Unspoken Desire:
Zhang Xianliang's Autobiographical Trilogy and The Contemporary Chinese Intellectual

by

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Abstract:

Zhang Xianliang's writing, best known for breaking sexual taboos, is also praised for its exposition of the Communist Party of China's persecution of male intellectuals, which led ultimately to their physical and psychological emasculation.

Since the founding of the Qin dynasty in 221 BCE, Chinese intellectuals have been a primary target in the political campaigns of whatever elite happened to be in power, and Zhang's fictionalized autobiography apparently mirrors this narrative. However, it is the purpose of this thesis to offer a radically different reading, one that examines what is left unsaid in Zhang's texts, what falls under the mark of erasure— the status, role, and function of women in Chinese society .

Drawing upon analytical techniques from Deconstruction, Feminist criticism and Freudian analysis I explore the following questions: (1) why are Chinese male intellectuals obsessed with having political power? (2) What is the relationship between politics and sexuality in the People's Republic? (3) What is it in the psychological make-up of male intellectuals which allows them to victimize women after they themselves were victimized? (4) How is it possible for the author to reconcile his criticism of state policies while supporting the rhetoric of the Party's propaganda?

A close examination of the three texts under review yields a wealth of information, some of which answers questions, some of which raises other questions.

However, in reading Zhang Xianliang's trilogy two things become apparent: his protagonist, Zhang Yonglin, only regains his "manhood"—both psychologically and sexually—through the intervention of women; and the unspoken truth that their insatiable desire for political and sexual power contributed to the "tragic" fate of male intellectuals in modern Chinese society.

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Introduction

Among prominent contemporary Chinese writers, Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮 holds a pre-eminent position based on his personal experience, literary accomplishments, and the enormous controversy aroused by his writing. Born in 1936 to a well-educated and wealthy family, at age twenty-one Zhang Xianliang became a teacher at a college for Communist Party officials. Soon after he published a number of poems[1] which were deemed to be anti-Party, he was exiled to rural prisons and labour reform camps[2] for the next twenty-two years. He has been a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (PPCC) since 1983, and has won National Literary Prizes three times.[3] His best-selling novel *Half of Man is Woman* gained him worldwide praise and international fame. He is one of the most controversial figures in contemporary Chinese literature due to his eager participation in politics.

His work describes the experiences of Chinese intellectuals who were exiled to the Northwest between 1957 and 1979, providing the reader with a unique point of view of the catastrophe of the Maoist policies. He narrated his personal experiences as a political prisoner in China's vast "gulag" of prisons and labour camps, and is therefore, called "the uncle of Chinese Great Wall Literature".[4] He was the first

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[1] Poems of *Night* *夜*, *Songs Sung in Evening* *在傍晚唱的歌*, and *Ode to the Strong Wind* *大风歌*, were published in January, March and July respectively, in1957 at the monthly literary periodical, The Yanan River 延河

[2] During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese judicial procedure was to arrest, and then to send the person to the local detention center to await either transitted to prison or "remoulding" at a labour-farm, according to the degree of the person's crime. Usually there were no trial, no lawyers, no juries, and no appeals invovled. Police made arrests based only on the accusations of colleagues, unit heads, or almost anyone else. The sentences varied according to the administrator in charge of the accused. In jail, which was also called a "forced-labour work-reform camp," prisoners were usually forced to work under poor conditions, with shabby shelter, poor food and no payment. After prisoners finished their sentence, some of them were allowed to reunite with their families. Some, however, continued to be forced to live at a state, provincial or local farm, living and working in poor conditions. The only difference between working at farm and that of a prisoner was that they got a payment or salary from the government. For detailed information on the Chinese prison camps, please refer to Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, ed., *The Great Wall of Confinement: The Chinese Prison Camp Through Contemporary Fiction and Reportage*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004).

[3] The National Short Story Award 全国短篇小说创作奖, China's national literary prize, is awarded every year.

[4] Zhang Xianliang, "*The Thoughts about Our Time and Literature*: *A Letter to Cong Weixi*" *关于时代与文学的思考：致从维熙的信* vol. 3, *Zhang Xianliang Selected Works* 张贤亮选集 (Tianjin: Tianjin baihua wenyi, 1999),

writer to break the taboo against mentioning the subject of sexuality. He was also the first writer to expose the way that the Communist Party of China's (CPC) relentless political campaigns emasculated male intellectuals physically and psychologically.

His three major novels, *Mimosa, Half of Man is Woman,* and *Getting Used to Dying*, record the physical and psychological suffering of a young Chinese intellectual Zhang Yonglin (章永璘) during the different ideological campaigns of the Maoist Era. *Mimosa*[5] depicts how he survives unbearable hunger during the Great Famine of 1958-1961.[6] *Half of Man is Woman* goes deeper, revealing the chain of events that lead him from political oppression, to the suppression of male sexuality, to the eventual loss of male potency. *Getting Used to Dying* occurs after the Cultural Revolution, when China opened its door to Western society, and respect for intellectuals and knowledge became a national policy. Even though the space and time have changed considerably, the protagonist still lives in fear, even at the moment of sexual climax.

Some critics applauded Zhang Xianliang's courage in breaking ground in the discussion of the connection between politics and sexuality; other critics were greatly bothered by this connection; and still others read the story as a simple tale of lust and impotence.[7] In Chinese literary circles, despite the intense controversy regarding Zhang's writing, mainstream critics praised his bold literary exploration and his courage in breaking the taboo subject of sex, his authentic descriptions of the political persecution of Chinese intellectuals, of their inhumane living conditions, and how this produced a generation of intellectuals with irreparable physical and psychological damage. The critical discourse on Zhang's work has focused mainly

689. And the Great Wall Literature is also called the Prison Literature.

[5] Some critics think that *Mimosa* is a novella; here I treat it as a novel.

[6] In 1958 Mao launched The Great Leap Forward, a mass movement designed to transform the units of economic production from relatively small scale collectives into large scale communes. The movement was a disaster that led to famine, starvation, and the deaths of somewhere between 20 and 30 million deaths.

[7] *Critique of Half of Man is Woman 评男人的一半是女人*. Ed. Ningxia renmin chubanshe. (银川 Yinchuan:宁夏人民出版社 Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1987).

on how the political oppression of Chinese intellectuals throughout the continuous political movements from the late 1950s until the late 1970s led to their emasculation. These discussions have been limited to the narrow focus of political oppression, but have failed to examine the issue in its wider dimensions. For example, aside from political oppression are there other factors that have contributed to the tragic lives of so many modern intellectuals?

I am particularly interested in why Chinese intellectuals are so often the first and foremost target for the government's countless political campaigns? What is the relationship between the Chinese ruling elite and the intellectual class? From the author's point of view, the political persecution suffered by his protagonist Zhang Yonglin[8] was a "long ordeal" designed to remould "a young Chinese [intellectual] from a bourgeois family, brought up on hazy notions of humanism and democracy, who undergoes a long ordeal, and finally becomes a Marxist".[9] However, my personal reading of this trilogy leads to a very different conclusion—from beginning to end, the protagonist is an adherent of those aspects of Confucian ideology and moral values which justify his own behaviour, and his ideas regarding the superior status of Chinese intellectuals. As in Lu Xun's famous story "The True Story of Ah Q", the protagonist, Zhang Yonglin, who is systematically victimized, in turn victimizes the only human beings more vulnerable than himself, such as women. In Zhang Xianliang's work there are extensive descriptions of his protagonist's relationships with various women. What is the protagonist's perspective on women? What is the role of women in the lives of male intellectuals? From a careful examination I explore that his uncontrollable desire for political power which leads him to play double roles in his pursuit of advancement: to wage political struggle and to exploit women.

Raising these questions does not mean I am unaware of the catastrophic impact

[8] Although the protagonist in *Getting Used to Dying* is unnamed, his characteristic behaviors mirror those of Zhang Yonglin in *Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman*, which suggest a definite association. However, the unnamed protagonist might well be construed as Zhang Xianliang abandoning his "*nom d'emprunt*", yet still unwilling to name himself outright.

[9] Zhang Xianliang, *Mimosa*. In *Mimosa and Other Stories*. Trans. Gladys Yang. (Beijing, Panda Books, 1985), 13.

of the CPC's political movements. On the contrary, in this paper I attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the national disaster and the tragic fate of Chinese literary male intellectuals. More importantly, asking these questions will help me to explore the fundamental reasons why intellectuals have suffered so much in China's long history.

Very proud of being a Chinese intellectual, Zhang Xianliang reveals that both his paternal and maternal sides came from great families of scholars. His grandfather had law degrees from the Universities of Chicago and Washington. And his mother's father was a famous Confucian scholar and high ranking official.[10] Zhang Xianliang believes that he inherited his ancestors' literati temperament, which made him a typical Chinese intellectual. From Zhang Xianliang's personal experience we can tell that he shares many similarities with his contemporaries, such as Wang Meng 王蒙, Deng Youmei 邓友梅, and Liu Binyan 刘宾雁. For example, because his poems were considered anti-Party he spent many years in prison and labour reform camps. And even though he suffered a great deal from the Party's policies during China's political turmoil, like many Chinese intellectuals, he still shows great loyalty to the Party and follows its political policies. Zhang Xianliang often states that this trilogy is based on his personal life experience, and to some degree it is his autobiography. Since many of Zhang Yonglin's experiences share striking similarities to the experiences of Zhang Xianliang,[11] it can thus be fairly regarded that his trilogy is his semi-fictionalized autobiography. Accordingly, the protagonist, Zhang Yonglin, mirrors Zhang Xianliang's own personal qualities. In addition, Zhang Xianliang's

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[10] Zhang Xianliang, *Fiction, China and Others* *小说中国及其他*. (Wuhan, Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe, 武汉, 长江文艺出版社 1999), 321-328.

[11] In the "*Author's Preface*" for the English version of *Mimosa* (Beijing: Panda, 1985), Zhang Xianliang writes that, "*Mimosa* is one part of an autobiographical series of novels." (p.7). In *The Great Wall of Confinement: The Chinese Prison Camp through Contemporary Fiction and Reportage* (University of California Press, 2004), Philip F. Williams and Yenna Wu also classify Zhang Xianliang's novella, *Passionate Words from a Village Jail* 土牢情话, as well as novels such as *Getting Used to Dying* as autobiography and semi-autobiography: "The Prison writings analyzed in this interdisciplinary study fall into four major categories, the first pair of which is nonfictional, while the third and fourth are fictional. [. . .] The first category consists of memoirs, diaries, collections of letters, autobiographies, and testimonials written by former PRC prison inmates. [. . .] Among the most significant are those by Lai Ying (1969), Jean Pasqualini (1973), Duan Kewen (1978), Peng Yinghan (1984), Wumingshi (1985), Song Shan (1986), Cong Weixi (1989/1998), Harry Wu (1994), and Zhang Xianliang (1995)" (155-6).

experience and that of his protagonist represents the experience of many Chinese intellectuals between 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution. Based on the above, in this paper, I treat Zhang Yonglin as a personification of the author Zhang Xianliang during the decades of violent chaos and political persecution.

Through my reading of Zhang Xianliang's three novels, and my understanding of traditional Chinese cultural and social conventions, I think a new reading of Zhang's work is needed. Applying the analytical tools of deconstruction, feminist criticism, and psychoanalytical critique, in this thesis, I use Zhang Xianliang's texts to explore the following questions: (1) Why are Chinese male intellectuals so keen for political power? (2) What is the relationship between politics and sex for male intellectuals in the People's Republic? (3) What is it in the psychological make-up of male intellectuals which allows them to victimize women after they themselves were victimized? (4) How is it possible for Zhang Xianliang to reconcile his criticism of state policies while simultaneously supporting the rhetoric of Party propaganda?

After a careful examination of Confucianism and traditional Chinese intellectual culture, we find that traditional social convention demands that educated males achieve a certain political position, and it encourages them to demonstrate their masculinity through the domination of women.[12] My reading of Zhang Xianliang and his protagonist leads me to suggest that contemporary Chinese intellectuals are trapped in the patriarchal tradition of Confucian social conventions.

I. Chinese Intellectuals in the Context of Chinese Society

Before going any further in my discussion of Zhang Xianliang's work, I would like to clarify my view of the intellectual in Chinese society. Confucianism, in its various formulations, has been the national ideology dominating Chinese society since the Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD). While the precepts of classical Confucianism have allowed for many interpretations and reformulations certain ideas

[12] While it would be irresponsible to blame Confucianism for the historically tragic fate of Chinese intellectuals, it is generally acknowledged that Confucianism was the single most influential source of Chinese intellectual culture, which included the pursuit of political power, and a patriarchal conceit that was (still is) misogynistic.

have remained steadfastly unchanged, such as the view that women are inferior beings, no better than slaves, who have no personal rights or access to education. In this way women have been excluded from the Chinese intellectual community, while men have controlled the world of Chinese thought. Despite the fact that in post-1949 China the CPC has advocated equal rights for women, the idea that women are equal to men primarily remains nothing more that political rhetoric. Hence in contemporary Chinese society the intellectual community continues to be mainly dominated by men. There are exceptions, but as a rule to be an intellectual in China is to be male. When there happen to be female professionals people always mark the distinction, such as female professor, female doctor, female writer, and so on. Once women gain access to the "men's club" they are institutionally de-gendered, yet there are still countless obstacles to their professional advancement. In addition, women who pursue professional careers, must maintain traditional feminine virtues in the domestic sphere, where "it is a virtue for a woman to have no skills" (女子无才便是德).[13] Traditionally men do not want women who are mentally stronger than themselves. Hence, in the following, the term "intellectual" refers to men unless otherwise stated.

For exploring traditional Chinese intellectual culture, and lives of Chinese women in pre-modern China, I will show that the traditional culture still has a very strong influence on Chinese intellectuals and on Chinese society in general. To understand my reading of Zhang Xianliang's trilogy I will concentrate on my theoretical framework that includes deconstruction, feminist criticism, and a psychoanalytic critique. The use of these three theoretical approaches gives us profound insights into the author and his protagonist.

II. Overview of Chinese Intellectual Culture and Chinese Women in the Confucian Tradition

In his studies of the characteristics of Chinese intellectuals Timothy Cheek

[13]此语出自明代人曹臣所辑的《舌华录》第 109 条，原文的全部内容是："陈眉公（继儒）曰：'男子有德便是才，女子无才便是德。'

asserts that intellectuals have double identities in contemporary Chinese society. "There is no gap between the Party and intellectuals. Rather, there are interlocking patron-client relationships, with a mix of political and intellectual roles and interests at each level".[14] In other words, Chinese intellectuals are not an independent group; they have to depend on the ruling group to maintain their social status. This characteristic dictates that Chinese intellectuals also have to live at somebody else's mercy. As a group or class, they want to serve power, and at the same time, their pride and ambition drive them to search for power in order to pursue their political dreams.

A. The Role of Intellectuals in the Confucian System: the Scholar-Official

In general, traditional Chinese intellectual culture is informed by Confucian thinking. Confucius himself spent his most productive years, from his early thirties until his late sixties, traveling between warring states trying to find a patron who would support his vision of statecraft and government. His efforts resulted in only three years of employment. In the end he was forced to resign and decided that he would never involve himself in political affairs again. Returning home to the state of Lu (now Shandong Province 山东, Qufu district 曲阜) , he established the first school in Chinese history. As China's most revered educator and thinker, Confucian ideas have had the greatest influence on the nature of the Chinese character. He believed that properly tutored scholars were duty bound to offer their learning in the service of the state. This idea has had a lasting influence on how Chinese society views intellectuals, and how intellectuals view Chinese society.

B. Political Position and Literary Accomplishment

In Chinese history, generally, the emperors depended greatly on intellectuals. Intellectuals also prided themselves on being good servants of the emperor and state, and enjoyed privileged status and power over others. From the very beginning, the

[14] Timothy Cheek, "*Introduction*". In *China's Establishment Intellectuals*. Ed. (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe. Inc., 1986), 15.

relationship between the ruler and the intellectuals was that of master and servants, and that relationship remained unchanged for about two thousand years.

Clearly, Chinese intellectual culture developed in a different way than its Western counterparts. Putting themselves in a position of servitude, Chinese intellectuals lost their opportunity to be an independent group. Because their servitude provided them with countless privileges, competition for official positions was intense. It was all masked by the rhetoric of serving the emperor and the state, but eventually the cultivation of learning became a political quest in which knowledge became a means of acquiring wealth and prestige.

In her study of the Chinese literati, Wendy Larson notes that the auto-biographies of Chinese intellectuals usually emphasize their political achievements, distancing themselves from their literary accomplishment even though it was their writing which brought them fame. When examining the autobiographies of Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 and Sima Qian 司马迁, Larson finds that

> In this text [the autobiography] the name the author uses is his socially and culturally sanctioned name, which is also the name of the author's ancestors. This name functions as a link of a chain that places him in line with official history, which consists of ancestors and close relatives who held official positions and whose names and titles could contribute to the status of the author, giving him definition in his relation to other people and to holders of political power. Through referential language which takes these elements as its context, the autobiography of Liu Yuxi aligns itself with structures of political power. Ancestors appear not as multifaceted people who perform in numerous capacities but as progenitors—those who give the author lineage and establish his name in time. The author's works are also listed by name, establishing his identity as inheritor of the public role of officeholder.[15]

Although Liu Yuxi[16] and Sima Qian[17] were very proud of their political

[15] Wendy Larson, *Literary Authority and the Modern Chinese Writer*. (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1991), 17-18.

[16] Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡 772-842), Poet, essayist, best know for the philosophical text *Tian lun*.

[17] Sima Qian (司马迁 C. 145 - 90 BCE) Regarded as the father of Chinese historiography based on his seminal

contributions, the Chinese people considered them great writers, not politicians. By the same token, although Qu Yuan[18] and Confucius rose to positions of great political status and influence, they are now remembered as China's greatest poet and educator respectively.

C. Women's Role in the Political and Literary Pursuits of Chinese Intellectuals

Playing an essential role in politics is the primary ambition of Chinese intellectuals. Playing a dominant role in women's lives is a well conditioned instinct among Chinese intellectuals. Traditional Chinese culture, more specifically Confucianism, has permitted Chinese men, especially men with privilege and power, to dominate women in every way. Confucius once said that "women and base men are the hardest people to deal with" 惟女子与小人难养也.[19] Not only did traditional Chinese culture put women at the bottom of the social hierarchy, it also put forth strict regulations to circumscribe women's power in order to suppress their natural abilities and dominate their lives. Men's concerns were so fundamental to the way institutions and legal frameworks were organized that women became accustomed to their gender subjugation. These gender specific social conventions so profoundly penetrated the lives of Chinese intellectuals that they eventually found expression in the traditional literary canon. The literary works of traditional literati the idea of "woman" is used as a metaphor to express political loyalty, women are also used scapegoats for political strife, and finally as compensation for political failure.

When the nation's cultural hero, the poet-official Qu Yuan (332-296 B.C.) was exiled by King Huai of Chu (楚怀王, 329-299 B.C.), he expressed his unwavering

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work the *Shiji*.

[18] Qu Yuan (屈原 332–296 B.C.), Culture hero, poet-official and national martyr who committed suicide when stripped of his political power.

[19] Confucian, *"Yanghuo"* in *The Analects* 论语・阳货. Trans. D.C. Lau. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000). The original text is "唯女子与小人为难养也，近之则不逊，远之则怨"。

loyalty by writing a long allegorical poem called Encountering Sorrow (Li Sao 离骚). In this poem, he draws an extended analogy between a minister's loyalty to his ruler and a wife's devotion to her husband. In the poem, Qu Yuan's persona is cast in the female role. He considers himself as one who is like flowers and bushes which are pure, delicate and fragile, characteristics that are considered female qualities and virtues.

> I will make my coat of water lilies' leaves.
> And gather lotus flowers for my skirt.
> Men know me not. Let it be, even so!
> Indeed, my feelings are quite true and pure![20]
> (制芰荷以为衣兮 / 集芙蓉以为裳 / 不吾知其亦已兮 / 苟余情其信芳)

Qu Yuan not only self-depreciates himself as a fragile woman in order to seek the Emperor's sympathy and forgiveness, but also angrily condemns the people who persecuted him as a group of women who envy his extreme beauty.[21] Drawing his political enemies as jealous women, Qu Yuan distinguishes himself as one who is an obedient and loyal wife willing to follow her husband's orders: "yet for what I sincerely think is good, though I shall die 'nine deaths', I will never regret" (亦余心之所善, 虽九死犹未悔).[22] The gender message that Qu Yuan delivers in his poem conveys several meanings. First, when he is a political victim he is in a female position, very fragile and easily attacked, and totally loses his ability to defend himself. Second, women are morally inferior to men, so that he compares his enemies with jealous women. Third, women's natural duty is to obey their husbands. The message about women's role in early Chinese society as well as Qu Yuan's understanding is very clear. Women are supposed to be in a subordinate position and they are weak and inferior, thus when a man loses his power, he automatically

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[20] Qu Yuan, *The Li Sao. Encountering Sorrow 离骚* Trans. Lim Boon Keng. (Taiwan: Eastern Culture Publishing House 台湾: 东方文化书局, 1972), 73.

[21] Ibid., 71. The original text is, "now all the women envy my comely looks, by slanders calling me an excellent rake". 众女嫉余之蛾眉,谣诼谓余以善淫.

[22] Qu Yuan, *Encountering Sorrow*. 71.

downgrades himself to the status of female by both his own and the social classification.

Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) was one of the most famous poets and man of letters of the mid-Tang 唐 period, and held several senior official posts during his lifetime. Similar to Qu Yuan, his outspoken criticisms of government policies resulted in exile. Despite his belief in Buddhism and his criticism of social injustice, many of his poems describe time passed with his concubines. The line "[So attractive are] Fan Su's lips as pretty as the red cherry, / [so elastic is] Xiao Man's waist as diaphanous as a willow [dancing in the breeze]" 樱桃樊素口，杨柳小蛮腰 shows that Bai wrote about his life with women after leaving his official life. In his long poem Song of Everlasting Sorrow 长恨歌, he gives voice to the view, widely-held then as now, that the beauty of the imperial consort Yang Guifei 杨贵妃 is to blame for distracting the lovelorn Emperor Xuan Zong from his political duties during the An Lushan rebellion, instigating a catastrophe that began the long decline of the Tang Dynasty.

