and meetings were held - the effect is not that I don't dare to write things, it's just that I get very depressed.

RR: When you write do you ever take self-protective measures, eg in depicting Yang Yueyue's reasons for accepting divorce?

SR: At the time I had no thought of protecting myself. The situation was really as I depicted. What I wanted to show was that as a person, she

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1 Yang Yueyue after being unhappily constrained in an oppressive traditional marital relationship, agrees to divorce her husband (who has a new lover) so that she can "do some work for the Party."
could not exist independently, she was nothing but an appendage. It was from this angle that I dissected the spiritual burden society imposed on people. She wasn't lying when she said she wanted to work for the Party, she never thought about herself. So why have I depicted a lot of this type of woman? Because I ardently hope that women's social status will genuinely improve, that they will achieve true equality. In fact this was also my intention in writing "Can't be Bothered to Divorce."

RR: Your early works, up to 1983 tended to examine traditional marital relations, but after 1984 you began to look at modern marriage. In "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong" and "Can't be Bothered to Divorce" you seem to be questioning the rationality of marriage itself. Is that correct or are you just questioning the rationality of marital relations as they exist at present?

SR: Both. In fact I hadn't thought about it that much. I've seen a lot of families where all feelings are dead, but the family is still being maintained. In some cases it's because partners made the wrong choice in the first place. When women live in a class society there are a lot of factors they have to consider [when choosing a marriage partner]: culture, social position etc. But among these complex factors, the one that is missing is love. So that even if through marriage they form a family, there are bound to be deep rifts within it. In addition Chinese people are very disloyal. I'm speaking out for women. In fact I feel very anxious about it. I'm saying to them: You ought to know feelings in marriage are extremely important. If there are no feelings marriage is a dead, superficial thing. The union of male and female chiefly depends on attraction of the opposite sex. When people are young they can use their looks, but after marriage you learn every little detail of the other person, his smallest faults, where on his body he has a small mole. Then mutual attraction lies in extremely tacit mutual understanding and mutual respect. Of course it also includes sexual attraction. People of every age group -
thirty, forty or fifty - have their own kind of beauty. If you can preserve it, then as a man or a woman you will continue to be attractive. If you ignore the problem and lose your charm, then you are sure to lose your partner, and extra-marital affairs will occur. I say: Don’t curse the "third party." If husband-wife relations were very stable, he or she couldn’t butt in. How could they? It’s because there’s a deep rift between you. Particularly as most "third parties" are women, I say to the wives: If you can’t attract your husband, you haven’t the right to blame others. Strange to say these women direct all the blame at the "third party" when the blame lies with themselves. So in "Can’t be Bothered to Divorce" I talked a lot about taking care with your clothes and appearance when you’re at home. Pay attention to your manner. These things are very important, but you can’t say them outright, you absolutely can’t openly write them. In fact these things should be elevated to a place of prominence and studied. It’s a difficult question to write about.

There’s probably another question I avoid: sex. Sex is very important in marital relationships; it’s important in maintaining harmony in married life, but Chinese people are embarrassed to discuss it. Historically Chinese have never talked about it, but many families are not harmonious. Besides this, there’s little or no sex education. There’s no sexual stimulation in marital relationships... It’s not that sex can’t be depicted in literature, it’s just that I haven’t found a way to depict it. I want to depict it as beautiful. I think *Lady Chatterly’s Lover* depicts it quite well, but I can only talk about it in a roundabout way, by saying you should be attractive to your husband. In fact at forty or fifty women still have sexual desire, but from their appearance they are already completely finished sexually. This is a tragedy. So in my story I talk about the problem of clothing, but in fact it’s not a problem of clothing.