III. Three New Ways to Read Zhang Yonglin in Zhang Xianliang's Trilogy

I believe that the above discussion of traditional Chinese intellectual culture and Chinese women in the context of the Confucian tradition provides a useful background for my analysis of the Zhang Xianliang's limitations, his apparent lack of self-awareness regarding his attitude toward women, and the fact that his protagonist's personal weaknesses serve as a personification of the Chinese intellectual class. To approach my topic, I use the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction[23] as the fundamental theoretical approach of my critique. The American feminist Judith Butler's influential work, *Bodies That Matter,*[24] and French philosopher Michel Foucault's work,[25] *The History of*

[23] Jacques Derrida (July 15, 1930 – October 8, 2004) was an Algerian-born French literary critic and philosopher of Jewish descent, most often referred to as the founder of "deconstruction". His voluminous work had a great effect on continental philosophy and on literary theory. His work is often associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism. His philosophical project involved extremely close reading of texts and tremendous erudition. He was also noted for his efforts to encourage the study of philosophy amongst French lycée students.

[24] Judith Butler is a prominent post-structuralist philosopher and has contributed to feminism, queer theory,

Sexuality (vol.I) will further help me to focus on the function of women in the lives of Chinese intellectuals, and the connection between sexual desire and political power.

Using deconstruction provides a tool for "reading against the grain" of the primary narrative. By excavating beneath the rhetorical surface of the text, a number of interesting discursive artifacts are unearthed, not the least of which is the significant gap between "authorial intent" and the received text. As Jacques Derrida points out, it is always the author who subverts his own text. In "reading against the grain" of the narrative, I will demonstrate how Zhang Xianliang's protagonist undermines his own quest to become a "good Marxist". Through his depiction of Zhang Yonglin, the author inadvertently exposes irreconcilable contradictions between what is said in the surface narrative and what is exposed upon a deeper reading of the text. Since this trilogy is largely a fictional autobiography, it is possible to infer that these contradictions exist within the author himself.

In today's China the belief that women are inferior is still widespread. Specific to Zhang Xianliang's trilogy, acts of discrimination against women are very obvious in both the language used and the protagonist's comments; women are the subjects of occupation, male sexual gratification, and abuse. What ultimately puts women in such an inferior social position is the issue of body and reproductive functions. In her seminal work, *Bodies That Matter*, theorist Judith Butler provides an effective theoretical approach for gaining a new, more comprehensive understanding of women's identity and position in the social hierarchy of Western civilization. From her work we can extrapolate an interesting new way to explore modern Chinese society and its historic interconnections. Approaching her topic from multiple

political philosophy and ethics. She is Maxine Elliot professor in the Departments of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley.

[25]Michel Foucault (October 15, 1926 – June 25, 1984) was a French philosopher who held a chair at the Collège de France, which he gave the title "The History of Systems of Thought." His writings have had an enormous impact on other scholarly work. Foucault's influence extends across the humanities and social sciences, and across many applied and professional areas of study. Foucault is known for his critical studies of various social institutions, most notably psychiatry, medicine, and the prison system, and also for his work on the history of sexuality. His work concerning power and the relation between power and knowledge, as well as his ideas concerning "discourse" in relation to the history of Western thought, have been widely discussed and applied. His work is often described as postmodernist or post-structuralist by commentators and critics.

perspectives, Butler questions the constitution of gender identity, body, and subjects that are established by "an identification with the normative phantasm of sex".[26] Even though Butler's work discusses many issues that pertain to gender, subjectivity, and sexual transgression in modern society, I will use her critique in a very limited way, focusing on the "matter of body". Butler's discussion of woman's body provides me a different angle from which to critique Zhang Yonglin's perspective on women. Examining how patriarchal norms maintain male hegemonic power in Chinese society, I will use Butler's critique to explore how Zhang Yonglin regards a woman's body as a field to conquer, how a woman's body is a war trophy that proves a man is a "real man", deserving of physical and psychological pleasure from a woman.

Although psychoanalysis has developed in many directions over the last century, Sigmund Freud's pioneering work still provides a useful framework for exploring Zhang Yonglin's sexual frustration and impotence, his traumatic early life, and his overriding sense of narcissism and self-importance. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (Vol.I), will help support my argument that it is the unacknowledged and virtually unquenchable desire for power by the post-1949 Chinese intellectuals that has contributed significantly to their tragic fate.

A. Deconstruction:

Jacques Derrida proposes that an author's writing is determined by his consciousness, but that an author always says more and other than he intends to say, something that wells-up from his unconscious. An author's plots, themes and motifs, along with the actions and utterances of his protagonist may subvert his original intention. As well, the author's language, both at the conscious and unconscious levels, is deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and philosophical environment in

[26] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

which the author lives.[27] Reading beneath the surface of the text, one finds that each text undermines itself by undermining its own textual ground and disperses itself into incoherent meaning. At this point, both author and language lose their absolute power to dominate the text. Deconstruction "reinscribes" any text in a system of difference which shows the instability of the text. The text and language usually subvert or undermine the author's original intention.[28]

Applying deconstructionist ideas to reading Zhang Xianliang's trilogy reveals that even though he condemns the CPC policies that victimize intellectuals, unconsciously he believes that the "long ordeal" was necessary for remoulding Chinese intellectuals into useful people. He depicts the suffering of intellectuals to condemn the Party's political policies, but in his depiction of Zhang Yonglin, he subtly undermines this message by glossing over the brutal and inhumane political movements that transformed Zhang Yonglin from an outcast into a "good" Marxist.[29] In reality, Zhang Yonglin is neither a Marxist, nor a Materialist, but a defender of traditional Confucian culture. He basks in the privileges given to "successful" intellectuals, and discriminates against women. Given that the trilogy is a fictionalized autobiography it suggests that Zhang Xianliang was carried away by his own successful transformation from a prisoner to a celebrated writer and Party official.

B. Feminist Critique:

From the beginning of recorded civilization women have been excluded from philosophical discourse in both East and West. If, by chance, great philosophers such as Socrates and Plato mentioned women, they invariably made a connection between "woman" and "body". Moreover, these great philosophers clearly suggested that

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[27] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Part II: *Nature, Culture, Writing*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 95-247.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Zhang, *Mimosa and Other Stories*, 13.

women should be put in the same category as slaves, children, and animals.[30] This consistently negative representation of women codified them as belonging at the bottom of human society. By re-examining classical philosophical texts, Judith Butler works her way through a reductionist ontology that arrives finally at the fundamental principle of woman as womb.[31] Butler is highly critical of the language-power structure of traditional western philosophical discourse, which codified the socially inferior status of women, a codification that has severely circumscribed women's lives.

While Butler critiques the rhetoric of Socrates (469–399BCE) and Plato, I will be looking at the ideas of Confucius, China's most influential philosopher and educator (551–479BCE), whose life was roughly contemporaneous with that of Socrates. As outlined by Confucius, women were seen as inferior creatures and had only three proper functions in society: obedient daughters, faithful wives, nurturing mothers. It was not until the Han dynasty that Confucianism was adopted as a national ideology in which the basic patterns of Chinese social behaviours and gender roles were officially codified. In Chinese history, many emperors issued countless regulations, such as, *Commándments For Women* (女诫), and *The Scripture of Teaching Women* (教女经), to codify women's lives and behaviours. The *Commandments For Women* teaches that women shouldn't have outstanding talents, shouldn't have good skills in debating, shouldn't pursue physical beauty, and shouldn't master craft skills (妇德不必才明绝异, 妇言不必辩口利词, 妇容不必颜色美丽, 妇功不必工巧过人).[32] The purpose of the commandments was to restrict women and in a limited measure to enslave them. Since the time of those ancient regimes women's minds and spirits have been confined to a very narrow

[30] Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views," Feminist Studies 8, no. 1 (Spring, 1982): 109-131.

[31] Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* 29.

[32] This book was written by the Eastern Han Dynasty female poet Ban Zhao 班昭. "*Women For Commandment*" is so-called "female education" to achieve the purpose of regulating the behavior of female words and deeds. However, Ban Zhao is not the first one who thinks that women should not as strong and wise as men. "chaos great drop since days since the woman" are form Western Zhou Dynasty "Book of Poetry Life". It says woman with wisdom is not good, it disrupts the world, causing disaster, and it brings calamity. According to the "Book of Poetry" in the argument may conclude that "women disaster theory," the idea is quite a long history.

space in which their creativity was stifled; they were reduced to wombs for bearing children, and their bodies used for the gratification of male sexual desires.

The experiences of the female characters in Zhang Xianliang's trilogy reflect the traditional Confucian view of women. Despite the fact 2,500 years have passed since Confucius put forth his teachings, the role and function of women in Chinese society remain essentially unchanged. Neither time nor the Communist Party has really freed Chinese women from this oppressive social status. Zhang Yonglin still uses these values to judge women, and judges them as being morally inferior. He maintains the fundamental idea that women are dirty, eventually treating them as sexual objects which provide him with momentary pleasure.

C. Psychoanalytic critique:

In examining the history of human sexuality in Europe, Michel Foucault reached the conclusion that the authorities have used sex and sexuality to control, manage and manipulate people's social lives. The control of sexuality is a manifestation of the power to codify human social activity and behavior. In terms of the sexual relationship between men and women, the role of male sexuality has been accepted as aggressive, domineering, and often oppressive, while the role of women has been relegated to the position of object and victim. However, in reality, men suffer far more anxiety and fear regarding the loss of male identity, both physically and symbolically, because that identity is so intimately dependent on sexual performance.

In Sigmund Freud's studies, male sexuality also plays a significant role in the development of men's psychological problems. For example, negative sexual experiences during the early years can lead to narcissism. The narcissistic patient by no means wants to withdraw from sexual fantasy and sexual life; rather he desires the sexual conquest of multiple partners as a way to satisfy sexual desires that stem from his early trauma. While, there has been much debate over the validity of the Freudian practice of psychoanalysis, Freud's ideas still prove a useful way to explore the trauma of Zhang Yonglin's early life, his frustration, impotence, and narcissism.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (vol.1), also helps to support my argument that it is the unspoken desires of male Chinese intellectuals that have contributed to their tragic fate.

In Zhang Xianliang's trilogy, impotence, male identity, woman's body, and political desire have been the most important elements in Zhang Yonglin's problematic and troubled life. To be fair, most of his suffering is the result of CPC policy, yet it also results from his conceptions about woman, his personal desires, his troubled sexuality, and his sense of self-importance. Of course, the ideology that Zhang Yonglin espouses has an undeniable connection with traditional moral values and male intellectual culture. Although Zhang Xianliang asserts that the protagonist has been transformed into a new person, a good Marxist, I am going to show that Zhang's connection with Chinese Confucian ideology can not be ignored or evaded.

In Zhang Yonglin's life, sexual anxiety is the first and foremost problem that he confronts. How he deals with this predicament gives the reader an opening into a closer look at Zhang Yonglin's personality. In *Mimosa*, his sexual frustration makes him think about death. In *Half of Man is Woman*, frustration over sexual impotence causes him to attempt suicide for the second time. In *Getting Used to Dying*, his sexual anxiety no longer exists, and there are plenty women available. However, whenever he has sexual intercourse, there is one thing that casts a shadow over his moment of climax—thoughts of death. He can't get rid of the image of death in his sexual pleasure. In *Half of Man is Woman*, sexual satisfaction stimulates his desire to struggle, to fight, and to pursue power. In *Getting Used to Dying*, the same pleasure plays a different function in his radically changed life. The question that we want to ask, then, concerns what these changes suggest. When he reaches the moment of the sexual climax why does he feel the threat of death? Is there a direct connection between women and death? What roles do women play in his image of death? After recovering from impotence, why does Zhang Yonglin lay claim to super potency? Does Zhang Yonglin's expression of physical potency have any connection with politics? Does the fulfillment of his political ambitions grant him added sexual potency? What are the relationships between politics, sexuality and women in this

novel?

Foucault's and Freud's research offer useful tools with which to explore Zhang Yonglin's sexual and psychological experiences. In both Western and Eastern societies the erect male sexual organ has always symbolized both patriarchal power and male identity, thus it is not difficult to understand Zhang Yonglin's agonizing frustration at being physically and psychologically emasculated by the state. These are heavy blows for the young Zhang Yonglin, and to some small degree, they mitigate his narcissistic character. Ultimately, he maintains a sense of superiority based on principles from traditional Chinese intellectual culture that fosters the expectation that educated males always have privileges and the right of power over others.

In my reading of Zhang Xianliang's three novels vis-à-vis traditional Chinese intellectual culture, I find that the aggressive pursuit of political power by Chinese intellectuals plays a significant role in their continuing suffering and ordeals. As a personification of the modern Chinese literary intellectual, Zhang Yonglin plays a double role in the three novels; he is a victim of various political movements and, at the same time, he victimizes the women who help him. This double identity is rooted in the same social and cultural background as that of his own persecutors. Achieving political power is the long-standing objective of Chinese intellectuals; political power provides them with privileged access to sexual activities and the opportunity to demonstrate their sexual potency. But when there are political failures, sex may function as a means for them to show off their manhood, or it becomes a symbol of lost male power. In Zhang Xianliang's fictional world when a man has political power his next objective is to have power over women. During periods when an intellectual is out of favour, in exile and deprived of power, women become the means for them to regain power or to compensate for the loss of actual political power. Zhang Xianliang unconsciously exposes the weakness of Chinese intellectuals, and Zhang Yonglin unconsciously demonstrates the same weakness when he conforms to the value system of China's modern sociocultural structure.

Chapter One: Zhang Xianliang's Political Pursuits and Literary Ideas: Literature Serves Politics, Women Serve Men

Zhang Xianliang is legendary in the contemporary Chinese literary society for his life experience and controversial writing. Twenty-two years in exile provided him with writing resources and a distinctive perspective on contemporary intellectuals' encounter with the CPC. Zhang Xianliang's early attempts at writing brought him bitter consequences. Twenty-two years later, with the changed political climate, his exploration of a literary forbidden zone—the taboo subject of sex—brought him unexpected fame and embroiled him in heated controversy.

His writings, particularly, his fictional autobiographical trilogy, condemn the CPC's political oppression of the Chinese intellectuals that resulted in their psychological repression and sexual impotence. On the other hand, his fiction and literary essays praise the Party's political policy as a necessary means for remoulding intellectuals into new and useful men. This contradiction, demonstrated in Zhang Xianliang's writing, illustrates his and his contemporaries' epistemological limitations due to the political climate at the time.[33] In Zhang Xianliang's case, when we examine his political ascendancy,[34] and give free rein to the connection with his protagonist, who uses his wits to take advantage of others, one cannot help but wonder if Zhang Xianliang also uses his prison experience to ride the Party's political wave to gain power and fame. If this is indeed the case, it explains why the contradiction in his work is so irreconcilable. If it is not, what are the reasons behind these contradictions in his writings? What role does his political attitude play in this contradiction? Or, to be more general, why does Zhang criticize the CPC's political policy, and at the same time willingly follow its political propaganda?

To answer the above questions this chapter focuses on Zhang's life experience

[33] Cong Weixi's and Gu Hua's writing also shows the same problems.

[34] In 1979 Zhang Xianliang was released and rehabilited. In 1980 he became editor of the literary journal *Ningxia wenyi*. In 1983 he joined the Communist Party and became a member of the People's Consultative Conference. In 1986 he became a member of the China's Writers' Association..

and his literary ideas. By discussing two aspects in Zhang Xianliang's work--the male protagonist Chen Biaotie's 陈抱帖 attitude towards politics and women in the novel, *The Style of Man* *男人的风格,* and the characterization of the intellectual in *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail* *土牢情话,* it will provide a brief background for further analysis of the role of women in the lives of male intellectuals. Zhang has consistently argued that literature should serve the Party's policies, and in this chapter, his political preferences and activities will also be discussed.

I. Zhang Xianliang's Early Writing and Twenty-Two Year Imprisonment

1957 marks a turning point in Zhang Xianliang's life and eventually the life of the entire Chinese intellectual community.[35] While teaching at the Gansu Provincial

[35] 1956 April 25, Mao Zedong In an enlarged meeting of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau gave "On the 10 Major Relationships" speech said "Let a hundred flowers bloom". One month later, The Central Propaganda Department Minister to Intellectuals gave a keynote speech entitled "letting a hundred flowers bloom" speech "to promote scientific research in the literary work and the work of independent thinking and freedom to debate and freedom to create and the freedom to criticize and express their views, to retain their own views and the views of freedom." 1957 May 1, People's Daily published "Instructions on rectification campaign" and decided to launch a movement against bureaucracy in the party, sectarianism and subjectivism as content rectification campaign, calling on non-party personages "airing of views" and to encourage people to present their own ideas, opinions, or to the Communist Party and government comments, and help the Communist Party rectification. Thus circles, primarily intellectuals who began to express dissatisfaction with the party and the government and recommended improvements. Press follow-up, published various voices. Later, the Party and the Government criticized some words intense, sharp, and even some argument, far beyond the Communist Party of tolerance limit. 1957 May 15, Mao Zedong wrote an article "Things are changing" to party comrades to read. June 8 People's Daily published editorial "Why?", told people "minority right-wing elements in the Communist Party rectification help in the name of an attempt to take the Communist Party and the working class down to the great cause of socialism down", it also pointed out "The Communist Party still rectification, they still have to listen to all outside criticism goodwill" for the future. On the same day, the CPC Central Committee issued a "right-wing elements of organized forces to counter attack instructions".
1957 October 15, the CPC Central Committee on the "right-wing elements of the division of standards", informed which "right-wing elements" of standards, including: Against Socialist System; Against proletarian dictatorship, opposition Democratic centralism; Against Communist Party in the country's political life leadership; To oppose the socialist and communist opposition for the purpose of splitting the unity of the people; Against Communist cause for the economic and cultural undertakings leadership; Organizations and the active participation of the socialist opposition, the opposition Communist faction; Conspiracy to overthrow the Communist Party of a department or a grass-roots leadership; For the crimes committed right-wing elements of the ideas, connections, communication intelligence reports to their revolutionary organizations secrets.
In the concrete implementation, especially in the latter part of the campaign, many units simplified standards for the lower percentage of units' designated right-wing elements. In 1957 and 1958, the CPC Central Committee on the demarcation of the right-wing elements in accordance with the severity of offences to deal with the six from the light followed by the re - Labor camp, supervision of labor, retained probation, dismissal, demotion from administrative punishment. Makes the right-wing elements in the previous two penalties forced to leave their job to border regions, rural areas, and engaged in heavy manual labor in prisons because of the overload of the national labor and shortly after the arrival of the famine, which was made with the right-wing elements in a large number of deaths. Right-wing elements remain in the city that were punished for not willing to do manual work, such as cleaning toilets, or in the case of discrimination continue to be original. According to 1978 statistics vindicate the right course in 1957 "Anti-rightist movement" in 1958 and "anti-rightist opinions", the Chinese produced 550,000 of "rightists".

Cadre College, he also wrote poems. In January, March and July of 1957,[36] he published three poems, Night 夜, Songs Sung at Evening 在傍晚唱的歌, and Ode to the Strong Wind 大风歌. The poems tell the reader of his great passion for his new country and his life in it. In the poem Night, Zhang writes:

> Lying on the reclaimed wasteland
> I am listening to the most beautiful symphony
> I am listening to the heartbeat of our motherland
> the heartfelt sound, excitement, and happy laughter
> the tone of the car joyously spinning at high speed
> the song of printing machine, the baby's cry like
> the melody of violin,
> the sluice gates of the hydropower station the keys of piano
> the electricity of telegram a high-pitch melody
> Oh, I love the symphony; it's the symbol of my native land.[37]

He is full of praise for the new country and his new life. He dreams that his native land will become strong and prosperous, and that its people will have peaceful happy lives. He trusts the Party, and accepts official propaganda with great enthusiasm.

The publication of Ode to the Strong Wind initially brought Zhang Xianliang high praise. From these poems we can recognize the influences of Walt Whitman and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The Ode to the Strong Wind, for example, has the same passion and tone as Shelley's Ode to the West Wind.

The intensity of joy soon faded away dramatically. In that same year the Anti-Rightist Campaign began and his poems were attacked for being revisionist and advocating humanitarianism. He was sent to a labour camp in Ningxia, a hostile environment in the north-western province of China.[38] He stayed there for

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[36] Three poems published in a literary magazine the Yan River (Yan He)

[37] Zhang Xianliang, Night 夜. Vol. 1. *Zhang Xianliang Selected Works* 张贤亮选集. (Tianjing, Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 天津,百花文艺出版社, 1985), 3-5.

[38] It may very hard for some people accept this fact that because of writing poems, people were sent to prison. However, it happened in Chinese society during the CPC's continuous political movements. Some people even did not write also sent to prison because the places they worked had rations for Rightists to go to prison. In Zhang Xianliang's case, he asserts that the reason for him to spend twenty-two years in prison was because of the pomes, even though in those poems, I can't find any trace of attacking the Party. However, there is no other evidence that prove that writing poem was not the reason Zhang spent twenty-two years in prison. To know more Chinese

twenty-two years, transferring from prison to prison, and from prison to labour reform farms. During this time, his father, a successful businessman who had been accused of spying, died in prison; and his mother, a housewife, followed her only son to the bleak and desolate northwest where she died alone without her son's company. In the course of those twenty-two years, Zhang Xianliang remained single since he did not have the opportunity to make contact with any woman.

II. Rehabilitation and Writing: Extracting and Purifying Aesthetic Elements from Suffering

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 brought an end to the Cultural Revolution. According to Zhang Xianliang's reminiscence, in the winter of 1978 he heard that many Rightists were being rehabilitated, so he petitioned the authorities to remove his Rightist classification. The result was disappointing because he had also been accused of counter-revolutionary activities, and he did not qualify for rehabilitation. With the encouragement of an old prison friend he devised the sophisticated strategy of using writing to change his identity and his life. "In 1979, after I had published three short stories, in September of the same year, I was completely rehabilitated, and became a high school teacher at the reform farm".[39] The four short stories changed Zhang's life forever.[40] These stories all deal with the same subject matter that pervaded the Chinese literary world in the wake of the Cultural Revolution: condemning the damage done by the Gang of Four 四人帮,[41] and applauding the Party's determination to end the Cultural Revolution.

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intellectuals lives in china and in prison, please refer: 1.Merle Goldman China's *Intellectuals: Advice and Dissent*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981. 2. Williams, Philip F. and Yenna Wu, Ed. *The Great Wall of Confinement: The Chinese Prison Camp through Contemporary Fiction and Reportage*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004. 3. Merle Goldman and Lee, Leo-Ou Fan: An Intellectual History of Modern China. Ed. Cambridge, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press).

[39] Zhang Xianliang, *Fiction, China, and Others* 小说中国及其他. (Wuhan: Changjiang Wenyi Chubanshe 武汉, 长江文艺出版社, 1999), 33.

[40] Zhang Xianliang published four short stories in 1979. All these four short stories published on Ningxia Wenyi 宁夏文艺 1979, January, February, March, and May respectively. They are "Four Letters" (四封信), "The Forty-third Express"(四十三次快车), , "Gypsy" (吉普赛人)and "The More Colourful the Colder" (霜重色愈浓).

[41] The Gang of Four 四人帮 was a group of Communist Party of China leaders in China who were arrested and removed from their positions in 1976, following the death of Mao Zedong, and were blamed for the events of the Cultural Revolution. The group consisted of Mao's widow Jiang Qing 江青 and three of her close associates, Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, and Wang Hongwen 王洪文.

What first attracted the attention of Chinese readers to Zhang Xianliang's writing was his short story, *Old Man Xing and His Dog* (*邢老汉和狗的故事*).[42] This story is about the bitter life of an old peasant named Xing. He has been single all of his life. Then one day a young woman comes to his village begging for food. Xing feeds her and she stays with him for ten months. The woman's presence makes him a happy man. However, because her class identity is that of a rich peasant, she can't stay in the village. The day she leaves old man Xing picks up a homeless dog who becomes his closest friend, accompanying him through his lonely life. But government policy does not allow Xing to keep this dog, and when it is shot old Xing dies as well.

Old Man Xing and His Dog provides a revealing glimpse into the CPC's harsh governance, the lives and suffering of ordinary Chinese people, the relationship between men and women, man and nature, and the way in which they are cut off from each other. Ordinary people become enemies of the government, and separation and death are everyday events that Chinese people have to confront. This piece is full of humanitarian sentiment and exhibits a great force of humane concern. In Zhang's writing the subject matter of human feelings is very rarely dealt with because he focuses more of this attention on political events. Most of Zhang Xianliang's work is explicitly political. In fact, he openly declaimed that "all my literary work is political writing".[43]

Zhang's political-literary journey begins with the publication of his short story *Soul and Flesh* (灵与肉).[44] The story's protagonist, Xu Lingjun 许灵均, is a teacher at a farm-run school. When he is eleven years old his father abandons the family, leaving China for the United States with his mistress. His mother dies soon after his father leaves. It is the Party which offers him an opportunity to finish high school,

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[42] Shuo Fang 朔方 1980, February.

[43] Zhang Xianliang, "*The Bible of the Ruler*" 统治者的宝典. *Fiction, China, and Others*. 2.

[44] *Soul and Flesh* published in Shuo Fang. By the time Zhang was an editor working for this literary journal. It won the national short story award, and was adapted into a movie. In the following year, because of the patriotic tones for both the short story and the movie, Zhang was chosen to be a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative. In the same year, he joined the Communist Party.

then gives him a job as a teacher. In 1957, he is accused of being a Rightist, and sentenced to be re-educated through labour reform at a remote area in North-western China. He becomes a herdsman living an indigent and desolate life. One day, a young woman, Xiuzhi 秀芝, fleeing from famine in Sichuan province comes to his home, becomes his wife and gives birth to a baby girl. After the Cultural Revolution he is rehabilitated and the Party compensates him five hundred Yuan for its erroneous judgement; he becomes a teacher again. Xu Lingjun is very appreciative of what he has now: a good career, a kind wife, and a lovely daughter. Unexpectedly, the Party's reform policy enables Xu's father to return from the United States. He asks Xu to carry on his family business in the States. Xu refuses his father's request because he loves his country.

This sense of loyalty and love of China are the reasons why Xu does not go with his father. "*Soul and Flesh*" won the National Short Story Award in 1981. Its patriotic tone stirred the Chinese people's bittersweet feelings for their native land. From the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Party leaders hoped that the Chinese people would forgive and forget their losses and suffering during all the previous political movements—let bygones be bygones. Party controlled newspapers reinforced the political myth that the Party is a mother to the people of China when a mother hurts her children, she is still their mother. *Soul and Flesh* came out at just the right time, fitting the Party's political needs flawlessly. This short story was adapted very quickly into a movie named *A Herdsman's Story* (牧马人) and won a great deal of popularity throughout China.

Gaining the great success and fame, Zhang Xianliang has not sought to conceal his point of view that literature should serve politics. In an essay discussing *Soul and Flesh*, he says

> For the past ten or even twenty years Leftist policies have inflicted many wounds upon the Chinese people. Now there are works of literature which expose the suffering of the people. But how are we to help them see the beauty in their wounds, when the beauty of a scar is apparent only after the wound has healed? How are we to use our ordeal to inspire the people? How are we to use our ordeal to raise the spirit of the people?

> Following the Third Plenum [December, 1978], we were directed to draw lessons from our bitter experiences so that we could extract and purify some aesthetic elements from our suffering. The policy issued by the Third Plenum asked writers to create plots and narratives that illustrated the brilliant lustre of our wounds. This is why I wrote "*Soul and flesh*".[45]

III. *The Style of Man*: the Ideas of Literature and Politics, Men and Women

The fame brought by *Soul and Flesh* paved a smooth path for Zhang Xianliang's arrival on the national stage. By 1981, his essays, short stories and novellas were published in very influential literary journals and magazines.[46] The publication of *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail* enhanced his literary reputation and won him another National Award. In 1983, he published his first novel, *The Style of Man* *男人的风格*.

The Style of Man is a highly ambitious work in which Zhang tried to expand his writing into a new territory beyond the realm of his own life experience. This novel clearly shows his determination to directly connect literature and politics, and use political ideas and conceptions to inform his literary creations. Above all, it is also a concentrated reflection of Zhang Xianliang's ideas about the relationships between politics and literature, and men and women.

In the early 1980s, China was a country in which long neglected tasks were waiting to be addressed, and the people were very excited about its promising future. Party chairman Deng Xiaoping said that the country's leading task was the "accomplishment of the Four Modernizations", and that economic development was the nation's primary mission. In regards to works of literature, "the sole criterion for deciding the correctness of all work should be whether that work is helpful or harmful to the accomplishment of the Four Modernizations."

The principal narrative of *The Style of Man* has two interwoven plots. The protagonist Chen Baotie's 陈抱帖 political reform and his family life with his wife

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[45] Zhang Xianliang, "*从库图佐夫的独眼和纳尔逊的断臂谈起—[灵与肉]之外的话*". Vol, 1. *Zhang Xianliang Selected works*. 182-183.

[46] They are Selected of Short Stories 短篇小说选刊, October 十月, People's Literature 人民文学 and Contemporary Literature 当代文学.

Hainan 海南. Chen is a firm Party member unswervingly carrying out the Party's opening-up policies. He reforms contingents of cadres, improves the lives of intellectuals and shows his concern about local economic development. He is a mouthpiece for Party policy, and puts all his energy into following the Central Committee's guiding principles. In this novel, the protagonist doesn't do any concrete work other than acting as a conduit for Party propaganda. He fiercely debates the Party's ideas with the people, giving long utopian lectures to citizens, defending the Party's mistakes, and using patriotism to persuade people. But at home he is a different person: a cruel and domineering husband. Although his wife desperately longs for his concern and tenderness, he never shows that he cares for her, and refuses to speak to her as an equal. "He smiled to his wife very rarely. If he smiled, it was like he was sneering at her, or was looking down on her from a height or was laughing at a naive kid. This she found most insufferable".[47] "He also acted imperiously at home. She had to listen to him at all times, whether as eating, sleeping, and working. Even in her spare time she had to follow his instructions. But he never discussed anything with her".[48] He complains that "a wife who does not understand her husband's goals is even more annoying than his opponents".[49] However, when his wife shows her concern for his work, he says disdainfully: "I warn you, do not interfere in my business; if you want to get involved in politics, you can choose to be Mrs. Thatcher yourself."[50] He wants his wife have a "plump and naive face, a tender and docile expression and that she always be ready to serve him."[51] Chen Baotie thinks that "[his wife] did not fulfill her duty. She did not take good care of him, was not a qualified wife, and was not even a woman".[52]

Chen Baotie's character reminders us of most of the protagonists in Cultural

[47] Zhang Xianliang, "*The Style of Men*". vol. 2, *Zhang Xianliang Selected works*. 324.

[48] Ibid., 204.

[49] Ibid.,154.

[50] Ibid.

[51].Zhang, *The Style of Men*. 384

[52] Ibid.

Revolutionary "Beijing opera",[53] in which Communist Party members are ideal characters who are represented by the tall, sturdy physical statures of "perfect" human beings. He believes in the Party faithfully, works very hard, and treats his comrades better than his wife. He has no family life nor does he want one.

In *The Style of Man,* Zhang elaborates his views about the relationships between literature and politics, and men and women. He thinks that literature should not intrude upon politics but should serve it, and that men should dominate women. Therefore, the roles of literature and woman in the Chinese society bear striking similarities to one another. Throughout *The Style of Man,* Zhang Xianliang reveals hints that his writing is a way to ingratiate himself with the Party. Chen Baotie says that "Feudal emperors had the vision to support a group of literati for their use, why shouldn't our socialist country".[54]

Zhang Xianliang was well-satisfied with his work, but most critics thought that the novel was not successful because he was too eager to use literature to expound the Party's current political policy. Therefore, the novel was considered to be a product of political work whose "political ideas are heavier that the characters (理念大于形象)".[55] He was using the protagonist's words to expresses his own understanding of literature and politics. No matter how fiercely Zhang Xianliang defended himself, the novel quickly sank into oblivion. What impressed the reader most was Zhang's aggressive political stance. At a literary symposium, a reader sent Zhang a note. It asked: "what are you going to be, a writer or a politician?" Zhang replied that

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[53] From 1964 to 1966, Jiang Qing 江青 organized, and participated in the adaptation of some Beijing operas have been executed, rehearsed, late processed, they were marked "Jiang noted" signs. May 23, 1967 in memorizing Mao Zedong *Yanan forum* speech 25th anniversary of the day, the Theatre Festival in Beijing staged at the same time. Mao Zedong repeatedly rated Politburo members attend to give strong political support. Jiang Qing entered active in the Central Cultural Revolution Group and thus the central core of the political arena, are related. Then gradually added the Beijing opera "Longjiang Chung"龙江颂, "Plain Combat"平原作战, "Rock Bay"磐石湾, "Red etachment of Women"红色娘子军, "Cuckoo Hill"杜鹃山, ballet "Song Chung"沂蒙颂 and "Pasture Children"草原儿女. As a result of these works are about the Chinese people under the leadership of the CPC armed struggle and the building of modern economic life, have been given a broader political significance.

[54] Zhang, "*The Style of Men*". *Zhang Selected works*. 449.

[55] Zhang Xianliang: "*Contemporary Chinese Writers First should be the Socialist Reformers—A letter to Li Guowen*"当代中国作家首先应该是社会主义改革者—给李国文的信. vol. 3. *Zhang Selected works*. 648-657.

> From the very first day that I started writing, I did not want to be a writer who only worked for art. My twenty-two years of painful life experience taught me that literature couldn't survive without politics. To be a contemporary Chinese writer, first one should be a socialist reformer.[56]

In Chinese society, during the time when Zhang Xianliang stated his understanding of literature and politics, it is inconceivable for a cultural worker (文艺工作者)[57], especially a writer, to go outside the Party's political ideological control. However, writers could decide whether or not to follow the Party's propaganda and cooperative with its initiatives. While many Chinese cultural workers practice self-censorship, few voluntarily cooperate with the Party to the extent that Zhang Xianliang does.

IV. The lives of Intellectuals in Zhang Xianliang's Great Prison Wall Literature Writing

In 1980, the publication of Cong Weixi's 丛维熙 novella, *The Blood-Stained Magnolia(大墙下的白玉兰),* marked the start of the new literary genre referred to as the great prison wall literature 大墙文学.[58] Compared to Cong Weixi's prison writing, most of Zhang Xianliang's works, such as, *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail*(1981), *Mimosa* (1984), *Half of Man is Woman* (1985), *Getting Used to Dying* (1990), and *My Bodhi Tree 我的菩提树* (1994), gives a deeper and more comprehensive description of prison life. Compared to the blind faith of Cong Weixi characters, Zhang Xianliang's are more colourful, more vigorous and richer in variety. Living in inhumane environments they demonstrate great endurance, helping each other and also scheming against one another. They are loyal to their country, but they betray their friends and lovers. They are vivid and substantial human beings,

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[56] Zhang Xianliang: "*Must be feel freedom in your writing*"必须进入自由状态. Vol.3. *Zhang Selected Work.* 683.

[57] Cultural workers indicate people who are journalist, editor, writer, interpreter, university teacher, actor and actress.

[58] The publication of Cong Weixi's *Red Magnolia Under the Great Wall* in late 1970s and Zhang Xianliang's publication of *Half of Man is Woman* in the early 1980s gave rise to the term "Great Wall Literature", which was comprised of literature about the tragic lives of young intellectuals in exile.

and they are also twisted and tortured souls.

Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail is Zhang Xianliang's first prison wall story. In this novella he describes a young intellectual Shi Zai's 石在 life in prison, providing details about how the inhuman environment and political pressure have twisted and destroyed his life, and most importantly preyed on his own weaknesses. Because of publishing a poem that extols humanism, Shi Zai is sent to jail where ten inmates live. All of them are intellectuals: a re-educated youth, an accountant, an agricultural technician, a doctor, a military officer, and Shi Zai. The endless criticism and self-criticism, and years of exhausting physical labour destroy his self-confidence and weaken his will to survive. And yet, in the midst of this hellish environment, Shi Zai encounters the heartfelt love of woman.

One day, a heavy rainstorm bursts the worn-out jailhouse and all of the prisoners are soaked in toxic water.[59] On the same night, the prisoner who was a former military officer is beaten to death. The jail leader Liu Jun 刘俊 forces the inmates to testify that the cause of death is appendicitis; if they do not cooperate, they will face the same fate. The desire for survival and the sense of powerlessness force the prisoners to suppress their outrage.

The arrival of a pretty, young, female jail guard named Qiao Anping 乔安萍, brings Shi Zai a ray of hope when she shows special concern for him. She gives him extra food, and dances for him in the morning. Afraid that the jail leader Liu Jun will continue to torture other prisoners, Shi and his cell-mates scheme to use the innocent Qiao to smuggle information to people outside the jail that might be able to protect them. However, the jailors discover their underground activity. Under pressure from the prison authorities Shi Zai tells them of Qiao's help and their plan to run away together. That very night, Liu Jun rapes Qiao. She tries to commit suicide but fails. Before she disappears from Shi Zai's life, she sends him a letter in which she tells him that she loves him.

What makes *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail* so appealing is its

[59] The jailhouse was the farm's storage for chemical fertilizes and there are still some remains in nearby rooms. See "*Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail*". Vol. 2. *Zhang Selected works*. 3-89.

sense of verisimilitude. Following his artistic intuition, Zhang Xianliang gives this novella the feel of an authentic historical record. Without being fully aware of it himself, we can tell that Zhang was deeply influenced by his observations of other intellectuals and the conditions under which they are held. However, this influence leads him to unconsciously expose the weakness of Chinese intellectuals. The way Shi Zai dealing with prison life and his relationship with Qiao reveals Shi Zai's weak character and evil personality. He is extremely selfish, has no faith in truth, love and beauty, takes advantage of others, and mercilessly betrays friendship and love.

His betrayal changes Qiao's life completely. After rehabilitation Shi Zai reencounters Qiao Anping in a small railroad station. She is with her husband who was one of the labour camp guards abusing Shi and his cellmates. To Shi Zai's eye, Qiao is no longer the healthy and pretty woman she once was, but he never gives even the slightest thought to the possibility that his betrayal was the cause of her suffering and tragic fate.

> I noticed that she had changed terribly. Her face shrivelled and was very pale. Her forehead, the corners of her eyes and mouth were full of wrinkles. A lock of hair stuck on her check, and a droplet of clean nasal mucus hung on her nostril. She was like an aged printing that withered away it original colour.[60]

Shi's response to Qiao Anping is silence. "Without saying a word, I turned and walked away."[61] When Shi was face to face with Qiao's husband, his former tormentor, now a dejected man, "immediately, there was a malicious pleasure coming into my heart, I straightened my chest, giving out a menacing sound. 'Do you remember me?' I bent toward him, using a very commanding manner as I asked him."[62] Shi Zai's gesture to both Qiao and her husband reveals his indifference and cruelty.

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[60] Zhang, "*Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail*". In *Zhang Selected works.* Vol. 1. 5.

[61] Zhang, *Passionate Word.* 7-8.

[62] Ibid., 6.

Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail earned Zhang Xianliang more laudatory credit in the literary world, and the critics generously praised the female protagonist's giving, nurturing character, and her acts of self-sacrifice. But there were no words of condemnation regarding Shi Zai's conceit, cowardice, and utter selfishness. However, in his later works, *Mimosa, Half of Man is Woman,* and *Getting Used to Dying*, Shi Zai's character is fully developed with the creation of Zhang Yonglin, a richer and more vivid character.

Contemporary Chinese literature has been strongly concerned with the fate of Chinese intellectuals in the course of the CPC's political movements. Their suffering and ordeals stirred-up considerable condemnation of Party's policies toward intellectuals, and consequently won them great public sympathy.[63] However, the never ending political campaigns which started in the later part of 1950s have changed Chinese intellectual in many ways. A Chinese scholar, Lu Jiandong 陆键东, in his well-known book, *Mr. Chen Yinque's Last Twenty Years,* states

> Compared to pervious two years, the capitalist intellectuals became more tractable. They kept silent like a cicada in cold weather. They no longer resisted political movements. With the intellectuals no longer providing evidence of their initiative for the critics to criticize them, the last dignity and independence of Chinese intellectuals disappeared. Even though the phrase "stinking ninth category" came after the Cultural Revolution, the intellectual's weakness and cowardice had an inkling of the matter.[64]

Although Chinese intellectuals clearly demonstrated their indifference and weakness of character, by and large the Chinese people still view them as the greatest victims of China's political campaigns. However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different; through continuing policies established early in the Maoist Era

[63] In contemporary Chinese writers' works, such as Cong Weixi, Gu Hua, and Wei Junyi, we can find the same subject matters--Chinese intellectuals' suffering in the CPC's political movements.

[64] Lu Jiandong陆键东, *Mr. Chen Yinque's Last Twenty Years* 陈寅恪的最后二十年. (Shenghuo Dushu Xinzhi San Lianshudiang 生活 读书 新知 三联书店. Beijing, 1995), 303.

of mass political movements, it was the poor, the weak, and women who suffered the deepest wounds and endured the greatest ordeals. How is it, then, that their stories have gone largely untold? First, these social groups have neither the power nor ability to give voice to their sufferings. Second, Chinese intellectuals have traditionally regarded themselves a privileged class, and their suffering is magnified to coincide with their inflated image of themselves. Above intellectuals in the social hierarchy there is only the ruling elite, who do not suffer. Below them are the ordinary Chinese people whose suffering is unworthy of mention. *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail* exposes two basic "truths": the suffering of women is trivial compared to that of men; the suffering of intellectuals is never too trivial to discuss.

V. Three Novels: *Mimosa, Half of Man is Woman, Getting Used to Dying*

In 1984, Zhang Xianliang published his milestone work, *Mimosa*. It solidified his literary reputation and political position in Chinese society. It clearly establishes that the experiences of an intellectual exiled to prison camps and labour reform is the primary source that informs Zhang Xianliang's writing. Only when Zhang writes about the life he knows very well, does his writing demonstrates its special charm: vividness and the power to move. *Mimosa*'s overwhelming popularity caused a shortage of printing paper. It became a hot topic among intellectuals and ordinary readers as well.

The story of *Mimosa* takes place in 1961, the most desperate period in China's great famine. After four years of prison life Zhang Yonglin is released from jail and assigned to be a labourer at a state farm. Even though he does not have the freedom to move about and speak like most Chinese people, his primary problem is starvation. He uses every way to hunt for food, much like a hungry animal. Farm work is heavy; and hunger haunts him like a nightmare day and night. Mimosa 马樱花[65], a young

[65] Mimosa, a plant grows in North China. In Chinese, Mimosa is pronounced Ma Yinghua, it also the female protagonist's name.

woman with a fatherless daughter, always invites Zhang Yonglin to have dinner with her. The extra food gives him a very warm feeling for Mimosa and hope for a better future. He starts gaining physical power and mental strength. He becomes stronger with each passing day, and spends a tremendous amount of time reading Karl Marx's *Capital* at Mimosa's cozy home. Her attentions to Zhang makes her admirer, Hai Xixi 海喜喜, the farm's cart driver, very jealous. Hai Xixi challenges Zhang's physical prowess in a fight. In front of Mimosa and other farm workers, Zhang fights Ha Xixi in frenzy and defeats him. Being a healthy, normal young man in a small community he greatly enjoys the expression of physical power.

The warm concern and care from Mimosa puts Zhang in a dilemma. He is attracted by her good nature, beauty, and kindness. However, he is hesitant to accept her as a wife because she has a fatherless child, too many admirers, and too little education. Even though Zhang is poor, has a criminal record, and an inferior social classification, he still can't shake off the idea that as an intellectual he is still superior to the illiterate peasant. On a snowy stormy night, the disappointed Hai Xixi advises Zhang to treasure Mimosa's love and to marry her. He sends some food to Mimosa and Zhang, and then leaves for somewhere else. On the same night, without saying good-bye to Mimosa, Zhang is transferred to another farm.

For the Chinese reader many things in *Mimosa* were novel. First is the unique perspective used to narrate the lives of exiled intellectuals during the great famine. Zhang draws considerably detailed descriptions of starvation. He shows exiled intellectuals desperately trying to use their misused skills to find food (i.e., cheating others), reacting physically and psychologically to hunger, and starvation driving them to live by animal instinct to ensure their own survival. These graphic descriptions won the novel the popular title: "Hunger Dictionary". Second, the story is about both the oppression of the body and subjugation of the spirit through physical confinement, and the denial of the emotional and sexual needs of the exiled. Third, like Shi Zai in *Passionate Words from a Small Village Jail, Mimosa* shows its protagonist, Zhang Yonglin, to be equally selfish and cowardly.