RR: Some of your characters as well as yourself have expressed guilt over not doing enough housework. But neither you nor they do less work and more housework as a result. Does that mean the expression is insincere?
SR: No, it’s not insincere. Every married woman wants to be a good wife and mother. Nowadays in Chinese society, in cadre families like ours housework is shared by both partners and everybody regards it as normal. But I’ve always disagreed with feminism. I argued this point with some American feminists. I said: I believe you are trying to make women become like men, including the masculinization of women’s dance. I disagree with that. It is precisely by using special female attributes to establish an independent place in the world that women manifest their self-respect and self-confidence. The special characteristics of woman are that first of all she should be very gentle, very delicate, very meticulous. Some things, like work in the home, women simply do better than men. I’m not saying she has to do them, just that she does them better. For example: making clothes, decorating the home, looking after children, cooking. She can’t do them all, both partners should do them, but I believe women do housework better than men. Women shouldn’t see it as a burden, but should regard it as a pleasure. It’s a pleasure to get the house looking nice. But I often feel that my own situation is rather out of the ordinary. I don’t even have time to do the most basic tasks.

RR: But if you didn’t write and spent all day doing housework, you would feel it a burden.

SR: Not a burden. There’s another problem here. If you want to be respected in the home, you must have a position in society. Japanese women slave away at home like beasts of burden, but their husbands and sons don’t respect them in the least. To handle both home and career well is extremely difficult. As I once wrote, it’s like racing backwards and forwards between two huge mountains.
I interviewed Zhang Jie at her home on October 10, 1988

RR: Do you have an aim in writing?

ZJ: Writing is your experience of life and your understanding of the world. You have things you want to say. You want to communicate with others, arouse a sympathetic response. It's a way of getting things off one's chest. At the same time I hope that my works will contribute to the advancement of mankind.

RR: Do writers have any specific responsibility?

ZJ: It's not a responsibility that anyone gives you, not a unified responsibility. It's not like the responsibility that the Communist Party gave writers in the past. I believe that kind of responsibility can be completely disregarded, writers can refuse to accept it. The aims I talked of just now are in fact responsibilities.

RR: Should writers consider the social effects of their writing?

ZJ: This is an official slogan. Nevertheless, we can't encourage people to become evil. I personally hope that people will become better, but it's not an effect that one achieves consciously, not a stipulated duty, rather it is determined by a writers world view, his values. It is an objective result, not something that can be achieved by an order.

RR: So it's not something that a writer consiously considers?
ZJ: Right. It's comes from things already deeply rooted in one's thought and soul.

RR: When you are writing do you consider any external limitations?
ZJ: I give them little thought. I know there are a lot of limitations imposed on us in China, but I basically write whatever I feel like writing, so my works are often criticised. Almost every one of my works has been criticised. Our [material] conditions are very inferior. You must have a certain official rank before you can obtain many things, otherwise life is difficult. But I don't have many needs. Even if I have poor housing and can't solve any of my problems I don't care. But the one thing I can't do without is saying what I want to say. If you treat me badly because of something I've said, it's not my fault. I basically won't be influenced by it. As far as very incisive views go, it's not that I'm not willing to express them, it's just that if I do they won't be published. I can write them, but editorial boards won't necessarily approve them.

RR: Do you consider readers?
ZJ: I don't take much notice of them. My works are by no means all popular, "What's Wrong With Him?", for example, had a very cool reception in China. Many people couldn't understand it. "Add Some Onions, Add Some Garlic, Add Some Sesame Salt" was the same, but it was well received in Europe. In China it was as if the story had never even appeared. But I don't care because all I want to do is complete my own projects - I'm not bothered about what readers think.

ZJ: Because I was involved in court cases over Leaden Wings. After the novel was published I was placed under intense pressure as several cadres
of ministerial rank identified themselves with characters in the novel and got together to deal with me. They wanted to expel me from the party. A document of the Central Propaganda Department at the time put forward 66 instances of my book being anti-Party and anti-Socialism, so I was involved in court cases every day. There was no way I could write anything. The situation was really complicated. They almost threw me in prison. They used their powerful connections with Duan Dingyi who was then Secretary of the Beijing Party Committee. The Party Committee Secretary makes everything his business, his power exceeds that of the law and can control the courts. He wanted to make the court, the Police Bureau arrest me. He said they could finally declare there was insufficient evidence to convict me and release me again. But if a Chinese spends fifteen days in custody, he'll be finished for the rest of his life.