In 1985, Zhang Xianliang published *Half of Man is Woman*, which went on to become his best selling novel. It introduces the taboo subjects of sexuality, sexual repression, and sexual impotency. Like a powerful bomb, the subject matter of this novel shocked readers, and upset many. Some critics praised it for breaking the taboo against the subject of sexuality. Some thought the protagonist was a hypocrite. Some were terrified by Zhang Xianliang's boldness and courage; some were bothered by the protagonist's sexual experiences. Some felt insulted by Zhang's vulgar descriptions. Wei Junyi scorned it for "lowness" and "superficiality", "catering to the tastes of vulgar readers".[66] The hot debate lasted for two years, and while it raged Zhang became one of the most popular writers in Chinese society. The novel was also the first Chinese novel to make the New York Times best-sellers list.

The story *Half of Man is Woman* takes place during the Cultural Revolution. After leaving Mimosa, Zhang Yonglin works at a labour reform farm. During the daytime the heavy labour gives him the simple pleasure of life and hard work. At night, loneliness and sexual desire exhausts him tremendously. At age thirty, he still remains single and a virgin, and longs for a woman's tenderness and caress. One day, quite by accident, he comes upon a scene that sticks in his memory forever: a young woman, Huang Xiangjiu 黄香久, is taking a bath by a reed pond. Her healthy, pretty, naked body shocks Zhang. Even though fear drives him to run away from the scene, his memory does not spare him from what he has seen. Since then, physical desire afflicts him on many sleepless nights and dreamlike days. Eight years later he encounters the woman he had only glimpsed before. Although she has married twice, Huang is still a pretty, young woman. In Zhang a hope raises that he may yet set up a family with her. Tormented by the idea of starting married life without love, Zhang still marries Huang Xiangjiu. On their wedding night, Zhang finds that he is impotent. His frustration and Huang's disappointment foreshadow a cloud for the marriage; then Zhang finds his wife is having an affair with farm's Party leader. Zhang Yonglin throws himself into reading Marx, trying to find a way out of his muddled state. A

[66] Wei Junyi 韦君宜, "*The Thoughts Caused by a Bestselling Book*" 一本畅销书引起的思考. Literature and Art 文艺报. Beijing, China.1985, Dec, 28

heavy flood comes, threatening to sweep away the farm and nearby villages. Drawing on his know-how of mechanical principles to deal with the flood, Zhang takes over the farm Party leader's position, and directs the people in fighting the flood. At the most dangerous moment he jumps into the cold winter water, in order to plug up big holes. Throughout the night his wife scolds him with worry and pride. Miraculously, with his wife's help, that very night, Zhang regains his sexual ability. The newly found sense of being a "complete man" gives him mixed feelings of destruction, remorse, and hope. Worrying that another political storm may impact this precarious family, he starts writing and analyzing China's political situation. Huang begs Zhang to stop involving himself in political events again. Determined to pursue political advancement, Zhang divorces Huang. The day before he leaves, Huang gives him most of her savings to him. They go to the bed for the last time. "Take me," she says, "so you will never forget me." At that moment Zhang thinks that a "woman is the most lovable thing on the earth, but there is something more important than women. A woman will never possess the man she has created".[67] The "more important" thing is Zhang's political pursuit.

In 1989, the criticism of Zhang's novel *Getting Used to Dying*, the third book in his trilogy, focused primarily on his more unadorned sexual descriptions and the protagonist's aggressive promiscuity. The story takes place after the Cultural Revolution, and Zhang Yonglin has become a famous writer and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.). As an establishment intellectual he has the privilege of being able to travel the world, giving lectures and presentations. He is very proud of his political accomplishments, his social status, and his successful career as a writer. Although now in his mid-sixties and plagued by nightmarish recollections of his life in prison, he performs with extraordinary sexual vigour with women from various countries. These women remain nameless except for initials.

[67] Zhang Xianliang, "*Half of Man is Woman*", Vol.3. *Zhang Xianliang Selected works* 张贤亮选集. (Tianjing: Baihua Wenyi Chubanshe 天津,百花文艺出版社, 1985), 618.

"A," once a famous Chinese actress, who starred in Zhang's sexual fantasies when he was a prisoner, becomes his lover in Beijing, and later, because he refuses to divorce his wife, she marries an American. "B" is a Chinese doctor and Zhang's first lover who, during the great famine, saves her own strict rations for him. Because he refuses to marry her she later marries her colleague. "C," an American citizen from Taiwan, is a volunteer working for an international literary conference who becomes his tour guide, interpreter and lover. She cherishes their relationship dearly and asks him to buy her a ring as a sign of their love. Zhang buys the ring but forgets he has it until he arrives in Paris two years later. In Paris he meets a French girl, Natalie; the only woman that has a name. She is the physical embodiment of the woman he conquers in his sexual fantasies. Zhang finds power in his triumph over the heart of a pretty young woman in the most romantic city in the world. Zhang goes from a man of impotence to a man exceedingly powerful sexual drive and potent ability to perform.

The three novels, considered as Zhang Xianliang's fictional semi-autobiography, tell the tale of Zhang Yonglin's endless desires. When he is a young man starvation drives him like an animal. Mimosa feeds him and makes him a healthy strong man. Sexual anxiety haunts him day and night, leaving him no peace until Huang helps to restore his virility. The end of the Cultural Revolution supplies him with a great opportunity to gain fame in both literature and politics. However, his desire is never satisfied. Now, in his early sixties, what he wants most is to demonstrate his political and sexual power.

VI. Critics of Zhang's Work in China

Even though Zhang Xianliang has given an account of his writing, especially *Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman*, his work still stirs up hot debate. The criticism of Zhang's work mostly focuses on its political and moral aspects. A few critics have pointed out that Zhang Yonglin is a hypocritical and cowardly man, but they have failed to ask why. How does he become such a coward? Why does he treat women so badly? And what is the connection between his sexual drive and political desires?

One must understand that in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, even though modern Chinese literature entered its second period of blossoming,[68] the hangover of Mao's literary policies, residual trends of ultra-leftist thought, and traditional morality still dominated Chinese literary criticism. Moreover, political restrictions, such as the anti-spiritual-pollution movement, also limited writers, as well as critics, from going too far into seldom explored and mostly unfathomed areas. To date, these factors have prevented Chinese literary critics from delving into a deeper, more penetrating discussion of Zhang's writings, which is an issue I hope to redress in this thesis.

Zhang Yonglin, the protagonist of the trilogy, is a personification of Chinese literary intellectuals. He has political ambition and the desire for power. He enjoys the status of being educated, revelling in his sense of superiority. He treats women as lesser beings fit only for sexual pleasure and for seeing to all his personal needs. And Zhang Yonglin is not alone in his journey through Chinese society; he is accompanied by a large number of his contemporaries and predecessors as well. Zhang Xianliang is clearly aware of his protagonist's characteristics. Using the persona of a gelded horse[69] as his mouthpiece, Zhang says "Yes, I even wonder if the entire intellectual community isn't emasculated. If even ten percent among you were virile men, our country would never have come to this sorry state".[70] Clearly, the moral and spiritual weakness of contemporary Chinese intellectuals contributed to their own suffering and ordeal, and their faults and shortcomings are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese intellectual culture.

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[68] Most scholars of Chinese studies agree that the 1930s is the first period of the modern Chinese literary boom.

[69] The character of the Gelded Horse in *Half of Man is Woman* serves as a foil for Zhang Yonglin's ruminations on impotence—moral, physical and political.

[70] Zhang, *Half of Man. Zhang Selected works*.145.

Chapter Two: A Deconstructive Reading: Zhang Xianliang's Self-Contradictory Theme and the Impossible Mission of Zhang Yonglin

Zhang Xianliang's work has caused heated debate both domestically and overseas; however, no one has yet attempted to deconstruct the rhetoric of the author's intent, nor the function of his protagonist, Zhang Yonglin. Although a biographical reading of the trilogy and a Derridean reading of the trilogy are technically incompatible, for example, a biographical reading inevitably assumes many things that Derridean theory questions, overthrows and disallow, my approaches are logically incompatible, they can nevertheless be consciously juxtaposed in the local context of my argument, for the purpose of illuminating Zhang Xianliang's work from radically different yet equally revelatory angles. It is the purpose of this chapter to address these issues, which I do: (1) by mapping the contradictions between the rhetoric of the narrative and the behaviour of the protagonist; (2) by an analysis of the way in which the author's language subverts his own ideological intentions; (3) by using a deconstructive approach to Zhang's texts to reveal that he is not so much a Marxist as he is a traditional Confucian intellectual. No matter how meticulously an author articulates his ideas, she or he always leaves traces of tension, contradiction and negation in the work, which ultimately raises questions about the author's reliability and trustworthiness as an interpretive authority of his own writings. In Zhang Xianliang's case, a close analysis of his language and the meanings it carries clearly shows how the very language used exposes an unbridgeable gap between the author's intended representation and the message delivered by his fictionalized persona.

I. The Author's Consciousness and Unconsciousness, Dismantling of the Protagonist and the Irreconcilable Language Gap

A deconstructive reading of literary texts looks for evidence of where an author's voice undermines his original intention. Disparities between his intentional and textual meanings reveal the problematic nature of the social, cultural and

philosophical realities in which the speaker/writer lives. In his ground breaking works, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology,* and *Writing and Difference*, Jacques Derrida introduces his ideas about the nature of modern Western intellectual activity, emphasizing the way in which that activity constitutes a radical break with traditional Western ways of thinking.

Through the idea of "axial proposition" Derrida asserts that "there is no outside-the-text" that grounds the reader, that it is impossible to get beyond the text because it is the text that serves to secure and determine what counts as meaning. As a result, the idea of an absolute truth, also understood as a correspondence relation between the text and the world, is put in question. This new intellectual activity turns reading into a "decentred" movement whose aim is not to arrive at a basic, unchanging centre point, but to liberate the practice of reading. Thus deconstructive reading grants the reader freedom to read the text with the aim of exposing the internal contradictions or inconsistencies lurking in the text, and by taking the text apart to draw out and to question all the threads of semantic meanings that can be found within the text.

Regarding the question of authorial intent, Derrida states that he is suspicious of the "phonocentric assumption" that, at the instant of speaking (or writing) the intention to mean is determined by the speaker's consciousness. From Derrida's perspective, the speaker always says more, and other than, what intends. The way an author treats characters and the way he uses language are just two of the signs that help reveal multiple layers of meaning within the text, layers with deeper social and psychological implications of which even the author himself is unaware.

In this context I find that Zhang Xianliang is trapped in his own contradictions, apparently unaware that the behaviour and utterances of his protagonist subvert his original intention and assertions. Throughout the trilogy Zhang Xianliang claims that the CPC's political movements transformed the protagonist into a new, useful person for the country; however, his underlying ideology never changed. He maintains the pretence that things which occurred never actually happened, revealing a fundamental gap between his conscious intentions and unconscious motives. He

criticizes the political system responsible for the physical and sexual repression of Chinese intellectuals, while the protagonist feels it is his right to dominate, oppress, and otherwise abuse women for his own comfort and pleasure. Zhang's protagonist functions in exactly this manner, which replicates the subservient role of intellectual vis-à-vis CPC policies. Moreover, even though he exposes the dark side of intellectuals, he also romanticizes, moralizes and glorifies their lives. The author accepts uncritically the CPC's propaganda while unconsciously combining it with traditional ideology. In the end Zhang Xianliang criticizes what he believes, exposing a wide gap between the original intent of his writing and its public reception.

Zhang criticizes the CPC's cruel political persecution which emasculated Chinese intellectuals, robbing them of the spirit for creative output, as well as the capacity for physical and psychological reproduction. At the same time, he claims that political movements are a necessary process by which Chinese intellectuals can be transformed from bourgeois enemies into Marxist revolutionaries. The story that unfolds in Zhang Xianliang's three novels reveals that his protagonist is neither bourgeois nor Marxist; rather he is a traditional male intellectual who stubbornly clings to the Confucian ideology which fosters a relentless pursuit for political power, and the total subjugation of women. Through a careful examination of the language used in the trilogy, we find very strong Chinese historical traces which are inscribed in or presupposed by contemporary Chinese politics and culture.

In Zhang Xianliang's trilogy, especially in *Mimosa*, the author reveals the unbridgeable distance he creates between his literally intended meanings and deeper textual meanings. For example, he uses Mimosa, the name of the female protagonist, as the novel's title, and claims that he has the boundless respect for the ordinary people because with their help he finally becomes what he is today. However, Zhang Yonglin always thinks that he is entitled to live on a "higher plane" than others, especially the illiterate and the powerless; and he deserves the best—certainly, there is a contradiction between what he says and what he does.

II. Zhang Xianliang's Political Consciousness: the Contradiction of Chinese Intellectuals' Lives in Political Movements

In 1985, the publication of *Half of Man is Woman* brought Zhang Xianlinag a solid national literary reputation and international fame. In this novel the main question raised is directed toward the Party's policy toward intellectuals, a policy that not only hurt the whole nation, but also emasculated intellectuals, both psychologically and physically. Using the experiences of Zhang Yonglin, the author exposes the devastating outcome of the Party's policies. In a conversation between the protagonist Zhang Yonglin and a gelded horse, Zhang Xianliang criticizes the fact that the Party's primary intent in exiling intellectuals was based on the desire to frighten them away from politics, thus eliminating their desire for power.

> After I was castrated, I lost the desire for sex, and nothing interested me. As it is said, 'there is no greater sorrow than the death of the soul'. Humans, your insidious cruelty lies in this: you have eliminated the hope I once held in my heart.[71]

Here, the horse is a trope with several levels of meaning. First, the horse tells a psychological truth that the political oppression results not only in sexual repression, but also destroys the impulse for creative. Second, speaking through the horse's voice, Zhang Xianliang condemns the damage caused by the CPC's political movements and questions the integrity of the Chinese intellectual community: "I even wonder if your entire intellectual community isn't emasculated. If even ten per cent among you were virile men, our country would never have come to this sorry state".[72] Third, the purpose of Party persecution is intended to destroy the self-esteem of intellectuals so as to enslave them. As the horse says, "you know as well as I do why people have castrated us: it is to remove our creative force, make us tractable."[73] By making a direct comparison between the gelded horse and the

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[71] Zhang Xianliang, *Half of Man is Woman*. Trans. Martha Avery. (New York: Norton, 1986), 143.

[72] Ibid., 145.

[73] Ibid., 145, 147.

emasculated protagonist, Zhang Xianliang delivers a powerful and persuasive condemnation of the party's policy toward Chinese intellectuals. It is for this reason that *Half of Man is Woman* won such great popularity in China and overseas.

I find that his original intention and artistic instincts have contradicted each other. He clearly wants to expose the devastating effects of the Party's policies, but his political consciousness drives him to defend the Party's interests. Following his artistic nature, he records the life experiences of his protagonist. At the same time he also uses literature as an instrument to support current political ideas. According to his own statement about *Mimosa*, he says that through his autobiographical trilogy he wants to convince readers that the "ordeal" the protagonist has gone through transformed him into a new person, "a Marxist", which means that all the political persecution was necessary.

> "Thrice wrung out in water, thrice bathed in blood, thrice boiled in caustic." This is Alexei Tolstoy's description of how hard it is for an intellectual to remould his thinking. Of course he had in mind bourgeois intellectuals brought up in tsarist Russia.
>
> However, this description also applies to those of my generation who, like myself, indiscriminately absorbed feudal and bourgeois culture. So it occurred to me to write about a young Chinese man from a bourgeois family, brought up on hazy notions of humanism and democracy, who after a long "ordeal" finally becomes a Marxist.[74]

This quotation shows that Zhang Xianliang regards these political campaigns as an integral part in Chinese intellectual history. It is only through these "ordeals" that intellectuals could become a useful force for the Party and the country. This idea is clearly expressed at the end of *Mimosa*. Twenty years later, the protagonist has become an establishment writer, and several of his autobiographical stories have been adapted into movies. With a film crew, he visits the farm where he once lived. Recalling his past in this small village, Zhang Yonglin feels grateful for spending time there because the hardship moulded him into a more useful person. "Though

[74] Zhang Xianliang: *"The Author's Preface". Mimosa and Other Stories*. (Beijing: Panda Books, 1985), *Mimosa* translated by Gladys Yang.

my life was so hard, this was where I started to understand life's beauty." [75] In actuality there was no beauty in the suffering of China's intellectuals, but Zhang Yonglin's post-prison success and fame allows him to find fictional beauty where none really existed. Moreover, the feeling that he is an important political figure in Chinese society drives Zhang Yonglin to mitigate his condemnation of the Party's catastrophic social policies by fancifying the role of Chinese intellectuals in the post-Mao political system.

> In June 1983, I attended an important conference in Beijing. As an army band played our rousing national anthem and I stood up solemnly with heads of the Party and state and delegates from all walks of life in different parts of the country. . . . I am an intellectual born in a bourgeois family and given a feudal and bourgeois education. Yet today I have the honour of attending this historic conference to discuss affairs of state in the Great Hall of the People who gave me material and moral support when I was on the edge of an abyss, so that I sought for the truth in Marxism and, during those most difficult years, had faith in our country as well as in our Party. They took me by the arm, set me on the road leading to this red carpet in the Great Hall.[76]

Statements like these make it hard to discern the source of the author's condemnation. Perhaps he feels all his suffering has been compensated and rewarded by the benefits of political success, and thus feels obligated to cooperate with the Party in glossing over the suffering of Chinese intellectuals. Zhang Xianliang knows the extent of the damage done to the Chinese people between 1949 and 1979, yet he freely and without regret enjoys all the privileges that the Party grants to establishment intellectuals. In a later essay Zhang explains why the acquisition of political power is so important.

> In the middle of 1980s, my novel, *Mimosa*, was translated into several languages. The first foreign language version of this novel is English. The translators are the well-known Chinese translators Xianyi

[75] Zhang, "*Mimosa*". 180.

[76] Ibid. 179-81.

> Yang 杨宪益 and Gladys Yang, 戴乃迭 whom I respect greatly. They suggested me to leave out the last chapter, with the protagonist walking on the red carpet. I insisted on keeping it . . . later, the Russian, Japanese, and Polish translators all offered the same suggestion. Some critics also thought that the description of the protagonist's walking on the red carpet was very poor taste, and damaged the aesthetic consciousness of the novel. I dismissed all their advice with a smile.
>
> Nobody understands that the protagonist's walk on the red carpet is significant, not only as the turning point in the protagonist's life, but also as a symbol of the change in Chinese society.[77]

In this statement Zhang Xianliang reveals his adherence to a Confucian principle: intellectuals should participate in politics because the fate of China and the Chinese people is dependent on their collective intellect. As intellectuals they bear the responsibility for the destiny of the nation; they take it for granted that only the educated elite can guard the interests of the nation as it moves into the future. Only with the participation of intellectuals at the highest levels of policy-making will the nation move forward and the lives of the people improve. Broadly defined, political success for Zhang Yonglin is marked by his readmittance into the elite realm of urban political culture. Acceptance into this cultural milieu is an essential element in his literal and symbolic quest, as it is for all Chinese intellectuals. In contributing to the well-being of the country they demonstrate their intellectual power and are rewarded appropriately. At the end of the trilogy it is apparent that the *raison d'etre* urging the protagonist forward is the same one that motivated Chinese intellectuals of the Han two thousand years ago—to be appropriately rewarded. Zhang believes that Chinese intellectuals can bear any difficulty, suffer any indignity and privation that the Party imposes on them as long as all the suffering is later paid back with political rewards.

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[77] Zhang Xianliang, *Fiction, China, and Others*. In the English version, *Mimosa and Other Stories* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1985. Trans. Gladys Yang). The scene of "walk on the red carpet" is still kept, but in is deleted in the Chinese version of Zhang Xianliang Selected Work. Vol.3 (Tian Jin, China, Bai Hua Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 1985). It is unknown it was Zhang Xianliang or the editor who committed this work and how Zhang was persuaded to accept this opinion.

III. Marxist or Confucian: Zhang Yonglin's Impossible Mission

While I naturally acknowledge the profound influence of Confucianism in the areas of philosophy, education and culture, I also have different opinions about some of the ideas and social conventions that developed from Confucian ideology. For example, encourage educated people to pursue political goals, and discrimination against women. These two aspects of Confucianism are concerns to me in my critique of Zhang Xianliang's trilogy.

From a modern perspective Confucianism and Marxism appear as polar opposites; however, in modern Chinese politics these two ideologies have been tightly interwoven.[78] In general, Marxist ideology was used as a weapon to confront and destroy Confucianism. From its inception the guiding principle, aim and slogan of the Marxist movement in China was the overthrow of Confucian ideology. During the Cultural Revolution, Marx was worshipped as a god and Confucius was held in contempt as the source of all social evil. In reality, Confucian ideology has been an essential political principle guiding the Party at every step; Marxism was only a rhetorical framework used by the Party to deceive the Chinese people, and to justify its own actions. Zhang Xianliang is very proud of the fact that he read Marx's *Das Capital* while in exile.[79] At one stage in the trilogy Zhang Yonglin also spends all his leisure time reading *Capital*. Reading this text had significant symbolic meanings in Chinese society, especially during the period of the Cultural Revolution. People commonly assumed that very few individuals had the intellectual capacity to read Marx. The people who could read Marx had the power to explain his writings, and were thus viewed as authorities on Marxist theory. Mao said that anyone "who has mastered Marxism, has mastered the truth", so the image of Zhang Yonglin reading

[78] For a comprehensive understanding the argument of Marxism and Confucianism in modern Chinese society, please refer to William A. Callaham's article, Resisting the Norm: Ironic Images of Marx and Confucius. Philosophy East and West. Vol.44, No.2 (Apr., 1994). 279-301. Callaham has an interesting reading of Zhang Xianliang's *Half of Man is Woman*. However, my reading of Zhang's this novel is at variance with him.

[79] In Zhang Xianliang's many essays, he emphasizes that Karl Marx's book, especially *Das Capital*, have helped him to have deep insight of Chinese culture, history and society. To know more about Zhang's thoughts about his reading of Marx and Chinese society, please refer his book, *Fiction, China and Others*.

Marx signifies that he regards himself as a bearer of Marxist truth. It is this belief, although privately held, that gives the protagonist a feeling of superiority.

This image of Zhang Yonglin reading Marx plays a critical role throughout the protagonist's life. In *Mimosa*, it is Mimosa's inability to read Marx that serves as a justification for Zhang Yonglin's abandonment of her. In *Half of Man is Woman*, he even finds an opportunity to ask Marx's advice about his predicament. One night, when he returns to home he accidentally discovers that his wife is having an affair with the Party leader of the reform farm. Not knowing how to deal with his indignation, humiliation, and frustration, in his imagination he asks Karl Marx for help. Ironically, using not only Western philosophy, but Eastern ideology as well, Marx persuades Zhang Yonglin to treat his wife "with an attitude of equality and respect".[80] Continuing to use Chinese philosophy, Marx points out Zhang Yonglin's problem: "you are not able to meet the obligation of a husband, so what right do you have to keep her from temporary happiness? You think that you cannot forgive her because you have a high level of morality? In fact, you have no authority even to pardon her".[81] Zhang does not want to continue this topic and says to Marx, "Master, I am not asking for help in that affair, I have already thought things through on that particular issue. I want to handle it with an even temper and good humour, and not to damage my own morality." But Marx tells him, "You think you have thought it through, but have not at all".[82] In the end, he still uses his wife's affair as an excuse to divorce her. It is clear that Zhang Yonglin does not want Marx's advice, rather he just wants to use Marx's name to prove that his actions are representative of someone who is imbued with the standards of accepted moral and political correctness.[83]

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[80] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 172.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] In the article, Gender: Biology, Nature and Capitalism, Dr. Jeff Hearn states that "Marx's and Engels's writing remains most obviously relevant to the broad field of the study of gender in the analysis of explicitly economic relationships" (222-3), but in Marx's book, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Hearn points out that "there are two important points here. First, the relations between women and men are described here as an index of the 'entire level of development of mankind' (as opposed to 'man'). Only when women and men are equal can humanity be fully achieved; accordingly, equality between women and men is seen as an essential component of

By Confucian standards a woman's unfaithfulness is unforgivable. Even though Zhang is vocally very keen on Marxism, actually he is like the people whom he knows very well—"there are those who distort your [Marx] teachings, they carry your banner just to further their own devious schemes".[84] Marx points out that these people "take sentences from my works out of context and use them as theoretical weapons... for their own personal profit, either in struggling for power or in oppressing the people".[85]

In the long history of China the relationship between the literati and women has explicit and implicit aspects. Explicitly, women are sexual objects and reproductive vehicles for men. Implicitly women are the subject matter of their writings and usually played very symbolic roles in the thought and lives of the literati. For example, the possession of women is a demonstration of male power: the more powerful the man the more women he can possess. In *Getting Used to Dying*, Zhang Yonglin has become an establishment writer who travels around Western society, sleeping with a number of different women. Zhang Xianliang uses the symbolic value of women to demonstrate that his protagonist is a powerful man not only in China but in the developed world as well. What is clear is that Zhang's view of women has a historical link to the patriarchal prerogatives of the literati in classical Confucian society.

In *Mimosa*, Zhang Xianliang asserts that when his protagonist "was on the edge of an abyss . . . [he] sought for the truth in Marxism",[86] and who, "after a long ordeal finally becomes a Marxist".[87] However, a close reading of the text reveals

egalitarian, socialist society. Inevitably, gender relations, according to Marx, are maintained well below this potential, albeit in different ways in different societies. Second, the immediate, natural, and necessary relation between people is (equivalent to) what exists between women and men in a sensuous form. If relations between people are to be fully human, so that the 'human essence has become nature for man', then according to Marx, they have to become as relations between women and men naturally are" (227-8). To read the whole article, please refer, *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*. Ed. Terrell Carver. Cambridge England & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[84] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 173.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid. 81.

[87] Zhang, "*The Author's Preface*". In *Mimosa and Other Stories*.

that Zhang Xianliang's narrative quest fails to achieve its intended goal. "The long ordeal" (starvation) does not turn Zhang Yonglin into a Marxist, but provides a stage for him to demonstrate his true character. He tricks other people, takes advantage of the woman who loves him, and fights for every opportunity to profit at other people's expense. Moreover, the long ordeal does not make him a Marxist, but reaffirms his strong conviction that he is entitled to his sense of superiority. Marx asserted that all class divisions should be eliminated, and it follows from this that men must respect women and give them equal social opportunities. On the contrary, Zhang Yonglin enjoys his feelings of superiority, and believes that educated people deserve all the benefits that society has offered. He has no respect for women, treating those who love him as his servants, and using them as temporary shelters to aid him in times of hardship.

Zhang Xianliang seems unaware that the gap between his intended message and the underlying facts of his narrative is unbridgeable. He intends to tell the story of his protagonist's ideological transformation from educated Confucian elitist into a Marxist intellectual worker. However, upon close reading the narrative reveals the protagonist's underlying Confucian ideological orientation. Zhang Yonglin is both the object of oppression and the carrier of pre-modern social values which informed the rigorously patriarchal social structure of traditional Chinese society.

Mimosa is regarded as China's "Hunger Dictionary" since it gives elaborate descriptions of Zhang Yonglin's experiences of starvation during the Great Famine (1958-1961). Hunger follows him everywhere, and the heavy farm work makes his situation even harder to bear. He is "little more that skin and bone".[88] In this difficult time, besides losing weight, human compassion "has long since [been] driven from [his] mind".[89] Political oppression and physical hunger force Zhang Yonglin and his fellow inmates to live by their wits. Getting extra food is their first priority; they unscrupulously use their knowledge and intelligence to take advantage of others.

[88] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 14.

[89] Ibid.

Zhang Yonglin's trick is to "[get] that 100ccs of extra gruel by taking advantage of an optical illusion".[90] He uses a "milk-powder tin...because its depth contained more than a mug. The cooks, deceived into thinking they had given him less than others, always added a little more".[91] This little bit extra food becomes a daily source of happiness for Zhang Yonglin—he is proud of his ability to deceive uneducated peasants. One day while shopping in a small market town he finds that 4.5 kilos of potatoes cost a whole month's salary, so he devises a scheme to trick the local people. 1 kilo of fresh carrots costs ¥ 3.20, and 1 kilo of potatoes costs ¥ 4.00; Zhang can't offer that much for these precious foods. He threatens the old man with the fact that he's just been released from prison. When the "old man looked afraid", he "deliberately threw him off balance with this switch, 'other people trade three catties of potatoes for five of carrots'"[92] The old man falls into his trap. Zhang buys the man's three catties of potatoes and immediately uses the potatoes in an exchange for 5 catties of carrots. "I was gloating over the success of my trick. I'd had a lot of dealings with local peddlers and knew how their minds worked . . . so I often outwitted them",[93] Starvation was an ordeal that every Chinese was forced to confront, and most of them dealt with it with great dignity. However, hunger and suffering do not temper Zhang Yonglin's character, nor is he transformed from a Confucian intellectual elitist into a Marxist intellectual worker. Instead the narrative trajectory of the novel exposes Zhang's personal frailties, his deeply held sense of self-importance, and his callous indifference to the real suffering of the Chinese people.

While it is true that the extreme shortage of material resources contributed to Zhang Yonglin's callous indifference to the needs of others, his egoism plays a crucial role in shaping his response to the national disaster. The first day he came to

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[90] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 22.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid. 54.

[93] Ibid., 55-6.

the village dormitory, he "dashed inside [the room] and kicked one pile of straw as close as [he] could to the wall to make a thick pallet".[94] When others complain of his selfishness, his reaction is to say "never mind, live and let live; since I was meant to live on I had to be resourceful".[95] That same night, when the team leader brought them a lantern, "[as] he produced a box of matches, at once I went over to hold the lantern while he lit it, then hung it on a hook above my pallet—it would be half mine".[96]

Zhang Yonglin complains that the lack of food forced him to live by his animal instincts; however, a sufficiency of food does not change animals into human beings. The ultimate difference between human beings and animals is that humans deal with hardship rationally and with integrity. It is clear that his rural exile is not the sole factor in shaping his self-centred view of the world. His self-obsession is an inherent trait of his personality, a reflection of his meagre moral and spiritual development; the famine only provides a channel for the dark side of his personality. Zhang Yonglin professes that after studying Marx's *Das Capital*, he starts "transcending himself", but the fact is that he uses traditional moral values to judge Mimosa, and uses the ideas of Confucian culture to make sense of himself and to rationalize his own behaviour. Marxism is only camouflage beneath which he hides his adherence to Confucian ideology.

In *Mimosa*, Zhang Xianliang uses two methods for depicting the "transcendent self". The first is the transformation of Zhang Yonglin's physical strength, and the second is his devotion to reading *Capital.* The reading reinforces his sense of superiority, which allows him to belittle Mimosa's expression of love as "laughable".

> Every evening after eating our rations from the kitchen I took *Das Capital* to her [Mimosa] place to read . . . sometimes when my eyes were tired from reading in that poor light, I would look up at Mimosa.

[94] Zhang, *Mimosa.* 31.

[95] Ibid., 31-2.

[96] Ibid., 33-4.

> I was beginning to feel estranged from her. Sweet, lovely, and honest though she was, she hadn't outgrown her crudity.[97]
>
> Now that I was beginning to "transcend [my]self', my feeling for her was also beginning to change. As Goethe wrote in *Faust:* "Two souls dwell in my breast." On the one hand, while I read Marx, she wanted to transform my outlook, bringing it in line with that of the working people; on the other, my past experience made me conscious of a gap between them and myself. I was superior to them mentally, on a higher intellectual plane.[98]
>
> Because I had tried once to integrate with the "wisdom of mankind" and raise my political consciousness by studying Marxism, I seemed to have embarked on a new life. And that impelled me to search for my heart's desire.[99]

Unlike Marx who advocated bridging the education gap between workers and intellectuals, Zhang Yonglin's true "heart's desire" is to widen it. Knowing Mimosa's limited educational background he begins to distance himself from her. The night when Hai Xixi tells Zhang that he is leaving the village, Zhang conceives of the idea of giving Mimosa back to Hai Xixi. Since he has gotten what he needs from Mimosa, he thinks it is time to begin a new quest, the "search for [his] heart's desire." Zhang is aware that his heart's desire and his political ambitions are a blatant manifestation of his egoism. Acknowledging his own frailty, Zhang Yonglin says, "the reason I couldn't understand her was because I'd never scarified myself for anyone I loved . . . I was too involved with myself, even my desire to 'transcend myself' was for egoistical reasons".[100] I take this narrative as Zhang Yonglin's own confession. At this moment he cannot help from revealing his true self—he is the one entitled to be loved by others, but he does not need to love others in return. Although the protagonist has experienced many difficulties, the transformation has never taken place in him.

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[97] Zhang, *"Mimosa"*, 131.

[98] Ibid., 139-40.

[99] Ibid., 145.

[100] Ibid. 170.

Through Chinese history the proprietary right to knowledge has been held tightly in the hands of ruling elite. In fact, Confucian ideology advocates that "people can be used, but are not to be educated" 民可使由之，不可使知之.[101] This policy of keeping the people in ignorance is an age old stratagem for keeping the masses of Chinese people enslaved. By this means the intellectual elite kept their privileged position intact. The tension between Zhang Yonglin and Mimosa is a reflection of this superior/inferior relationship. People who are educated should not live ordinary lives but lives filled with glory, hence the significance of the protagonist's later walk along the red carpet at the Great Hall of the People.

If Zhang Xianliang thinks that the great famine was the "long ordeal" which transformed Zhang Yonglin into a new man armed with Marxist ideology, he created the wrong representative. Zhang Yonglin's performance in *Mimosa* illustrates that the "long ordeal" which helps him out of his miserable life, sends innocent people into yet another "long ordeal". One can fairly say that Zhang Yonglin and the Party are engaged in the same mission, the only difference being that he is the object of the Party's persecution of intellectuals, while simultaneously exercising his right of superiority as an intellectual to dominate and use people whose social status is lower than his. The irony of this contradiction seems to have escaped Zhang Xianliang's notice and that of his critics as well. Zhang Yonglin never becomes a Marxist, and his "transcendence" has nothing to do with Marxism. At heart the protagonist is a traditional, self-centered Chinese intellectual stubbornly clinging to Confucian values and ideas.

IV. Asserted and Denied Rhetorical Titles of Zhang Xianliang's Trilogy

Originally, Derrida did not propose "deconstruction" as a mode of literary criticism, but as a way of reading texts in general to reveal and subvert their supposed grounding in coherent meaning. Focusing on the grammatical aspect of deconstruction, Paul de Man asserts that a literary text, of necessity, "simultaneously

[101] Confucius, *"Negara"* in *The Analects 论语 • 泰伯*

asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode".[102] Reading Zhang Xianliang's trilogy from this perspective is yet another way of exposing his contradictory thoughts about men and women, the political aspirations of intellectuals, and emotionally painful sexual dysfunction. At one level of consciousness he wants to be a modern, Westernized intellectual who acknowledges women's equal moral and social status, but his earliest education in the Confucian tradition overrides his desire for self-transformation. As the narrative progresses it becomes obvious that Zhang Yonglin feels most comfortable in this narrow and obsolete Confucian world.

Mimosa, the title of the novel and the name of the female protagonist, is a common plant that grows mainly in central China. Zhang Xianliang's description of Mimosa renders her as a pretty, kind, healthy, and sanguine young woman, who despite living in a hostile environment, never complains about her difficult life. She is presented to the reader through her acts of natural kindness and respect for people who possess knowledge. She unconditionally offers Zhang Yonglin extra food, and encourages him to continue his studies. However, his sense of being a superior educated man creates an unbridgeable chasm between them. One day, after he left Mimosa, his roommate tells him that she has come to visit him, but the news of her visiting does not stop him from falling asleep. In his mind she is nothing more than the ordinary plant whose name she carries—"likes sun, can stand drought and will grow in poor soil".[103] The night that Zhang Yonglin leaves her, he says "my anger outweighed my longing for Mimosa… now I am in good health and have a certain grasp of Marxism, so that wherever I went I could cope with whatever fate had in store".[104] After becoming a famous writer and an important political figure in Chinese society, he starts thinking that "Mimosa inspired me, helped make me into a new man . . . I salute the lovely, sacred Mimosa trees growing over the whole length

[102] Paul de Man: *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 17.

[103] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 178

[104] Ibid., 176.

and breadth of our land".[105] This "changed" attitude reveals Zhang Yonglin's shameful hypocrisy. His salute speaks down to ordinary people from the superior height of literary greatness. The tone of the protagonist's language exposes the depth of his hypocrisy; while maintaining a public persona that lauds the power of the "little people". What is not said reveals his disrespect, and perhaps even disgust, for ordinary Chinese people? His "salute" to the Mimosa tree can be read as a gesture of triumph over adversity, but it is not a salute of respect to the people who helped him overcome that adversity.

In using *Half of Man is Woman* as the title for the second book in his trilogy, Zhang Xianliang wants to convey the ideas that: (1) women are indispensable to men; (2) men and women share a common ground and common sky; (3) Chinese men treat women fairly and respectively because they view women as the other half that completes them. In what could have been a subversive narrative, Zhang Yonglin's attitudes and behaviour towards women undermine the rhetorical power of the novel's title. Throughout the novel the words "half of man is woman" suggest that only with a woman's help can a man become a "complete man". When we compare the rhetoric of the novel's title to the content of the narrative, the meaning of "half of man is woman" becomes direct and simple: women are important to men because it is only through them that heterosexual men can achieve true sexual gratification. In Chinese society a man's sexual prowess is a reflection of his power as a man, hence it is through the domination of women that a man demonstrates his social and political power. A young man's first sexual union is a rite of passage of boyhood into manhood, and if a man is not a "normal" man, it is a woman's duty to assist him in gaining his manhood. At this level, the woman is the healer helping the man to heal his affliction. However, once cured that man's status is immediately raised, while that of the woman remains unchanged.

Before leaving his wife Zhang Yonglin asserts that "a woman is the most lovable thing on the earth, but there is something that is more important. Women will

[105] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 180-1.

never possess the men they have created".[106] These two sentences convey a very clear message: as "lovely thing[s]" women are objects for men's entertainment and pleasure, but attaining political power is the most important goal; compared to a man's political aspirations women pale in comparison. At best they are used for physical pleasure and as symbols of power. "Women will never possess the men they have created" implies that by their very nature men transcend women and serve as the arbiters and masters of women's fate. Women have no power to possess men, and no ability to influence men's choices. Although Zhang never states overtly that men can have as many women as they choose, the actions of his protagonist throughout the trilogy attest to the fact that he believes this to be true; men can possess as many women as they want and have them as they choose. In the relationship between men and women, women are always passive. Zhang Yonglin's farewell speech to Huang Xiangjiu summarizes his understanding of women's role in his life, further reinforcing the truth that Marxism is unable to bridge the gap of gender inequality imposed by a tradition that has hobbled Chinese women for millennia, rendering them powerless and insignificant in comparison to men.

Putting the title *Half of Man is Woman* into the context of the narrative itself, it becomes clear that the word "man" symbolizes male sexual power, and that the word "woman" implies the biological female in her socially assigned role as the sexual being who validates male sexuality, and the sexual healer who practices the alchemy by which "half a man" becomes "complete." Thus, Zhang Yonglin's sexual impotence signifies on multiple levels of meaning. First, his impotence is a result of political oppression. On the political level his impotence is a reflection of his questionable social identity. Sent to prison, he simultaneously loses his political and sexual identity. Second, a man's sexual virility influences his creativity. Zhang Yonglin thinks that man's desires for a broader world, for creation, for production come from his sexual consciousness. Using the old piebald horse as his mouthpiece, Zhang explains the connection between sexual ability and creativity. The horse says

[106] Zhang, *Half of Man*. 285

"after I was castrated...I lost my stimulus of sex, and nothing interested me".[107] Then the horse goes further, saying that the purpose of the Party persecution was to take away their creativity.[108] Since Zhang so obviously identifies male sexual power with creativity, one can conclude that Zhang thinks it is only men who possess the power of creation. Third, given that a man without sexual power has no right or access to political advancement, regaining his sexual potency becomes the only way for Zhang Yonglin to ensure a political future.

The information that Zhang Xianliang discloses in this title is informed by a social reality that has existed in Chinese society since Confucianism was first being codified: through women's sacrifices men gain access to all aspects of their manhood. By exploiting and suppressing women, men satisfy their desires. Women help men and men victimize them as repayment. In the final analysis women have no other role to play in men's lives than to act as bodies for reproduction and pleasure.

The title of Zhang Xianliang's third novel, *Getting Used to Dying,* is difficult to understand in any literal way, either in Chinese or English. A literal meaning can be constructed, something along the lines of "a person who is used to dying is not afraid of death". Zhang Xianliang admits that "many readers cannot understand the novel now".[109] In discussing this novel's theme with the English translator, Zhang says, "although the gun may never have been fired, the bullet of fear and repression has lodged inside the brain. Every intellectual in China lives with this kind of bullet lodged in his brain".[110] Once again the title of this novel and the content of the narrative are at odds with one another. I find it hard to agree with Zhang that the theme of this novel is the fear in which Chinese intellectuals must live. This does not strike me as an accurate reading of the title. Indeed, it seems to me that Zhang Xianliang has always had difficulty craftily embedding his didacticism within his

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[107] Zhang Xianliang, *Getting Used to Dying.* Trans. Martha Avery. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 143

[108] Ibid., 147.

[109] Zhang Xianliang, "*Two Letters Concerning Getting Used to Dying*". Studies on Contemporary Writers, 6 (1990), p103

[110] Zhang, *"The Author's Preface"* in *Getting Used to Dying.* ix.

fictional texts. His plots and characters always betray his original intentions, and he, himself, seems to lose his bearings in his protagonist's personality. Maybe it is Zhang himself who gets lost in his own contradictions. Clearly, he has many difficulties in finding the real self that may have been lost to trauma during those long years of deprivation and suffering. It may be that his real self has never re-emerged and is still lost, wandering through the maze of his traumatized mind. As one reads through *Mimosa*, *Half of Man is Woman*, and *Getting Used to Dying*, the author's internal discontinuities become larger and increasingly apparent.

Chapter Three: A Feminist Reading: Woman's Body, Man's Battlefield

Critiques of *Half of Man is Woman*, both domestic and foreign, focus primarily on the subject of the political oppression and sexual repression of men. The female characters in this novel, treated by Zhang Xianliang as mere ciphers, have been treated with a similar indifference by many critics. Given that women are the most silent group in Chinese society, along with the fact that the intellectual elite has paid little attention to the repressed lives of women, the female characters in Zhang's novels are largely ignored. Therefore, a reading of Zhang Xianliang from a feminist perspective is necessary; such a reading leads to a clearer understanding of the way in which Zhang Yonglin is securely embedded in traditional Confucian culture which shaped his attitude toward women.

In this chapter I offer a brief introduction to Judith Butler's view on the images of women's bodies in Western society, and will then apply her approach to gain a new perspective on the function and status of female characters in Zhang Xianliang's trilogy. Butler's approach also allows me to gain new insights into Zhang Yonglin's consistently perverse behaviour. The first and most obvious question that demands attention is Zhang Yonglin's general view of women. From just a cursory reading of the text it is obvious that whenever possible he uses women as a buffer against the harsh realities of his life in exile. Throughout his years of forced celibacy his sexual hunger and frustration intensifies to the point where he breaks down under the power of repression and becomes impotent; it is a woman who comforts Zhang Yonglin and helps him regain his potency. With this in mind, I examine how Zhang Yonglin uses women's bodies as a means of relieving his sexual anxiety, as physical objects meant to satisfy his sexual desires, and as tokens of his sexual power. Absurdly, Zhang Yonglin asserts that he is a Marxist, but his treatment of women as inferiors reveals a constructed reality that is antithetical to women, which in turn reveals a pattern of thinking that is inextricably linked to traditional Neo-Confucian ideology.

I. Images of Woman's Body: Irreducible Reproductive Tool, Materiality and Enforced Social Convention

Anthony Synnott points out that "the body is not just skin and bones, an assemblage of parts . . . . [It] is also, and primarily, the self, [and] we are all embodied".[111] Undeniably, women's bodies are made as social, cultural and philosophical constructs, representations or symbols. Reading women's bodies in more complex ways—interrogating the matter of body—by questioning the social regulation of gender, Butler points out that the materiality of bodies is a historical, philosophical, cultural, and social construct; sex, in both factual and natural aspects, is imposed by regulatory and cultural assumptions.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler's critique is impressively wide-ranging, from the dialogues of Plato to contemporary discourse on homosexuality, but my use of her scholarship is limited to the specific issue of women's bodies. Why and by what means did it come to be that a woman's body is irreducibly sexual and reproductive? Who conceived woman's body and life? Who materialized that body and that life? Why has the definition of woman been so narrowly circumscribed? Keeping such questions in mind while following the narrative of Zhang Yonglin's death, rebirth and triumphal success reveal a great deal about his attitudes and ideas about the role of women in Chinese society.