RR: This probably answers my next question: I read in a critical article: "for reasons everybody knows, Zhang Jie did not receive the Mao Dun literary prize in 1982." What was this reason that "everybody knows"?

ZJ: Right! Since they almost expelled me from the Party, how could I get a prize? The selection committee had all approved [Leaden Wings to receive the prize], so I should have got it. But officialdom was pressuring me, so they decided that to award me the prize would do me no good, it would just make [officialdom] even more angry and I would be in even greater trouble. So they gave me the second Mao Dun Prize instead. But it was not a victory for me - the political situation had eased, so there was less pressure on me. The political situation has only to become favourable to them for the pressure on me to increase again.

RR: So it was chiefly political pressure.

ZJ: Yes, but where a Chinese woman is concerned, political pressure is often exerted through attacks on her personal life. The best way to ruin
someone's reputation in China is to say they behave immorally. In the West a love affair is not regarded as something immoral, especially when you haven't even slept together. What's wrong with having a love affair? I never transgressed morality. I was an unmarried woman, why shouldn't I have a love affair? But they deliberately use this to discredit you. Particularly for a woman, if they say this sort of thing about her, then she is (regarded as) wicked through and through. So the pressure is not only political, though it has political motives. The method used is first to ruin your moral reputation.

RR: So it was actually nothing to do with your having written "Love is Not to be Forgotten"?

ZJ: No, it was mainly because of Leaden Wings. "Love is not to be Forgotten" was criticised in the press, but did not create any political pressure on me.

RR: You depict numerous cadres in your works, but very few of them are women, and all of those are without exception negative or at least very dubious characters. Why is that?

ZJ: Because in reality there very few likable women cadres. Women are very strange, if they attain any power, whether in feudal society or in the present, they become more terrifying than men. Women are fairly narrow-minded - more narrow-minded than men.

RR: So you think women aren't capable of being good cadres?

ZJ: Very few of them are.

RR: Is it possible that in present society it is only unscrupulous women who are able to attain positions of power?
ZJ: At present most people in official positions are appointed from above. [A superior] appoints the people he likes and doesn’t use truth as his criterion. As a result it’s often people who curry favour that gain office. The question of women is something different. Women in themselves have huge shortcomings. Although feminists are always shouting about equality for men and women, they often don’t recognise their own failings. They think the responsibility for women’s unequal status all lies with men and society. In fact their own shortcomings are pretty serious. I don’t agree with the feminist movement because I think this question must be examined comprehensively. The feminist movement is too extreme, their understanding is very shallow. They must recognise their own failings.

Zhang Kangkang

This interview was carried out at Zhang Kangkang’s home on October 4, 1988.

RR: Do you think critics use the same criteria to evaluate men and women writers’ works, especially over moral questions?

ZKK: It’s difficult to say, but because most critics are men, to a greater or lesser degree they are subconsciously biased when it comes to questions like the evaluation of morality and marriage that women often touch on in their works.

RR: Do you mean they’re tougher on women writers?

ZKK: That sort of thing does happen, because they never thought women writers would boldly express their views on moral questions. They feel
surprised. "Northern Lights,"2 for example, was criticised by many male writers. Among the people who criticised it, the majority of the ones I knew were men. They said the story was not moral enough. It’s difficult to know if those critics would be equally critical if a man also write this type of story. I think they would. Because China is a conservative and feudal country, even though we’re already becoming an open society, these influences haven’t disappeared. No matter whether writers are male or female, if in their works they knock old morality and suggest that a new concept of morality should be established in an open society, they will be criticised. The critics will be dissatisfied with any writer who transgresses the original order of this society.

RR: In the past you always had a fairly clear aim in writing and sense of responsibility as a writer. Do you still have a specific aim in writing? What are a writer’s responsibilities?