The matter of a woman's body is the starting point and the object of Judith Butler's inquiries. In Western philosophical and linguistic systems a woman's body is considered a sexual tool and irreducibly a reproductive vehicle whose only function is to produce and nourish children—to be the raw material of reproduction. But, how and by whom has the social function of women been codified? Butler argues that the "irreducible materiality" of woman's body "is constructed through a problematic gendered matrix",[112] thereby making certain that "the classical association of femininity with materiality can be traced to a set of etymologies which

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[111] Anthony Synnott, *The body social symbolism, self, and society.* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

[112] Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* 29

link matter with matrix (or the womb)".[113]

Butler concludes that privileging one "identity" through the oppression of an "other" identity is a patriarchal act of hegemonic power that binds men to dominating sexual performativity. Consequently, "its materialization is coextensive with its investiture with power relations, and materiality is the effect and gauge of this investment".[114] Butler asserts that the persecution of females by males can date back to the very beginning of human civilization. She claims that

> It seems, Plato's phantasmatic economy virtually deprives the feminine of a morphe, a shape, for as the receptacle, the feminine is a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless, non-thing which cannot be named. And as nurse, mother, womb, the feminine is synecdochally collapsed into a set of figural functions. In this sense, Plato's discourse on materiality, (if we can take the discourse on the hypodoche to be that), is one which does not permit the notion of the female body as a human form.[115]

In discussing the French feminist Luce Irigaray's philosophical view of Plato, Butler admits that Irigaray is right when she examines ancient philosophical discussions about women. Irigaray points out that women's abject position in Western society is due to the fact that historically they have not been included in Western philosophical discourse, "where the feminine cannot be said to be an intelligible term at all".[116] The substitution of the term "feminine" for woman reduces the being, woman, to formlessness, which is an enabling condition for "phallogocentrism". Following Irigaray's line of thought, Butler claims that woman is materiality, and that men form that materiality through codifying the function of "woman" as nothing more than a vehicle of reproduction. More specifically, a female is matter without "human form", until men give the form to a woman. "In

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[113] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 31

[114] Ibid., 34.

[115] Ibid., 53.

[116] Ibid. 39

reproduction, women are said to contribute the matter; men, the form".[117] In this sense, woman's body becomes a "repository", a passive receptacle, a mouldable space that accepts whatever shape or appearance men care to grant or give to it.

Butler reads Plato as arguing that as a receptacle woman's "proper function is to receive, to take, accept, welcome, include, and even comprehend. What enters into this hypodoche is a set of forms or, better, shapes, and yet this receiving principle, this physis, has no proper shape and is not a body".[118] Given their position as "receptacle" cannot give themselves form, or have their own lives, or express their own personalities, and experience freedom. "She will be entered, and will give forth a further instance of what never resemble either the formative principle or that which it creates".[119] Questioning why human society has assigned women the function of formless reproductive vehicle, Butler suggests that men want to degrade women to make sure that the feminine principle is subordinate to the male principle in the male/female binary.[120]

By studying Plato, Foucault and Irigaray, Butler discovers that our language and social conventions play a crucial role in determining our sense of gender. Discussing how a normative prescription and proscription of gender roles has been "preformed" in our modern society, Butler claims that from announcing the baby's birth, to baptism and the naming of the infant, to weddings and joining of lives, social conventions are an ongoing process that positions and constitutes the differences of a heterosexually organized gender role. Moreover, the language through reiteration and performativity anchors the conventionally designed or prefabricated male authority. Going further, Butler argues that the reiteration of discourse "not only causes but composes everything which is its object . . . bringing into being and exhaustively constituting that which it names".[121] Men not only

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[117] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 31

[118] Ibid., 40.

[119] Ibid., 42.

[120] Ibid., 36.

[121] Ibid., 6.

dominate through their power to invent and establish social convention and regulation, but also through their mastery of the power of using language. "The textual practice is not grounded in a rival ontology, but inhabits—indeed, penetrates, occupies, and redeploys—the paternal language itself".[122] Language and textual practice reinforce the inferior status of women, which grows from the belief that the irreducible materiality of the human experience is the female body, the site of sex and reproduction.

Why does society assert gender and sexual differences? Why do males want to [de]form the materiality of women? Why do they want to deprive women of equal social status, and degrade women's bodies into irreducible reproductive functions? Butler concludes that the only goal these performances and regulations serve is to destroy women's self-esteem, which makes them willingly give up their own right. She claims that from the very first assertions of male dominance, men have presumed to invest women with "inferior" attributes related to bodily functions. Examining the history of sexuality, and studying Foucault's thinking, Butler finds

> The juridical law, the regulative law, seeks to confine, limit, or prohibit some set of acts, practices, subjects, but in the process of articulating, and elaborating that prohibition, the law provides the discursive occasion for a resistance, a resignification, and potential self-subversion of that law".[123]

Although Butler's critique focuses on Western philosophical thought and practice, the same ideas and practices are found in Chinese society as well. As early as two thousand and three hundred years ago, Confucius outlined that women were lower form human beings and had only three proper social functions: to be obedient daughters, faithful wives and nurturing mothers. The institutionalization of Confucian ideology started in the Han Dynasty, in which the basic patterns of Chinese social behaviours and gender roles were officially codified. Since that time,

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[122] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*. 45.

[123] Ibid., 109.

women's minds and spirits have been confined to a very narrow space which stifled their creativity, reduced them to wombs for the bearing of children, and used their supple bodies for the gratification of male sexual desire. Even though many changes have occurred in Chinese society in recent years, the system's rigid codification of women's inferior social status is still a force impacting on Chinese women. In Zhang Xianliang's trilogy we also find that men's beliefs about women's position in the society have changed very little. For example, the protagonist has used every means to put women down and to treat them as sexual objects, as tools to help cure his infirmities and to indulge his sensuality. Moreover, he follows and practices traditional Chinese patriarchal views to women with great pleasure.

II. Serving Man's Nurturing Need; Woman as Servant in Zhang Yonglin's Life

Zhang Yonglin's relationship with women, especially in *Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman,* is very much like stories of the traditional Chinese literati. In such a story the son of a rich family on his way to the national examination falls on difficult circumstances. A poor but pretty woman provides him with food, nurtures him, and helps him out of the misfortune. As compensation and a reward for his tribulations he takes this woman. Later, under the pressure of his own family and the Emperor, he abandons her because she has become an impediment to his pursuit of political power and his desire to serve his country.[124]

Zhang Yonglin's experiences replicate his literary antecedents; he too gives up these women who have helped him overcome starvation, assisted him in gaining his manhood and revived his male identity. The roles of women in both traditional stories and Zhang Xianliang's novels have remained the same: nurturing lovers and obedient servants. In Zhang Xianliang's trilogy almost all the women from Qiao Anping, Mimosa, and Huang Xiangjiu to the doctor girlfriend in *Getting Used to Dying*, all are motherly lovers who serve his unending need to be nurtured. They

[124] In Ming and Qing Dynasties short story's like San Yan Er Pai 三言二拍, and Liao Zhai Zhi Yi 聊斋志异, have many these kinds of stories. For example, 杜十娘怒沉百宝箱.

come to save him from physical and sexual starvation, and they all share the same fate, abandonment. In his degradation of women and indifference to them as independent beings Zhang Yonglin shares at least two characteristics with the traditional literati. On the surface the times have changed, but beneath the surface Zhang Yonglin is repeating the deeds of his classical predecessors.

Zhang Yonglin's story, however, has a different ending than that of the traditional literati. Usually, in the traditional "gifted Chinese scholar and beautiful girl" (才子佳人) story, the man who fails to be loyal to his lover is punished. Zhang Yonglin, on the contrary, is not punished for mistreating women--he is rewarded!

When Zhang Yonglin meets Mimosa, he is a twenty-five-year-old young man just released from prison. Because of the extreme insufficiency of food, he stands at 1.78 meters tall but weights only forty-four kilograms. Starvation has ravaged him like a wild animal. It is Mimosa who invites Zhang to her home and feeds him with "white buns". "For four whole years [he] had not eaten any white flour".[125] His tears "fell on the bun". From then on, when most people are struggling to put food on the table, Zhang has bidden farewell to starvation. With the nutrition provided by Mimosa, Zhang gains physical strength day by day, and he is used to taking extra food from Mimosa, a single woman with a child. "I could sit down without any scruples on the stool and wait for her to serve me".[126] One cannot help but wonder how Zhang Yonglin can accept a vulnerable woman's help without discomfort and can unscrupulously "wait for her to serve [him]"? The only plausible explanation is that deep down in his consciousness, he sees that women's function is to help men overcome hardship, and a man does not need to do anything in return for the woman because as a man, he is entitled to be served.

Zhang always has a greater concern about food than about the woman with whom he lives. Throughout Zhang Yonglin's life, he has demonstrated his belief that satisfying a man's need is a woman's first priority. In *Getting Used to Dying*, Zhang

[125] Zhang, "*Mimosa*". 69.

[126] Ibid., 106.

is in love with a young doctor, who is his first girlfriend. Soon after their love affair has developed, he is sent to a prison fifty miles away from the city in which the woman works. One weekend, she rides a bicycle for a whole day in order to visit him.

> She said that she had pretended to be my fiancée, and that the labour reform troop leader had finally agreed to let me out for a short time to see her. The tone of her voice changed as it swelled with new courage.
>
> Her big eyes looked resolutely into mine, searching in them for some sign of hope. In return, I stared at the package she had brought, estimating how much food was packed inside.[127]

It took great courage, determination and sacrifice for a young woman to associate herself with a prisoner during China's politically chaotic period because any connection with a political prisoner was inviting trouble. However, this young woman puts her life and career in jeopardy to show her love and commitment to Zhang, but what concerns him most is how much food she has brought to him. "I was hoping that she would leave early so that I could start in on the eggs and breads she had brought".[128] At that time, China instituted a food quota system, and buying food requited a quota certificate. The package of food uses up his girl friend's whole monthly quota and she has to suffer from starvation for months. In the end, getting no word from Zhang, she rides another fifty miles back to her own residence. The final word she receives is a letter that Zhang asks one of his fellow inmates to write, informing her falsely that Zhang died of starvation. In the letter he blames her for not sending enough food. Deep in his unconscious he thinks that women should suffer more than men because men, especially educated men, are above women. Later Zhang Yonglin admits that "after suffering enough torture, sometimes [I] deliberately torment [myself] and others as well".[129] The others, judging from Zhang Yonglin's

[127] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 53.

[128] Ibid., 53.

[129] Zhang Xianliang, *Getting Used to Dying* (Chinese version). (Beijing: China's Writers' Publishing House 北京

life experience are women.

Huang Xiangjiu is the only woman to whom Zhang Yonglin offers marriage. He does it in order to soothe his sexual anxiety, and he divorces her soon after regaining his sexual ability. In their short marriage, Huang functions as a tool to solve Zhang's personal problems: to satisfy Zhang's sexual appetite and provide him with good food. After getting married, Zhang says each evening, when "[I] made my way back to the two old store-rooms, there was always a meal waiting for me on our pretty table, [and every dish was extremely delicious]".[130] Even though Zhang decides to divorce Huang, and she is devastated by his cruelty, she still cooks nice food for him.

> On the top of the pure white rice was a fried duck egg. In the winter there was not much in the way of vegetable, but the chicken and duck eggs raised by the farm labourers were the best food they know…I suddenly understood: these days she was giving me all our tiny ration of rice, take care of my southerner's preference.[131]

Her sacrifice does not soften Zhang's determination to divorce her. In his view a woman is only a vehicle to help solve the problems that a man confronts. Zhang Yonglin's behaviour repeatedly reveals that he has been deeply influenced by the worst aspect of traditional Chinese culture in his thoroughly negative and utilitarian view of women.

III. Serving Man's Natural Need: Woman as Sexual Object

For thousands of years women's intellectual ability has been denied, and women have been portrayed as essentially physical but mindless bodies. The assumption that woman is body, and is bound to her body, or is meant to take care of bodily aspects of life, have greatly contributed to the degradation and oppression of women. Conventional culture and social regulation in both the East and West have

作家出版社, 1994), 57. The English version omits this two sentences.

[130] Zhang Xianliang, *Getting Used to Dying* (Chinese version). 57.

[131] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 257-8.

codified the bodies of women to two functions: reproduction and sex. However, in Zhang Yonglin's case, woman's reproductive function is ignored, which leaves women with the sole function of sexual body.

Foucault has said that male identity is the essential element in pursuing power. When a man's identity becomes solidly fixed, he finds that a pursuit of a higher goal is necessary. Turning to Zhang Yonglin, we find that he satisfies his primitive needs with the help from women he meets. Mimosa helps him to build a strong body, and Huang Xiangjiu helps him to regain his masculinity. Later the actress, the interpreter and Latali become tools for him to demonstrate his sexual power. No matter how much time has passed and Zhang's life has changed, the role of women in his life is unchanging; they are sexual tools.

Zhang Yonglin meets Mimosa when hunger afflicts him and he is "little more than skin and bone"; however, it is Mimosa's feminine charm that first attracts him. The first time Mimosa provides him food, he notices "a distinct fingerprint on the bun, the small whorls in the middle fanning out like the ripples fish make in a pond".[132] Later, he tries to have intimate physical contact with Mimosa, but she kindly advises him that "all right, do not do that...do not get hurt. Better stick to your books".[133] She knows as he knows that he is using Mimosa to alleviate his sexual hunger and his psychological helplessness. Explaining why he asks Mimosa for sex, Zhang says that "because I hadn't started life as the poorest of the poor. The son of rich parents, when he falls on hard times and rescued by a poor woman, will immediately repay her by trying to lay her".[134] So in Zhang Yonglin's view being rich, educated and not used to a rough life is a reason to ask a woman for sex to lessen his anxiety. Although he thinks that reading Marx is transforming him into a new man, ideologically, he has never been transformed; traditional Chinese intellectual cultural and patriarchal values still dominate his thought and behaviour.

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[132] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 69.

[133] Ibid., 113.

[134] Ibid., 114.

Consciously and unconsciously, woman is just a means for improving the quality of a man's life.

Even though Zhang Yonglin is eager for physical satisfaction, he always claims that he puts spiritual life above everything else. Five years after leaving Mimosa and remaining single, he speculates on the role of love and women in his life. Sex is till the subject that concerns him the most.

> Love had been extinguished in me long ago-both what I had felt and those I had known had disappeared . . . . Pure love, the fear, and trembling of first love, the fragrance... eradicated by prison clothes...the physical needs of an animal were what remained. Sex is, after all, a native talent: with the loss of love we return to the physical.[135]

He does not have the capacity to love women because he does not want to love them. What he has is "the physical need of an animal" that "would pounce on the first woman [he] saw".[136] He describes his dream like this:

> [Women] took a more familiar form. She melted into other things that gave me pleasure. She was the gentleness and gracefulness, the beautiful curves of my cigarette smoke. She was the flavour and resilience of my steamed bread. She was the rustling, skin-white paper of my book. She was the well-used smoothness of my shovel handle. With all these things in mind as she came to me, I entered the abyss. In the darkness, too, found a physical pleasure.[137]

In this paragraph, at a semantic level, all descriptions, such as "the beautiful curves of my cigarette smoke", "the flavour and resilience of my steamed bread", "the rustling, skin-white paper of my book", and "well-used smoothness of my shovel handle" emphasize the protagonist's point of view about women. First, women should be as gentle and submissive as "beautiful curves", "steamed bread",

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[135] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 26-7.

[136] Ibid., 27.

[137] Ibid., 28.

and "well-used smoothness". All these characteristics suggest the natural feminine qualities which males desire the most and with which they are most familiar. Second, women should be easy to control, like a "cigarette", "bread", "book", and "shovel handle". All of those items are easy to manipulate and to play with. They are small, smooth, and essentially designed to be easily manipulated. Third, cigarettes, bread, books and shovels are objects used daily by Zhang Yonglin; he claims ownership of these items. Unconsciously, he wants absolute ownership over the women whom he views as his property. Fourth, and perhaps the ultimate meaning of this paragraph is the claim that women should provide men with physical pleasure by making themselves acquiescent and vulnerable. The docile body that is Zhang's ideal is easily connected to the docile bodies that were forced to undergo the morbid tradition of foot binding, yet another male sexual fetish that was painfully acted out on the bodies of women.

Judith Butler points out that women are shapeless and formless, that their forms and lives depend on men for definition. At a symbolic level, Zhang Yonglin's imagined female is a shapeless and brainless creature whose ultimate function is to give pleasure by satisfying his sexual fantasies. This image reveals not only the conventional Chinese perspective on women and their social function, but also shows that Zhang Yonglin's twisted sexual desires are still informed by the age old system that regards women as play things and sexual objects. Zhang Yonglin admits that "what frightened me was not that around us there were no women to love, but that if put to the test I could not have found love left in me".[138]

A close examination of Zhang's initial motivation in marrying Huang Xiangjiu, reveals that his first and foremost goal is to lessen his sexual desire. His second consideration is that he wants to start his political life.

> The passion of politics flows from the same source as the impulse of lust, both secreted internally from the endocrine glands. Both incite a man to abandon himself, to plunge forward-decisively, bravely,

[138] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 27

> foolishly, taking and possessing-receiving fulfillment and happiness in the act of self-sacrifice.[139]

Marrying Huang is a calculated move, but each time he feels hesitant the thought of her body reinforces his will to complete the transaction. He surrenders himself to his desires. "Her upright breasts, her small curve of a stomach, just looking at her body you could feel its elasticity . . . the very air she breathed was feminine: to a man she was the ultimate seduction".[140] Realizing the woman is only a sexual object, Zhang "began to scrutinize her carefully, and this time it was the cold eyes of a buyer".[141] Turning this courtship into a deal, Zhang still focuses on her body. "There was a seductive appeal to her face and her black, shiny hair".[142] "And I told myself love had been replaced with need".[143] The courtship and his finally agreement to the marriage exposes Zhang's view of women as objects to be used as needed. He sees marriage as a license for sex, and a passport to temporary shelter when his political adventures encounter rough weather.

In *Getting Used to Dying*, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zhang Yonglin rebuilds his political life and career. With the increased sense of importance his sexual ability has also been significantly enhanced. He not only plays around with women, but is proud of his promiscuous sexual behaviour.

Focusing on the question of what caused these changes may give us a better understanding of Zhang Yonglin's new life. Becoming a famous writer, after the Cultural Revolution, he starts having the opportunity to enjoy the freedom of visiting various countries and having sexual encounters with different women. He knows "he had always been trampled by others, but he had, in turn, trampled on women. Owing nothing to anyone else, he did owe a debt to gratitude to them",[144] because only

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[139] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 90

[140] Ibid., 113.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid., 112.

[144] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 12

women, or more specifically women's bodies, verified his identity as a man. Since his experience of impotence it has become a permanent phantom following him everywhere, so he uses the act of sexual conquest to demonstrate his male identity. "At age sixty-five, he recalled that all his life he depended on women to make bridges between the various phases of his life. The parts he does not remember had no women involved".[145] Moreover, women have to share his sense of suffering, and bear the tortures that he has gone through. "My hurts, my happiness, all had to be placed on some woman, as though the feeling would not otherwise have a foundation. They would be left dangling in the air, with nowhere to land".[146] However, he does not take women as partners to share his suffering, but uses them to purge the grievances that the political system has inflicted upon him.

Zhang Yonglin's twisted mentality and behaviour do not appear of out of nowhere. Throughout Chinese history women have been blamed for men's political failures. For example, Bai Juyi 白居易, the famous poet of Tang Dynasty, in his poem, Everlasting Sorrow 长恨歌, recounts the Emperor Xuanzong's complete infatuation with his imperial concubine Yang Guifei, ignoring affairs of state and setting the stage for violent social upheaval and military rebellion. Many high ranking officials sent written statements to the Emperor asking him to execute Yang Guifei in order to subdue the political turmoil. So, Yang Guifei, a woman of extraordinary beauty, has to sacrifice her life to save the nation. On one hand, women can be used as political trophies, and on the other they can be used as sacrificial offerings on the altar of politics.

After his rehabilitation, Zhang Yonglin starts using women to compensate for his suffering and to use them to demonstrate his fame and masculinity. His first target is a famous actress.

> When I stared at her on the screen in the camps, I imagined that she was too far away ever to reach. I could not possibly imagine her

[145] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying* (Chinese version). 16. The English version omits these three sentences.

[146] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 264.

> pressed like me into a smelly room with a dozen roommates. She must live by herself in several large perfumed and exotic rooms.
>
> And so it was not just for sex that I hugged her in my dreams in those days. It was not only because she was one of those strange creatures we had almost forgotten after so many years. I took her, in my mind, because it gave me the ghastly pleasure of retaliation.
>
> I took her kiss to be my real rehabilitation.[147]

Why does he choose to take the love of an innocent woman who was greatly manipulated during the Cultural Revolution as the object of his revenge? Why is it that he derives so much power from this "ghastly pleasure of retaliation"? From Zhang Yonglin's narration, we discover that all the political persecution, torture, and sexual subjugation have traumatized him and made him into a freak. Enjoying widespread fame and privileges beyond the imagination of most common Chinese people, Zhang Yonglin still wants revenge against society, and women are the instruments of his revenge.

One of his most telling acts of revenge occurs in his relationship with A, the "actress." She was the star of a film shown repeatedly in the prison camps, and she comes to represent all that he has lost by being sent into exile. In his imagination, while he serves time in prison she lives a life of luxury. Reflecting on her performance as a guerrilla leader, he says "I believed that she was capable of pointing a gun at the class enemy, me".[148] This image puts the actress into a dominant position. She symbolizes the ruling group that has power to control his life, to deprive him of the life he had once had, and to put him in an environment filled with pain and misery. She embodies everything he dreams about including his sexual fantasies. Possessing her means that it is his turn to be the dominating and controlling force in other people's lives. Her body satisfies his aspiration to retaliate, "I took her kiss to be my real rehabilitation".

Why is there such a need for revenge against a woman? Why the need to conquer woman's body as a site of contestation among political elites? The answer

[147] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 38-9

[148] Ibid., 38.

lies in thousands of years of Chinese history in which women's bodies always served as a symbolic battleground. Women were and still are the prize of the victor. He who is able to control the most beautiful women in the greatest number is the clear winner. In Zhang Yonglin's case, due to his frustrating sexual experience, the ability to conquer women becomes more significant; it not only demonstrates his political success, but also displays his masculinity. When he succeeds politically he possesses women's bodies with confidence. Having power over women demonstrates the way he not only abuses women but abuses power as well.

In the description of his sexual power over the actress, "he often felt like a truck driver, as she, terrified with eyes wide open, watched him drive a heavy truck over her body".[149] This "truck" image leads us back to the *Half of Man is Woman*. In that novel, Zhang Xianliang uses the same "truck image" to symbolize the way in which political oppression has sapped Zhang Yonglin's sexual energy, and caused his frustration at being unable to possess and satisfy his wife. On the wedding day in his new home, Zhang Yonglin notices "there was the matter of the bedspread. On it were embroidered two heavy tractors, pulling ploughs. Were she and I actually supposed to be able to sleep under such enormous machines"?[150] The "heavy tractors" foreshadow his impotency: he is too powerless to perform as a man and to express his manhood. However, on that same night, before their first sexual encounter, his wife demonstrates a different capability of enduring herself to the "heavy tractors".

> Her body was clearly outlined by the bedcover. The harshness of the iron ploughs made a ludicrous contrast with the full curves of her breasts and little stomach. She was a woman with unlimited resilience able to bear any weight.[151]

In frustration Zhang Yonglin "changed the tractor for a new cover, with the

[149] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying* . 18

[150] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 121.

[151] Ibid,. 132.

excuse that the tractor was too hot".[152] However, it does little to help. Finally, the position of the "tractor cover" becomes an allusion to his powerlessness. "By now, the newly embroidered tractors we had been given at our wedding were placed between us, like a signpost at a border".[153] With the change of his social status, his masculinity changes too. Not only does he no longer feel the "tractor cover" oppressing him, but he also turns himself into a powerful "truck driver" to drive over the woman's body that he once thought "was too far away to reach". This dramatic change suggests his overwhelming political superiority and sexual confidence. Manipulating and controlling a woman's body so powerfully and sophisticatedly betrays his view on the relationship between gender, subject, and power.

In this trilogy none of the women that Zhang Yonglin encounters has children, except Mimosa, who had her daughter four years before meets Zhang Youngling. Zhang's wife Huang Xiangjiu indicates that she wants to have a child, but Zhang tells her that it is "best not to have any child at all . . . I can't begin to fulfill responsibilities of a father".[154] According to traditional patriarchal practice, women only function as reproductive and sexual vehicles, but Zhang has taken away these women's reproductive function, and all that they have left is their sexual functions.

Besides treating women as mere sexual objects, Zhang also knows that they are the weakest group in the society and that taking them as the target of his revenge will offend nobody. Moreover, sexual revenge on women satisfies his body, gives him pleasure, demonstrates his potency, and also gives him a sense of compensation for his lost time. It is an undeniable fact Zhang Yonglin is the victim of political oppression, yet when we examine his relationships with women we find that he also assumes the role of victimizer. His use of power mirrors that of the CPC. After the end of the Cultural Revolution the CPC stopped persecuting intellectuals, but sadly there is no end to Zhang Yonglin's persecution of women.

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[152] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 135

[153] Ibid., 151.

[154] Ibid., 215.

IV. Women as Moral and Political Subjects

In traditional Chinese culture, cleanliness is a fundamental standard by which a woman's moral and physical values were evaluated. A virgin is clean, but married women are not clean. Losing virginity before getting married is tantamount to being given the death penalty for a woman. Women who are unfaithful and remarry are viewed as being physically and morally contaminated. Traditionally, in Chinese tea culture there was an established practice that before new tea was made, tea makers—only males could be tea makers—had to live alone for one hundred days, and take a shower every day in order to clean off the dirt that they had got from women. If they had any physical contact with women, the men couldn't make tea at all for one year. Moreover, if a woman, even by accident, entered the tea-making room, the tea would be abandoned because it was believed that the women's smell had stained the tea. This century-old practice indicates the traditional views that women are unclean to begin with, and men have the absolute right to question women's cleanliness.

The failure of Zhang Yonglin's love affairs with Mimosa and Huang Xiangjiu stems from his traditional moral values. Examining a woman's cleanness is his first priority. After enjoying Mimosa's food, feeling very certain that "I knew she loved me",[155] Zhang asks Mimosa a question that concerns him the most "who is your daughter's father"?[156] Mimosa has a fatherless child that puts his nerves on the edge. "There was so much about her I didn't understand, that was at variance with my old moral stands".[157] The unanswered question makes him sure that "she must be a loose woman".[158]

Since he notices his own emotional dependence on Mimosa, his male concern prompts him to start questioning Mimosa's moral qualifications. He is so concerned about Mimosa's illegitimate child that he concludes she is not a clean woman; he

[155] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 108.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 147.

scolds her using female advantage to get food, of which he eats the biggest share, claiming that she is a shamelessly immoral woman. All the blame he puts on Mimosa only displays the fact that, in the deepest part of his heart, conventional moral values still dominate his perspective on women. When he desires a woman's body, he puts all the moral standards and value codes aside; but when a woman shows her own nature and desire for life, he uses harsh moral standards to judge them and to make them suffer. Spiritually, Zhang belittles the women but materially he totally depends on their service. He uses two different moral standards to judge women and himself.

When finding out that he is impotent, Zhang laments his misfortune, focusing on his own sadness, never thinking about his wife's suffering. In his view, only his suffering is real and unbearable, other people's suffering and misfortune are insignificant. His self-centredness drives him to concentrate on his own frustration because his impotence may jeopardize his secret ambitions to "participate in determining the course of this nation".[159] His impotence also makes him blame his wife as having suffocated his life, "she has slowly expanded, in our so-called 'home', until she filled all the empty space".[160]

His "own morality" consists of traditional Chinese moral values, particularly the Confucian patriarchal standards that view women as villains. In Zhang's mind, being a "half man" he has no right to access and uses these weapons to attack anyone; but having a real male identity gives him a passport to all masculine advantages. He thinks that being nice to his wife is a sign of "the cowardice of a castrated horse".[161] "Now I want to smash it and escape: I had obtained what I desired, and now I rejected it".[162] He rejects it and starts torturing his wife. When his wife regrets her affair with the Party leader, he "push[es] her outside the covers

[159] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 89

[160] Ibid., 153.

[161] Ibid., 206.

[162] Ibid.

and wraps myself up in them, 'I can smell those other men on you right now'",[163] and tells her, "you and I are going to break up sooner or later". He even hints to his wife that he would like to kill her because of her unfaithfulness. "You should criticize Song Jiang, because he butchered his wife when she'd been playing around other men".[164] The sarcastic and ridicule laden language reveals Zhang's strong sense of traditional morality about women as men's property; unfaithful women are for men a significant insult because women want to own their bodys. They deprive the rights of men to control their property.

Zhang not only uses Huang's affair to humiliate her, but also uses it as an excuse to divorce her. When he supposes that his wife may impede his political adventurism, he takes Huang as a scapegoat for his insatiable desire. "Since I ceased to be 'half man', ceased to be a 'cripple', a fire had burned in my chest",[165] "my spirit is restless, and I hear voices calling me".[166] The voices are his political ambitions and he wants to sacrifice his wife for them. He comforts his conscience by deliberately enraging his wife and then blaming her for driving him out the marriage. "I needed her perverse behaviour to salve my conscience. When you're thinking of leaving a person its best to let that person does something to hurt you first".[167] Using concern for the nation's future as an excuse, Zhang connects his personal suffering with the whole nation's suffering; therefore, he magnifies his adversity as the nation's misfortune. This leap of imagination or connection gives Zhang Yonglin a sense of self importance and belief that he has the right to suppress women. His gender values are embedded in his unconscious and he acts accordingly. He even has his own criminal records and still views his crimes to be far less sever than Huang's; on a moral level alone her crime of sexual misconduct justifies Zhang's sense of

[163] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 207

[164] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*.222. Song Jiang is the main character in a classical Chinese fiction, *All Men Are Brothers*, who kills his wife because she has an affair with another man.

[165] Ibid., 206.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid., 246.

being cleaner than Huang and superior to her.

From the beginning of Chinese history women have been inseparably connected with politics. Not only is a woman's body a site of male contestation, it is used alternately as a trophy and a scapegoat for political disasters. "At any time or place a man is vulnerable to two lines of attack: one from women and the other from politics. These two things provide him with the meaning of life, with its pleasure and also its calamities".[168] Politics and women interact in a reciprocal way, the difference, however, is that politics dominate the lives and fates of women, even those women who are unwilling pawns of power. Zhang Yonglin understands that he can't gain power without women; and as always, power provides him with plenty of access to the means with which to possess women.

In Zhang Yonglin's case, he can't get rid of his painful past without becoming involved in politics. Even though he becomes a powerful man after the Cultural Revolution, in the face of such a powerful autocratic political system he is still relatively powerless. Consequently the occupation of women's bodies and infliction of little cruelties serves as a pale substitute for greater political power. His aggressive sexual behaviour with various women and prostitutes prompts him to say explicitly. "In the world, women are everywhere, and all the women are the same",[169] "I wanted to make love with either the women I knew very well or complete strangers because I already lost my interests to experience the progress of getting to know a woman".[170] In New York, when attending an international writer's conference, he seduces his interpreter, an American citizen from Taiwan. After going to bed with her, he says, "Actually between you and the prostitutes, I preferred the latter's approach. It saved time and it saved thinking".[171]

A comprehensive overview of his experiences with the women who help him during the difficult years suggests no justification for his cruel treatment of women.

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[168] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 198.

[169] Ibid., 65.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Ibid., 98.

His suggested justification is the absence of women in his camps days, and the humiliation of impotence. These psychological factors combined with his stubborn adherence to conventional ideology have a considerable impact on his attitude toward women. Moreover, in his mind he thinks that men are superior to women, and consequently takes it for granted that women should suffer more than men.

Chapter Four: A Psychoanalytic Reading: Male Identity and Male Sexuality

In this chapter, using psychoanalytic criticism, I discuss the relationship between male identity and male sexual power. Specifically, in Zhang Yonglin's case, the way in which his identity crisis eventually leads to an eruption of violence directed against Huang Xiangjui; the underlying cause of which is sexual frustration. In both *Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman*, Zhang Xianliang draws a connection between sex and death, which is further strengthened in *Getting Used to Dying*, where the death motif plays a decisive role in the protagonist's encounters with various women. At the end of the trilogy one is forced to ask questions regarding Zhang Xianliang's ideas on the relationship between sex, death, and women. Further complicating what is an already complex and damaged psyche, Zhang Yonglin takes for granted his sense of "natural" superiority, a sense of superiority that manifests itself as full-blown narcissism in *Getting Used to Dying*. What is the cause of Zhang Yonglin's narcissistic behaviour? What gives him the sense of social and sexual entitlement? Is it possible that there is a connection between Zhang's narcissism and traditional Chinese intellectual culture? I do not raise these questions lightly, nor do I ignore the difficulties they pose; rather, I want to make certain observations and suggest some tentative readings of the intellectual and emotional touchstones in Zhang Xianliang's fictional life and his protagonist.

I. Repression and Sexuality in Chinese Society

Since the establishment of Freudian psychology, which introduced the subject of human sexuality into the social sciences, the topic has spread into such diverse fields as medicine, psychology, literary criticism, history, and cultural studies. As the psychologist Ethel Person says:

> The meaning of sexuality will always be linked to nonsexual meaning because of the infantile intertwining of sensuality and object

> relations . . . sex qua sex, without these other meanings, is an impossibility. Sex will always be permeated with meanings that attach to individual and social parameters."[172]

Before Michel Foucault's ground-breaking work on the history of sexuality in Western Europe, the commonly held belief was that sexual norms were highly repressive. Through his meticulous research into the historical discourse on sexuality, Foucault discovered that instead devising a repressive system of practices, the newly minted representatives of the Enlightenment established a set of confessional practices whereby they could discover the "truth" about human sexuality. Beginning in the 17th century "confession has spread its effects far and wide: in the judicial system, in medicine, in pedagogy, in familial relations, in amorous relationships, in everyday life and in the most solemn rituals".[173] In exploring the relationship between sexuality and the mechanism of power, Foucault points out that sexuality is more than sexual behavior; the weight of its meaning lies in its cultural connotations. The powers of religious and state institutions designate certain sexual practices to be "morally acceptable" and "technically useful".[174] Rather than a system of silent repression, the discourse on human sexuality permeated Western European society, achieving critical mass in what Foucault terms the "four great strategies": "a hysterization of women's bodies"; "a pedagogization of children's sex"; "a socialization of procreative behavior"; and "a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure".[175]

From Foucault's perspective the mechanisms of power in Western society regulate sexual morality, interpret human sexual behavior, control the sexual pleasure of human body, and disseminate knowledge. Judith Butler concludes that "sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies

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[172] Quoted in Stephen A. Mitchell. *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis.* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988), 101.

[173] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality.* Vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 59.

[174] Ibid., 21.

[175] Ibid., 104-5.

it governs".[176] Going a step further, she builds upon Foucault's work on the relationship between power and sexuality, claiming that "the body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations, sexuality is a historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and affectivity".[177]

In their discussions of sexuality both Foucault and Butler argue that the understanding of sexuality in modern society, along with its sociocultural beliefs, is shaped by "[a] historically specific organization of power, discourse, body and affectivity". In contemporary Chinese society, the path people have taken towards sexuality may be at variance with the path taken by Western society. China has a history of more that 2500 years during which Confucian ideology dominated and shaped the Chinese people's understanding of sex and sexuality. In China, the erotic arts were practiced only by the elite class, and within that class they were the prerogative of men.[178] For the majority of ordinary Chinese who had no knowledge of the intricacies of sexuality, everything connected to sex and sexuality was viewed as dirty, obscene, and morally degenerate. All sexual transgression, such as extramarital relationships, incurred serious consequences ranging from losing one's job, being divorced, and even time in prison during the Cultural Revolution.[179]

The CPC's stern regulation of sexuality demonstrated its great power over the Chinese people's physical and spiritual lives from the 1950s until the beginning of the Twenty-first century.[180] The discussion of sex and sexuality was absent from the lives of the majority because the Party eliminated this discussion from public

[176] Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* 1.

[177] Ibid., 93.

[178] In Ming and Qing Dynasty, there were literary works describing sex and sexual activity in very details, such as *Golden Lotus 金瓶梅, Pu Meat Mission 肉蒲团.* However, these books were banned for the majority to access. Plus, the most people did not get enough education; they were also unable to read these books, only the elite class possessed the exclusive right.

[179] For knowing more about the subject of sexual taboo during the Cultural Revolution, please refer to Fox Butterfield's *China, Alive in the Bitter Sea.* (New York: Times Books, 1982).

[180] Starting from the late 1990s, the understanding sex and sexuality in the younger generation in Chinese society has changed dramatically. The influence of traditional conceptions of sexuality and sexual behavior is getting weaker and weaker on the young generation.

discourse. The regulations codified Chinese people's sexual morality, controlled individual's sexual activity and blocked people's access to the knowledge of sexual practices, thereby depriving them of their right to be healthy sexual beings. Its political oppression provided a graphic example of the power to control human sexuality. Even in the wake of the Cultural Revolution the subject of sexuality was still a taboo. Writers who took on the topic of sexuality in the early 1980s' confronted challenges which came not only from the CPC's political oppression and radical policies, but also from the Chinese people's conventional sexual beliefs.[181]

II. Impotence, Identity and Power

While Chinese and Euro-American societies have taken different approaches to human sexuality, the two cultures share one thing in common: elites in both societies increase their power by controlling and manipulating the sexual practices of ordinary people. To impose their power on sexuality, Western authorities used religious confession, psychotherapy, and education to codify people's sexual knowledge and manipulate their sexual activities.[182] In China, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the Party resorted to more direct ways of imposing its control on sex and sexuality. The CPC's powerful control over sexual discourse, the tacit denial of sexuality, and the desexualization of Chinese lives had serious ramifications for many individuals. For example, impotence and perverse sexual behaviors became more common, especially among male intellectuals.[183] In the works of contemporary Chinese writers, such as Zhang Xianliang, Gao Xiangjian, and Gu Hua, there are numerous descriptions of males' painful loss of sexual virility.

In her discussion of Jacques Lacan's *The Meaning of the Phallus*, Butler states that the lack of penis or phallus or the fear of castration is not only a form of

[181] Many post-Mao literary works have detailed descriptions of sexual dysfunction and the failures of marital intimacy due to highly restrictive and oppressive policies enforced by the Party, for example Yu Luojin's *A Winter's Tale*, and Zhang Jie's *Love Must Not be Forgotten*.

[182] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Please reference to "*Part Three: Scientia Sexualis*" 53-73.

[183] It is my belief that during the chaos of revolutionary China women suffered more severe forms of sexual repression and humiliation that their male counterparts. Further exacerbating this situation is the fact that there is a taboo against speaking of women's sexual desires which are considered aberrant and unclean.

punishment; it is also an essential part of a man's physical and social identity. Understanding "phallus" in a symbolic way, Butler writes that "the symbolic position that marks a sex as masculine is one through which the masculine sex is said to 'have' the phallus".[184] Since the phallus constitutes a function of male physical identity, and since a man's identity is his passport to fulfilling his personal desires, Butler asserts that the "identification is a phantasmatic trajectory and resolution of desire; an assumption of place; a territorializing of an object which enables identity through the temporary resolution of desire, but which remains desire, if only in its repudiated form".[185] Butler does not assume that the loss of male sexual function is an actual castration, but the lack of the image of a powerful male organ means the loss of power. As Lacan says, the phallus is a "privileged signifier".[186]

Regarding my study of Zhang Xianliang's work, the above discussions of the male distress at losing their identity give us an insight into Zhang Yonglin's experiences in *Mimosa* and *Half of Man is Woman*. Since the CPC oppressed the majority of Chinese, including the male intellectuals, it is easy to imagine how the latter's sexual desires are repressed and twisted. More significantly, one can see how their struggle to deal with their own desires is intertwined with their desperate need to find their own identities, which in turn strengthened their drive for political power.

In discussing male sexuality, Horowitz and Kaufman find the characteristics of pleasure and power inseparable:

> In the most abstract terms, the tension within male sexuality is between pleasure and power . . . The realm of pleasure is ultimately derived from the body... But the power of male sexuality also stems from social relations of power: the social power of men over women; the power of social constraint and socially imposed forms of sexual repression...the internalization of social and sexual domination in the form of the structures of masculinity and a sense of guilt.[187]

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[184] Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* 101.

[185] Ibid., 99.

[186] Jacques Lacan, "*The Significance of the Phallus*" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, Trans. by Alan Sheridan, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977).

[187] Gad Horowitz and Michael Kaufman, "*Male Sexuality: Toward A Theory of Liberation*" in *Beyond Patriarchy*.

Zhang Yonglin's later sexual experiences have a lot of to do with his desire for sensual pleasure and power. His aggressive sexual behavior is revenge against the political system, a release for his traumatized feelings, and an expression of disorientation at his unexpected fame and power.

III. Narcissism, Ideal Ego, and Hyperactivity

The term narcissism is originally taken from the Greek myth about a beautiful young man who falls in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, jumps in the water, and drowns. Later, psychoanalysis broadened the definition of narcissism to mean an excessive self-love. Making the connection between narcissism and human sexuality, Lacan says that "It's one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level".[188] Freud's definition of narcissism is "the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation"[189]. Usually, the narcissistic patients "suffer from megalomania and they withdraw their interest from the external world . . . but analysis shows that [the narcissist] has by no means broken off his erotic relations to persons and things"; he still retains behaviors of human beings in love. Freud theorizes that the ego ideal linked with the castration complex functions to compensate for the repression of primal narcissism. The "castration complex"—anxiety concerning the penis and early sexual intimidation—not only plays a significant role in the development of narcissism, but also leads to the masculine protest that "takes account of nothing but the manner in which they serve the interests of the ego".[190] Narcissists look for love objects in which they can rediscover and reclaim their masculinity. "A person's realization of organic inferiorities in himself acts as a spur upon an active mental life, and

Ed. Michael Kaufman. (Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 82.

[188] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book 1. Freud's Papers on Techniques, 1953-1954*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by J. Forrester, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1988), 142.

[189] Sigmund Freud, *"On Narcissism: An introduction"*. In *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 54. Ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins. (Chicago, London & Toronto: Encyclopedia Britannica. Inc,. 1952), 399

[190] Freud, *On Narcissism*. 407.

produces by way of over-compensation a higher degree of ability. But it would be altogether an exaggeration [to deduce]... that every fine achievement was conditioned by an original organic inferiority".[191]

Contemporary psychologist Gerald Schoenewolf, in his systematic studies of gender narcissism, finds that the narcissistic patients have the following features: (1) feelings of superiority about one's gender, (2) excessive concern about one's genitals, (3) bitterness and rage about feeling psychologically castrated.[192] He also finds that sex for the narcissist is an instrument designed to increase the number of methods to satisfy his narcissistic impulses. Through the processes of successful seduction and sexual conquest of multiple partners, the narcissist obtains a badly needed narcissistic "fix" and the fix is needed to soothe the old unresolved trauma.

Looking at Zhang Yonglin's narcissistic behavior, it is clear that his later expressions of maladjustment resulted from experiences in his early life prior to running afoul of the CPC, his painful and impoverished life in exile, and his loss of sexual potency. All his suffering eventually leads him to seek an idealized ego, and to sublimate his sexual frustration by glorifying his literary accomplishments. Zhang Yonglin makes a proximate connection between himself and China's Grand Historian Sima Qian. However, there is a significant difference between Zhang Yonglin's temporary impotence and Sima Qian's actual castration. To take Zhang Yonglin's literary fame into account, it is easy for us to understand the psychological and behavioral changes in Zhang Yonglin. Throughout Chinese history educated males have had privileged access to the highest positions of power and social status. Literary fame was one path to gaining a privileged life, one that granted almost limitless advantages. Exaggerating one's sexual ability was another method of building "face" among the male elite. Zhang Yonglin's sense of self-importance and his great pride in being a famous writer lead him to fall in love with his self-inflated sense of success and glory. The flaunting of his sexuality reflects his reaction to impotence. His later sexual hyperactivity is meant to compensate him for his sense

[191] Ibid., 409.