ZKK: I can’t deny this responsibility, because I don’t write for pleasure. When I was in the countryside, I wrote because I felt my existence had no value, I could see no hope in life. At that time I went to the Great Northern Wasteland to "labour, temper myself and transform the border regions of the motherland." But I felt my intelligence and abilities were being completely spent in labour that required no intelligence. I felt my value was more than just that I could grow crops and herd sheep, because man has thought and reason. So at that time I wanted to use writing to realise my value. At first I did not write for aesthetic enjoyment, I felt extremely constrained and depressed. My sense of responsibility was manifested as a protest against society wasting people in this way. I tried to liberate myself (though of course at the time I wasn’t clear as to what

2 The story depicts the young female protagonist, Lu Cencen, breaking relations with a fiance she has come to despise, having a brief relationship with cynical, disillusioned student and finally seeking out an impoverished, idealistic maintenance worker as her ideal partner. The main thrust of criticism was that Cencen was immoral for abandoning her fiance rather than patiently trying to correct his faults.
I was doing). At the time I just felt the farm was very boring, and that I should give play to my abilities. Since I liked literature, why shouldn’t I try to write about life? Life contained so many things I didn’t understand as well as things that excited or elated me.

After the smashing of the Gang of Four, many things slowly became clear. Some of my beliefs collapsed, and I suddenly woke up to some things. I felt that there were many unreasonable things in that past era, that society: the destruction of human feelings, the lack of respect for individuality, the restrictions placed on people. Quite apart from problems of the political and economic system many aspects of society gave me cause for concern. I hoped to understand, and hoped others would understand, so I wanted to tell other people what I had already understood. In the last ten years this is what my sense of responsibility has become.

In the past I criticised formalism and dogmatism hoping to accelerate the advance of society. Today I’m still not willing to abandon this, because I feel that life in this society is too agonizing, too difficult. I wouldn’t necessarily write if I didn’t have this desire. Writing can express many of my thoughts on life.

I don’t want to write love stories and popular literature because this kind of writing has little significance. From my childhood to the present I have always felt life to be very burdensome, it’s spiritually stifling, bewildering. I’m always thinking about these things and after I’ve thought for a while I want to write my thoughts down. I don’t think I’ll change in this respect. If one wants to talk of an aim, my aim is not so clear. My aim is just that I want to live a more interesting life.

I feel I’m not primarily an author, but a human being. Because I’m living in this society, I feel a lot of frustration and pain. From the beginning to the end of my life, I will have had to experience a lot of unfairness as well as happiness. These things are all linked with the whole of society and the lives of other people, because I’m not an isolated individual. So my joy and sorrow is all related to this society. Then the
entire goal is to hope society can develop towards a fairly progressive society. If a society progresses, then the state of existence of people in that society will improve correspondingly.

RR: Should a writer consider the social effect of her writing?

ZKK: I’ve never used this concept. This is something that some high-ranking leaders have demanded of writers, but I don’t use the idea and don’t agree with it. "Social effect" is a very vague term, a work may have a good effect on some people and a bad effect on others, so the concept itself is untenable. I don’t consider social effect, I just consider my own relations with the people. I believe I am serious and conscientious, and seek to come closer to the truth.

RR: When you are writing do you consider any external limitations, such as the political situation?

ZKK: In China society and politics are intimately related. One can’t use Western standards to make demands of China. I think that it’s impossible to completely ignore politics, because in the last ten years policies have been constantly chopping and changing. So it might be that in one period policies are fairly open, in which case some works are quite easy to publish. Perhaps in another period, because of the influence of policy, you won’t be allowed to publish that kind of work. In that situation, you might write something more indirectly, more implicitly, or you might decide temporarily not to publish that particular work. Publishing here is not as free as in the West, so we are necessarily limited in what we can publish. So in this respect we must consider the political situation. But what I have to say next is very important: when all is said and done, the political situation can’t control our thoughts. I’ll never be influenced or restricted by it again. We must uphold what we ourselves have observed in life and the ideas our pondering has lead us to. So the difference is
only one of degree and whether to write something now or later. But this
doesn’t mean that the political situation can change my views.