[192] Gerald Schoenewolf, *Gender Narcissism and Its Manifestation.* NARTH, 1996

of loss, which causes him to use women to counteract his deep seated feelings of inferiority. These women eventually become victims of his insatiable narcissism and his incurable repressed sexual traumas.

IV. Male Identity and Male Sexual Power

The key element in Zhang Yonglin's regaining his sexual virility is the sense of male identity. Before his recuperation he participates in a battle against a heavy flood. In the flood scene, he seizes an opportunity to assert himself in a manly way.

> Whoever worked hardest was given authority over others. Distinctions among Troop Leaders, Secretary and ordinary workers had disappeared—at this point people were listening to whoever was most capable. We were in a situation of life and death, and the customary hierarchy had broken down.[193]

Since Zhang Yonglin works very hard and knows how to deal with the problem, he gains the power to direct the heroic battle. Eventually he is giving orders to Party Leader Cao, an unscrupulous man who has had an affair with Zhang's wife. Cao is more than just a man, he is also a symbol of political power and sexual potency because he is the Party leader and as such he has the ability to possess Zhang's wife. At this crucial moment his struggle against the natural disaster allows him to demonstrate his capacity for dealing with difficulty, and winning the people's support gives Zhang a great sense of confidence.

> The water was three men deep on the outside of the canal, and as I went down I felt the uneven bottom. I was already wet through from sweat and had no consciousness of the cold. Feeling with my hands, I tried to find the opening. After I had gone several metres a great sucking force swung my legs around towards it. One foot was sucked inside the hole.
>
> I thrashed out against the current, and managed to fight my way back to the surface, emerging amidst the branches and debris.

[193] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 194.

> "It's all right," I yelled out, "the hole's only a little bigger than a wash-basin right now. Quick, pack a gunny-sack and throw it down to me. And throw that straw over."
>
> A gunny-sack brimming full of mud and bundles of straw immediately came flying over. Pressing the sack on top of the straw, I once again dived down into the murky depths. Before I had time to push them in, they were violently pulled out of my hands and clamped into the hole by the force of the water.
>
> When I worked my way back to the surface, a triumphant shout came down form the top of the canal, "It's plugged! It's plugged!"[194]

In this battle, Zhang's real triumph is not to stop the flood, but his rebirth as a man, and the recovery of his sense of masculinity. His heroic performance symbolizes that he is purified and reborn. After this purification ritual in water, Zhang's sexual virility is restored; this is a necessary component of being a hero. The battle against the flood clearly alludes to the legendary figure of Da Yu 大禹, who spent his entire life fighting a great flood, to the benefit of all the people. After he died, he was rewarded by being made the Emperor of Heaven with power over the emperor on the earth. The image of Da Yu reveals a political dream that Zhang Yonglin harbours for himself: he can achieve whatever he wants politically because he had the blessing of the Emperor of Heaven.[195]

That night he "felt something [he] had never felt before",[196] and with his wife's help, his first sexual performance was a success.

> "You're better?" Her voice floated up from the depths of deep water.
>
> "Yes, I am. I didn't know myself..." and I started to laugh. I laughed a convulsive laughter, filled with sadness and a wild joy. The sound became louder and louder, until my whole body was shaking with it and I was crying.
>
> "Can you...again?" Again the indistinct voice floated up to me.

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[194] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 197-8.

[195] I came cross this idea independently. Later, I find that Xueping Zhong in her article, "Male Suffering and Male Desire" has the same connection of Zhang's flood fighting with Da Yu.

[196] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman.* 202.

"I can!" I said savagely.[197]

Zhang Yonglin sexual recovery changes him psychologically; he goes from being a man filled with frustration and self-pity to being a domineering husband. He starts believing that he is ready for a political adventure. This change reveals Zhang Yonglin's understanding that male sexual potency and political power go hand in hand.

Prior to his "rebirth" Zhang briefly feels sorry for his wife whom he is unable to satisfy sexually, but mostly he pities himself, regarding the business of his impotence as a matter of life and death. Unable to bear the psychological weight of being something less than a man, he considers committing suicide. Even the horse can sense his fear. "You don't really want to go home any more than I do. You've been married exactly one month, but you and your wife are already sleeping apart. Am I right? You're afraid of the nights".[198]

Victory in his battle against the flood followed by the return of his sexual power gives Zhang the desire to conquer more. Giving his horse his head and letting him run as fast as he can, Zhang Yonglin recites from Milton's poem, Paradise Lost, to express his happiness. He begins thinking that his tolerance of his wife is like the "cowardice of a castrated horse".[199] He deliberately oppresses her at home causing her to feel like the mouse he had once been. Zhang's cold distance, hot temper and satirical tone drive her into depression. In referring to her previous affair with Party Leader Cao, Xiangjiu even blurts out, "If you don't think it's fair, you can sleep with other women a few times too".[200] Zhang Yonglin's changed attitude towards his wife (and women in general) displays a striking similarity to the Party's attitude towards intellectuals—persecution, humiliation, and forced sexual perversion. As Zhang states later "women and penis" are the two greatest threats to a man's success.

[197] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman. 202.*.

[198] Ibid., 141.

[199] Ibid., 206.

[200] Ibid., 207.

V. Sexuality and Death

In *Getting Used to Dying*, the protagonist is split into two images, "I" and "he". "He" is used to denote Zhang Yonglin prior to his rebirth. "I" is used to denote his character in the present—"He" used to live in exile, but now "I" live in the city. "He" tells the stories that happened before his rehabilitation, "I" tell stories about being a famous writer and an important political figure. "I" travel around the world, enjoying a successful writer's privileges. However, "he" and his past always come to visit, especially when "I" am having sexual intercourse. "He" bothers me a lot, so "I" decide to kill "him".

> Although many deaths had left his corporeal body intact, they had killed the nerves that allowed him sensation.
>
> Since the method of murder was old, where to aim should at least be new. . . . He had always been trampled on by others but he had, in turn, trampled on women. Owing nothing to anyone else, he did owe a debt of gratitude to them.
>
> So what most deserved punishment was his penis. If he was to be done away with, that was the place to start. I snickered when I aimed down there, thinking how completely society's punishment of him had missed its mark.[201]

In *Half of Man is Woman*, Zhang Yonglin explains to his wife that the reason he is impotent is "because I've been inhibited for so long...it means…suppressed, held back".[202] The reason is comprehensible because of the political persecution which means that impotency is the direct consequence of political persecution. The cost for political incorrectness is the loss of one's manhood. That Zhang regains his potency on the eve of the end of the Culture Revolution gives a subtle but direct hint of reapproaching political power. Talking with an old friend, Zhang Yonglin says,

> Premier Zhou Enlai has passed away; Deng Xiaoping has been knocked off the dais… I'm sure that a movement is gestating in China

[201] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 11-3.

[202] Zhang, *Half of Man*. 136.

> right now that really belongs to the people. I'm equally convinced that only that kind of movement will allow the country and the Party to start anew.[203]

Just as he expected, the Cultural Revolution ended that same year. Deng soon came to power, and intellectuals like Zhang Yonglin once again became the backbone of Chinese society. After gaining literary fame and political position, his confidence in his sexual ability becomes very strong, and although he never overtly articulates a direct connection between political power and sexual prowess, the idea is embedded throughout the text.

In Zhang's trilogy, death always indicates the protagonist's transcendence and rebirth. The opening scene of *Getting Used to Dying* is the protagonist trying to kill himself. However, the dead person is his past, and a new-self is reborn with the death of the old. This new born protagonist possesses striking characteristics: super sexual potency and great sense of superiority. In a symbolic way, Zhang Xianliang suggests that his protagonist is unbeatable. In the beginning of *Mimosa*, quoting from the *Ordeal* of Alexei Tolstoy, "thrice wrung out in water, thrice bathed in blood, thrice boiled in caustic", Zhang Xianliang asserts, even though the protagonist experiences a long ordeal, finally he has become a new man, transcending to the highest planet. *In Mimosa*, the first time when Zhang tries to have sex with Mimosa, she advises him to concentrate on his studies. Feeling shame, Zhang thinks of committing suicide. "I really was tempted to die. How easy it would be to step across the border line between life and death. To end everything, the shame, the remorse, the suffering...the only final release for me was death".[204] However, at this crucial moment, a voice tells him to "transcend self--for you that is your heaven. . . Transcend self"[205] and "integrate yourself with the wisdom of mankind".[206]

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[203] Zhang, *Half of Man*. 266-7.

[204] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 113.

[205] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 117.

[206] Ibid.

Awakened by this voice—"it sounded more like the dear one I had lost",[207] Zhang finds that "[his] face was covered with tears, and tears had soaked the bedding under my head, I felt for the thick hardback copy of *Capital*".[208] It is Karl Marx coming to save him from the death, leading him to a higher spiritual level, and giving him strength to deal with his pain-ridden life. Death or the thought of committing suicide, therefore in Zhang Yonglin's life is an opportunity to transcend himself. In *Half of Man is Woman*, after finding he is impotent, he says "again, I too thought of suicide. Since I was already a 'cripple', already 'half a man', since I could only be ordered around like the old piebald, what purpose was there in carrying on? Why spend the rest of a wounded life tied up in the stable"?[209] Again the spirit of Karl Marx shatters his thoughts of suicide. It is the belief that Marx guides the future of Chinese society that gives Zhang another chance to escape the seduction of death. Death helps him to overcome the frustration of being impotent and deprived of creativity, gives him new strength and courage, gains the sense of inescapable responsibility to "participate in determining the [country's] course of ship".[210] Death, in the terms of Zhang Yonglin's understanding, is transcendence and rebirth.

In *Getting Used to Dying*, the death motif is tightly connected with potency. Throughout the trilogy, the protagonist always says that his love-making with women is "successful" or "completely successful".[211] Nevertheless this reveals that he is afraid of "unsuccessful" sex; he still does not have enough confidence. But his fear is in proportion to the magnitude of this subject. He is still haunted by his experience of impotence. And clearly death does not play a negative role in his sensual experiences; on the contrary, it enhances his desire to demonstrate his sexual prowess. "That was the look in her eyes-the same as is when the gun was aimed at his head. As he watched for the gun behind her eye when they made love, her look

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid., 118.

[209] Zhang, *Half of Man is Woman*. 154.

[210] Ibid., 89.

[211] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 93, 118, 125, 171. Chinese version.

only heightened his passion".[212] In retrospect, he says at one point and not long ago that he was struggling with his potency, but now his sexual performance is beyond his expectation, even beyond the threat of death. This dramatic change between his impotency and the hyper-potency emphasizes the significant change of his political status. Even death can not affect his sexual ability, but "heightens" it. Zhang Yonglin attributes the incredible transformation of his success in politics and literary fame. The sense that he is a powerful man provides him boldness and courage to confront and to despise death, and turning the threat of death into the most enjoyable sexual pleasure. It explains why even in the most difficult time pursuing political power is his primary priority.

> I tell you not to move, not to speak. I hear death passing through the cracks in my bones. I tell you that although the feeling is ghastly; its coldness allows me to relax. I return to the edge of death after each vivid episode of sex, since the smell of death and that of an orgasm are the same.[213]

For Zhang Yonglin sexual prowess is a manifestation of political power. His extraordinary sexual performance in *Getting Used to Dying* reveals his fundamental belief in the relationship between political power and sexual vitality. Sex is politics and women's bodies are one of the primary arenas in which, on which, and through which men act out their power.

VI. Impotence and Narcissism

Many times in *Half of Man is Woman*, Zhang Yonglin is able to communicate with some historical figures, such as Karl Marx and Zhuang Zi; fictional figures, like, Song Jiang and Othello; and an old piebald horse. The first time he speaks with the old horse is when he confronts his impotence. The second time the spirits of Song Jiang, Othello, and Karl Marx come to console him when he discovers his wife's affair with the team leader Cao. After regaining his potency, he has another talk with

[212] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 20.

[213] Ibid., 145.

the horse. All the conversations with the dead, the fictional character, and the animal take place during difficult times and he asks for their help in coping with his hardship. These imagined communications are the ways to help Zhang restore his marginalized dignity, and give him a sense of being in alignment with the historical as well as fictional figures.

The conversation between Zhang Yonglin with Marx covers varying aspects: morality, Marxism, and the Marxist system's present situation and practice in China. Although this conversation gives Zhang Yonglin little help with his pain and perplexity, they reflect his ideas about Marxism and the self in Chinese society. During the Cultural Revolution Marxism was viewed as the absolute truth. Anyone who had any suspicion or question about Marxism could be put in prison even face the death penalty. In *Mimosa*, Zhang Yonglin claims that due to reading Karl Marx, he is able to deal with his difficulties better, and has realized that he cannot accept Mimosa's love because he lives on a higher plane than other people. In *Half of Man is Woman*, Zhang Yonglin becomes not only a keen reader and faithful disciple of Marx, but also a messenger between Marx and the Chinese people. They also discuss China's social problems, Marx's theories about philosophy, politics and economics. This discussions suggest that he holds a spiritual position that is higher than most Chinese people, like Jesus Christ as the messenger between the God and His followers (He actually compares himself with Jesus Christ in *Getting Used to Dying*) because he believes that he has mastered the absolute truths of Marxism. Moreover, these conversations imply that Zhang has started to prepare for his political career and started to transcend himself.

We can also see Zhang Yonglin's sense of superiority in his descriptions of his sexual potency and its close relation to death. At age sixty-five, he is very proud of his sexual potency. On the one level, his all-conquering sexuality is his enlarged self that makes him believe that he is capable of maintaining multiple relationships with women. This extreme sexual ability or power has a twofold symbolic significance. At the biological level, he is a "complete", "real", and "normal" man. In Chinese society, in a conventional understanding, the normal male has many advantages over

the female. At political level, a successful man, an establishment writer, has a lot of power over ordinary people, and an unlimited possibility of access to women. As Zhang Xianliang indicates in many ways in his trilogy, male sexual potency is power, and vice versa. Zhang Yonglin explains his understanding of man's power as following:

> A man's body has two organs that are alike in being both the busiest and the most powerful. One is his tongue, and the other is his penis. He uses the tongue to conquer other men and to win their approval-either to rally men behind him or to show off as he follows someone else. He uses the penis to conquer women.[214]

Zhang Yonglin comprehends that the first and foremost goal of an intellectual are to gain political power and possess women.

> An aura of sex pervades the world, even in a respectable cathedral. With his pained face and bloody body so arousing to women, even Jesus with his naked torso is the epitome of sex. You once said that blood triggers a woman's desire. It was when you saw my blood that day you fully opened yourself to me.[215]

Comparing himself with Jesus, Zhang exposes, after becoming a powerful man, that he occupies a sense of flawless morality and self-importance. On an occasion when discussing his cousin's business in San Francisco, he makes a comparison between overseas Chinese and Chinese intellectuals in China.

> Joe [Zhang's cousin] had remarked, "if Uncle [Zhang's father] and Aunt had brought your whole family out to America, you'd be doing even better here than I am." Through his flush of alcohol he had looked sideways at Joe. "I'm not doing so badly on the mainland, either!" the wine and his pride rushed together to redden his face.
>
> Yes, if we had brought the whole family to America, I would certainly be doing better than you. In America, anyone can be a success, start with bare hands and set up a family, not only

[214] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 179.

[215] Ibid., 144.

> commercially minded Chinese. On the mainland of China, on the other hand, sons of certain families were looked down on as the "enemy class". Years later, they were belatedly made "intellectuals with a contribution to make to the Four Modernizations." But these sons, every one of them, had to have been extraordinarily talented just to stay alive. Do you know that?[216]

Here Zhang Yonglin's lofty tone gives voice to his belief that he and his contemporary intellectuals are imbued with natural gifts, and are therefore entitled to luxuries and indulgences not available to the common people. Their suffering is harder than that of others, and their successes are of greater value because they are "superior to [others] mentally, on a higher intellectual plane".[217] Drawing upon Freud's theory of narcissism to interpret Zhang Yonglin's life experience, his comments are understandable. For someone who has lived in a prison cell for many years, the sudden rush of colourful flowers, applause and fame make it very difficult to distinguish the real self from the imagined enlarged self. Believing himself to be superior he indulges himself accordingly on all his worldwide travels.

> I have enjoyed dispensing the handouts all around the world: Beijing, New York, Chicago, Copenhagen, Paris, and San Francesco. The pleasure comes not from my beneficence; however, but from the concrete proof that my luck has turned.[218]

He makes no effort to cover up his smugness and complacency. The way Zhang flaunts his action reflects his pride in their achievements. Because showing off his success is just compensation for his painstaking past. "Being rich and honoured without going back to one's hometown to flaunt it, is like wearing the most beautiful clothes and walking in the dark" 富贵如不还乡，犹如锦衣而夜行.[219] Talking about his life, "he realized that some people spend their whole lives trying to be

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[216] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 58-9

[217] Zhang, *Mimosa*. 140.

[218] Zhang, *Getting Used to Dying*. 71.

[219]史记. 项羽列传

ordinary, yet despite their ordinariness discover that they have become an outstanding person such as me".[220] On another occasion, after intercourse with the interpreter, Zhang says to her that, "now I have power to enjoy the best life, also have the right to indulge myself in whatever I want, but if I do not use my power and right, I can be considered a great person".[221] This affected unconventional comment displays his insufferable pride in what he is today. In searching for a full understanding of Zhang's sense of superiority, the intellectual history of Chinese may give us background knowledge. Since China has never developed a common religious tradition but more secular practice of Confucianism, the worship of power became a cultural tradition in its own right. Since power not only is an affirmation of achievement, but also gives one an unlimited advantage over others, to be an establishment intellectual is the ultimate goal for all educated individuals.

I find it very hard to agree with Zhang Xianliang's assertion that the theme of *Getting Used to Dying* is the unending fear under which Chinese intellectuals must live. As I read this text, something I have done repeatedly, I can see that it is all about the glorification of Zhang Yonglin, from naive young poet, to prison exile, to a man of sexual and political power. In this final novel Zhang Xianliang uses the technique of parallel construction to join past and present like couplets from a classical text: his starvation in prison and sumptuous banquets in the United States, the richest country in the world; his filthy prison cell and luxuriously antiseptic hotel rooms in New York, Atlantic City and Paris; his endless forced confessions while in prison and his lectures and presentations as a famous writers; his sexual impotence early in life and his string of sexual conquests later in life. Compared to his illiterate women, Mimosa, and Huang Xiangjiu, his "post-exile" lovers are intelligent (an actress and an interpreter), young and pretty. All of these women are offered up as dramatic contrast to Zhang's earlier life of sexual deprivation. What we actually witness is the struggle and suffering of an afflicted soul who loses his bearings at the

[220] Zhang. *Getting Used to Dying*. Chinese version, 56,

[221] Ibid., 106.

moment he achieves his long dreamed of goal. Such is the story of Zhang Yonglin; it could have been a tragedy but for the character of the protagonist, or should we say the character of the author as protagonist, who never comprehends his own hubris.

Conclusion

In the preceding analysis I have examined Zhang Xianliang's fictionalized autobiography, *Mimosa, Half of Man is Woman* and *Getting Used to Dying,* from what is essentially a feminist perspective. Zhang Xianliang has been lauded for writing his way out of exile to literary and political success by exposing the brutal persecution of intellectuals during the mass campaigns of the Mao era. As well, his fame spread far and wide because his writing breaks the taboo against discussing sexual desire and sexual activity. However, what the author and critics alike have failed to address is the role of women in Zhang's fiction. While his narrative quite naturally focuses on his twenty year odyssey from the gulags of north western China to a seat on the People's Consultative Committee, the fact that women were instrumental in keeping him alive is dismissed as inconsequential to his pursuit of fame and political power.

Zhang Xianliang does not go out of his way to avoid the topic of women's emotional and sexual lives, they just do not figure prominently in his world view; women are nurturers and sexual objects, nothing more. This is obvious at the most immediate level of the narrative, and if one begins to explore the text more carefully, contradictions abound. It was here that Derrida's idea of deconstruction was helpful in getting beneath the surface narrative, and certain of Freud's ideas were helpful in understanding what I found there. Zhang Xianliang's protagonist, Zhang Yonglin, is amoral, angry, callous, deceitful, narcissistic, and impotent. He consistently supports the Party's persecution of intellectuals as a "tempering by fire" in the process of transforming modern intellectuals from traditionalists into Marxists, yet condemns that same Party for emasculating the male intellectual class.

While exalting his new Marxist self, Zhang Yonglin behaves as he always behaved, and continues to believe in the traditional entitlements due an intellectual: political power, prestige, and docile female bodies. That Marxism and Confucianism are antithetical, particularly on the issue of the status of women in society, is a fact that seems to escape the notice of Zhang Yonglin, but this type of highly selective

vision is at the very heart to Zhang Xianliang's trilogy. What I have tried to do in the preceding thesis is to demonstrate that Zhang Yonglin's embracing of Marxism is purely rhetorical, a matter of expediency. Even Zhang Xianliang's use of literature as a tool for expressing his disagreement with the Party's policies is an expression of his belief that literature should serve politics, and that the first and foremost duty of an intellectual is to acquire political power. However, amid the welter of contradictions expressed and acted-out by Zhang's protagonist, I arrive back where I began, at the one, unwavering constant that almost invisibly enables the narrative—woman.

In discussing the status and function of women in Chinese society, as represented in Zhang's trilogy, I have drawn on the work of Judith Butler because she addresses directly the highly deformative effects of the phallocentric discourse that reduces women to a set of bodily functions. I undertook this analysis of Zhang Xianliang's critically acclaimed trilogy because no one had looked specifically at the function of women in Zhang's narrative. As I have illustrated in the preceding chapters, women are used and cast aside with callous indifference. Why has no one asked about this before? Is it possible that the intellectual class along with the general reading public still accept as given that women are enablers and bodies of pleasure, with no meaningful significance beyond that? Zhang Yonglin's transformation into an enlightened Marxist was merely a rhetorical ploy on the road to fame, fortune and sex. Unfortunately he personifies millions of male Chinese intellectuals who still adhere to their sense of entitlement and superiority which is only possible with women in the role of silent, docile bodies.

I conclude, then, with the following observation, the great Marxist ideological transformation never occurred, and the traditional Confucian-oriented, patriarchal gender hierarchy remains in place. One has only to read Zhang Xianliang's trilogy to see that this is still generally the case.

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