RR: Do you consider critics?

ZKK: They’re not very important, but I can’t say one completely
disregards them.

RR: How about readers?

ZKK: Writers shouldn’t lower themselves to the same level as readers,
they should improve readers. Writers shouldn’t pander to readers,
shouldn’t adopt the attitude "I’ll give you whatever you want." No, I’ll
give you what I have thought about and see which of you like it.

RR: Does "Peony Garden"\(^3\) depict your own experience?

ZKK: No, but it’s something I saw with my own eyes.

RR: Have you ever had any experience of this type? I’ve noticed that
older writers never examine the psychology of those of their generation
who erred in the Cultural Revolution, whereas young writers are willing
to do so, even if they themselves had no such experience.

ZKK: Young writers present themselves more truthfully. They are willing
to reveal ideas that are not so attractive; they are more candid... Man is
evolved from animals and has many ugly ideas. In fact this is very normal,
but he believes it is evil. This situation is rather like religion that believes
man cannot be ugly and evil, but that’s just how he is. So once someone
has been educated, he can’t accept man’s ugliness and to the present still

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\(^3\) The story describes the introspection of a former Red Guard who zealously
destroyed beauty, represented by a peony garden, during the Cultural Revolution.
wants to hide it. So in "Never Feel Remorse" I wasn't only talking about
the waste of people's youth, everyone did stupid things, but there's no
need for remorse because this is just how people are. We'll continue to do
stupid things. People should reveal their own faults and weaknesses.

RR: What are your views on feminism?

ZKK: A feminist movement never emerged in China because straight after
Liberation, women obtained legal guarantees of subsistence. Women felt
very safe and didn't need feminist literature. The greatest threat that
Chinese women feel is spiritual and emotional fettering. Under the
pressure exerted by extreme feudal moral-ethical concepts, they have no
freedom. This has already become deeply rooted in women's own
consciousness, so they are already fettering themselves. Though women
work they are still not free. The biggest problem facing women is that
they must break out of these fetters. This has been discussed a great deal
in the literature of the last ten years, but it has not formed a movement.
The policy of equality for women in the workplace in fact created a
situation in which Chinese women universally failed to demand
self-improvement. Because everything was guaranteed, they could get
away with just drifting along. Why should they want to just drift along?
Because in fact the burden on them is very heavy. Domestic tasks in
China have not been socialised, so the burden of housework is very heavy.
In addition society is still controlled by feudal concepts, so a woman has
no freedom. Outside work she can't freely make social contacts, she must
go home and look after the children, and with the double burden of work
and housework, she hasn't the energy left to study. So though on the
surface the "Communal Pot" policy guaranteed women's rights, in the
end it resulted in a decline in the quality of Chinese women. It didn't

4 The common name for egalitarian policies followed during the Great Leap Forward
and the Cultural Revolution period, under which wages were fixed for groups of workers
regardless of the amount or quality of work actually done by an individual, and
promotion was on the basis of seniority rather than merit.
create outstanding women, it created the indolence common to most Chinese women today.

Why haven't Chinese women writers devoted themselves to depicting women's problems? Because for so many years we haven't had time to worry about women's problems. There was no human dignity, no human value, from the point of view of "human," people hadn't been able to live decently, so women's problems were paid no attention.

Equality for women is linked to the basic social system. If basic things aren't destroyed, women's equality can't be considered in isolation. For example, in China the first concern is to attack feudalism. Feudalism is manifested in clan relations, egalitarianism and so on - problems that lie at the base of society. If we don't attack the base of society, we can't resolve the basis of the problem of women's equality. If you want equality for women, but the feudal base still exists, how can you possibly realise this equality?

Zhang Xinxin

This interview took place at Zhang Xinxin's flat on August 29, 1988.

RR: Your early pieces very much followed the style of the times. As a new writer were you basically imitating existing literature?

ZXX: Yes, that's right.

RR: But in 1980 with the publication of "How Did I Miss You?" your style completely changed. Did your ideas change or did you feel the relaxed situation enabled you to express ideas you'd always held?

ZXX: I think my ideas changed. When I wrote the two earlier pieces I was not very satisfied with that infantile sort of writing, but because
writing is a pleasure in itself I went ahead and wrote. But in depicting the personality changes in a career woman in "How Did I Miss You?," I was more conscious of producing an original work. At the time, I read Ding Ling's "Miss Sophie's Diary." In her early works, Ding Ling paid little attention to structure or language, but she had one strong point: whatever her feelings were, she depicted them exactly. This made me think: she dared to write like that in those early days, yet this pack of writers in the 80s still don't dare. So I felt I ought to start to write more candidly, otherwise it would really be too outrageous!

RR: You show great concern for the question of the masculinization of women in that story, do you still hold the same views?

ZXX: I still feel the same way about it, but I have got used to it.

RR: As I see it, the female protagonist maintains a very old, traditional view of what constitutes "femininity."

ZXX: They aren't old views, it's just there's nothing you can do about it. You have to look at things through men's eyes. There is another problem here, that is one's relationship with readers. Chinese readers like this story (I particularly dislike it, and even withdrew it from an anthology published in Taiwan). Many men in particular like it best of all my works. They say its very penetrating, but I think it's hypocritical.

RR: Then you mean it doesn't reflect your own views?

ZXX: When I wrote it I was very sincere, but I had put myself in the position of the readers. I knew what sort of woman readers liked, and how they liked women candidly to reveal their thoughts and feelings, so I wrote as I did. Now when I re-read it I find it nauseating.
RR: Do you still believe it's women's nature to be weak and bashful?

ZXX: There are elements of it (This is also touched on in "Horizon," isn't it).

RR: And that to be a "real woman" one has to be like this?

ZXX: No.

RR: That's what "How Did I Miss You?" says.

ZXX: I was just pointing out a problem. I wasn't saying there was anything wrong with it. My original intention was not negation. I was just putting forward the facts. If life is too complicated, or too burdensome, many women will change. Their movements, their manner of speaking and the way their associate with others is sure to change.

RR: But do you personally see it as a positive or negative thing?

ZXX: It's difficult to say, I still have contradictory ideas... sometimes, the image of women in literature must not be damaged. Men can represent strength, and a writer can use all different kinds of thought to depict them. Sometimes women abstractly represent a concept of beauty and goodness. Mankind's basic aspirations always include some particularly pure and beautiful things -- [we] need images of children, or images of particularly beautiful, pure women. I consider that not only men, but women too demand these kinds of images. So when I'm writing I have very contradictory feelings.

RR: Are you a feminist?

ZXX: The concept gets more and more confusing.
RR: Chinese people seem very unwilling to accept the concept. It seems they are afraid of the very word.

ZXX: There's nothing frightening about it. It's just that if feminism demands equal rights and social position for women, men and women have had equal pay for equal work since the founding of New China. (RR: But this is...) It's superficial, it not real, so from the point of view of power, women can't possibly truly participate in government and politics. Thoughout the world women don't really participate in government and politics. I'm not happy with that. I really believe that as far as intelligence and physical strength go, women are often far superior to men. Men have explosive strength, but have less endurance than women. The reason I feel feminism has no future is because women naturally have a strong desire to be dependent, they demand a home to return to, they demand dependence. Of course, as men get older they become more and more dependent too.

RR: What effect did the campaign against spiritual pollution have on you. I heard that you were under considerable pressure. How was pressure exerted?

ZXX: When critics attack a writer, some of the time it's for political reasons and sometimes it's because writer and critic hold different views on literature. I think we ought to attack each other - in the past there hasn't been enough of it. They said you were either very good or very bad, but it was all political. There's no real literary criticism and discussion, so I consider established practice to be bad. I say: "Go ahead and criticise us! Start from me, I can take it." But criticism in the past, including 1983, 1984 and Liu Binyan's expulsion from the Party this time have been entirely politically motivated. On the surface it was all discussion of literary problems - realism, typicalness, thought and so on, but behind it all were political movements taking effect, so the superficial
discussion and what lay behind it were two entirely different things. Take for example criticism of "On the Same Horizon": superficially they said the image of the young man was poorly depicted, then later said: "Socialist society has no competition, how can you talk about competition? How unrealistic!" They thought they could use literary criticism to say I was unrealistic. But in fact the problem was that students at Fudan University had been reading Sartre's existentialist works and all believed in existentialism. My story and the report on their ideology were sent together to the central authorities, so that I became their "leader." So political criticism on one hand was turned into literary criticism initiated by literary critics, and on the other the Education Department also intervened. The then minister of education, He Dongchang, directly criticised both my college [The Central Academy of Drama] and me personally.5

RR: "The Last Anchorage" was written in 1983 but not published until 1985. Why did it take so long?

ZXX: Because I had been criticised. None of my works could be published.

RR: Because of their content?

ZXX: No, because of the author's name. Liu Binyan... in fact Liu Binyan can publish, because though the central authorities are still formidable, editorial boards are now quite powerful, and the mood of ordinary people is much more lively that it was then, as a result entire official control is much weaker that before, so theoretically Liu Binyan can publish his

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5 According to Zhang Xinxin, it was because of this that on her graduation from the Academy of Drama in 1983 she was unable to find work for ten to twelve months, because no work unit would accept her. She was eventually employed by the People's Theatre in Beijing in 1984.
works. But in the first couple of months after he was criticised, he really
couldn’t publish.

RR: Do you think critics use the same criteria to evaluate the works of
men and women writers, particularly over moral issues?

ZXX: Most critics are biased in favour of women writers and shower
attention on them. Women writers discuss problems fairly directly in their
works and tend to evoke controversy, so critics like them. Apart from
that, evaluating women writers has become a special field in itself, so there
is a significant group of people who specialise in it. The men feel very
neglected. As far as moral criteria go: Zhang Xianliang’s "Half of Man is
Woman" was criticised very heavily, and a lot of the attacks came from
veteran women writers like Bing Xin and Wei Junyi, who themselves were
once very liberated females - Bing Xin wasn’t "liberated," but at least had
an excellent tertiary education. Wei Junyi was responsible for publishing
an abridged version of *The Golden Lotus*, but she couldn’t accept "Half of
Man is Woman." Critics are pretty understanding towards women’s views
on concepts of morality, because women writers are not as hypocritical as
male writers over moral questions. Being more nit-picking in fact shows
their greater concern. It’s better than being ignored.

Wang Anyi

I interviewed Wang Anyi at the Lu Xun Academy of Literature and Art in
Beijing on October 12, 1988.

RR: Do you think critics use the same criteria to appraise the works of
male and female writers?
WAY: I think they do use the same criteria, but sometimes they are more lenient with us. There is the odd critic who is tougher on women writers, but they are not representative.

RR: Do you have an aim in writing?

WAY: My aims have changed. In the earliest period I just wanted to express my thoughts and feelings. Now I write to create things. I want to transcend substance.

RR: Do writers have any specific responsibilities?

WAY: Whether or not a writer is willing to shoulder this responsibility (he may have no sense of responsibility and simply write for himself), the moment his works have been printed in book form he has to take responsibility. A good writer with moral integrity should be responsible to himself. Being fully responsible to himself he will be responsible to society. He must be honest with himself, must not deceive himself.

RR: When you are writing do you consider any external limitations - the political situation, critics etc?

WAY: I don’t think about them. A writer’s work involves only the writer face to face with himself. The fate of a work once it’s written is something different.

RR: What are your views on feminism?

WAY: We are in a completely different situation to that of the West at the moment. Chinese women feel exhausted. For decades we have been required to be the same as men, so now we want to stress that we are like us were taught from an early age to labour and live exactly like boys.
different from men. We demand that we be given some special consideration.

RR: By this most women seem to mean in a physical sense.

WAY: We want it in everyday life too, for example, we want to wear beautiful clothes, we want to use make-up, we want more time in the kitchen or with the children.

RR: You don’t want to work?

WAY: There is a strong trend in that direction. We want our own women’s lives that are different from men’s lives. We want different rights, our own rights. I feel that the world is divided: men have men’s rights, women have women’s rights.

RR: The right to go back to the kitchen and look after children?

WAY: The right to live a woman’s life, to dress more attractively.

RR: But to share power with men doesn’t mean you can’t dress attractively.

WAY: But for decades it has been stressed that women are not for men to appreciate. Now we want men to appreciate us. Now many women are demanding to return to the kitchen.

RR: Do you believe there is an inherent female nature?

WAY: Initially there are some elements of it, but these things become more and more socialised. Natural instincts are very stubborn. Children like us were taught from an early age to labour and live exactly like boys.
We were told: "Anything they can do, you can do, not only physically but mentally as well. You should be like boys: think less about your personal concerns (because boys think more of everyone's concerns). You should control your girlish temperaments: Don't be petty minded, don't be weak, be as staunch as men are, don't burst into tears at everything, don't be so emotional, consider everyone's interests, not just your own." We were always being demanded to be like that, but after a couple of decades we feel exhausted, fed up, we don't want to be that sort of person. So I think inherent nature does exist.

RR: The female protagonists in your works are usually timid and tearful, and easily feel adoration for men they have just met. Do you believe this is women's nature?

WAY: I think this is my own nature. I'm highly inclined to adore men. I'll adore one man one day and the next day I'll no longer adore him, I'll adore another man. I'm improving, but I really do have this kind of feeling. It's probably that I'm very willing to adore something. Sometimes I can't find anything to adore, so I just grab the first thing available.

RR: Have you been influenced in your writing by your mother?

WAY: Because we grew up in a literary environment, we children liked to read and knew quite a lot about literature, but mother didn't influence our choice of career or our literary techniques. In fact my mother is someone whose nature has been twisted. Her nature was a woman's nature. She is just like a housewife, most concerned about the kitchen and the children. But she was constantly criticised for writing stories that lacked heroism. If she hadn't run into so much interference, she could have written more and much better works. I've had a fairly natural development, no one has interfered with me.
RR: In *People of the Old Course of the Yellow River*, you depict Yang Sen and his schoolmates hounding their headmistress to suicide. Did you have any personal experience of this kind?

WAY: I was still very young when the Cultural Revolution started, so I didn’t have the personal experience, but I saw things like it. Every individual’s experience was different, some people did those things and some didn’t, but from the point of view of the whole nation, every one of us has to take responsibility for the Cultural Revolution. We "educated youth writers" do possess a spirit of self-examination. It’s something that’s very important. The reason why mother hasn’t written anything penetrative on the Cultural Revolution so far is precisely because she lacks this spirit of self-questioning. The whole nation lacks the spirit of self-questioning. When I was in Germany I was very impressed by their spirit of self-questioning. The generation who lived through the Nazi era feel great anguish when they recall the Nazis, they don’t want to think about it, don’t want to mention it, but the generation of Chinese who personally experienced the Cultural Revolution have no sense of anguish, they just say how they were repressed, how evil the Gang of Four were. They push all the responsibility onto other people. But the young generation has started seriously to consider these things.
Bibliography

In this bibliography, the first reference listed for each work is that used in the body of the thesis to give specific page references, unless footnotes have indicated otherwise. In Part One I have attempted to include all the writers' fiction 1978-1989, but have only included the non-fiction which I consider relevant to the study. In general I have only listed works on the writers which I have referred to in the thesis. For a list of Ru Zhijuan's pre-1978 works, see Ru Zhijuan yanjiu zhuangji (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1982); for Shen Rong's pre-1978 works see Shen Rong yanjiu zhuangji (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1984); for a complete list of Zhang Xinxin's fiction and prose to 1988 see Zai tongyi dipingxiangshang (Taipei, Sanmin shuju, 1988).

Part One: The Writers' Works and Works on the Writers

Ru Zhijuan


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**Works on Ru Zhijuan**


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