

Lament Everlasting: Wang Anyi's Discourse on the "Ill-Fated Beauty," Republican
Popular Culture, the *Shanghai Xiaojie*, and Zhang Ailing

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a discourse on the Chinese author Wang Anyi's 1996 novel Lament Everlasting. In this thesis I argue that Wang Qiyao, the protagonist of Lament Everlasting, represents an ideal of beauty that was of a particular time and space, the ideal of the "*Shanghai Xiaojie*" that developed in Shanghai in the Republican period. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi is picking up a series of themes that had been ignored by the Chinese literary community for nearly fifty years, themes that had been previously explored by the Republican era-author Zhang Ailing. Described as a *Shanghai Xiaojie*, and as representing the ideal of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*, Wang Qiyao is Wang Anyi's late twentieth century embodiment of the theme of the ill-fated beauty.

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Chapter One:

From Bai Juyi to Wang Anyi, the Continuing Theme of Lament Everlasting

Introduction

“The emperor of Han, esteemed pretty looks, yearned for a devastating beauty,”¹

...

High may the heaven be, and wide the earth, there are still limits,
Yet this sorrowful feeling will last forever and ever.”²

Bai Juyi’s poem, “Lament Everlasting,” (“*Changhen ge*”)³, relates the tragic love story between the Tang Emperor Xuanzong and his favourite concubine.⁴ Written in 806, the poem “Lament Everlasting” illustrates the idea of the ‘ill-fated beauty’ while relating the unfortunate fate of Yang Guifei, the Emperor’s consort. Bai’s “Lament Everlasting” relates how the Emperor’s passion ultimately leads to chaos, as the Emperor neglects his imperial duties. He is forced to order the execution of Yang in order to placate rebels. The poem suggests that beauty brings power and, with it, inevitably, tragedy.

Wang Anyi offers a modern exploration of this classical theme in her 1996 novel Lament Everlasting. Wang Anyi’s novel and Bai Juyi’s poem share the same title, and additionally, share common themes. Lament Everlasting is about Wang Qiyao, a woman who was born in Republican Shanghai, was crowned a beauty queen as a teenager, and whose life follows the trajectory of Shanghai’s history. In this thesis I argue that the

¹ Chiu Ming Chan, *Between the World and the Self – Orientations of Pai Chu-I’s (772-846) Life and Writings*, (dissertation), Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1991, 494.

² Chiu Ming Chan, *Between the World*, 501.

³ Bai Juyi wrote “Lament Everlasting” in 806. Chiu, *Between the World*, 501.

⁴ Bai Juyi was well-known for writing using colloquial language so that his poems were accessible to average people.

novel's protagonist represents an ideal of beauty that was of a particular time and space, the ideal of the "*Shanghai Xiaojie*" that developed in Shanghai in the Republican period. "*Shanghai Xiaojie*" is a broad term that can be translated as "Shanghai girl" and "Miss Shanghai". In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi is picking up a series of themes that had been ignored by the Chinese literary community for nearly fifty years, themes that had been previously explored by the Republican era-author Zhang Ailing. Described as a *Shanghai Xiaojie*, and as representing the ideal of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*, Wang Qiyao is Wang Anyi's late twentieth century embodiment of the theme of the ill-fated beauty. In this chapter, I will examine previous Wang Anyi works arguing that her earlier works led to Lament Everlasting. Shanghai's role in Lament Everlasting is also examined.

Chapter two is an examination of the cultural geography of Republican Shanghai, the culture that created the character of Wang Qiyao. In this section, the special nature of the Shanghai cityscape in the Chinese popular imagination is explored by drawing on ideas presented by Yingjin Zhang and Leo Ou-fan Lee. Both authors have written on the character of the city of Shanghai, a character that has been personified as a woman and is linked to modernity.

In chapter three, Wang Qiyao is explored as representing an ideal character, the "*Shanghai Xiaojie*", a person specific to this city and this era. It will be demonstrated that Wang Anyi draws on such Republican period cultural icons as the tragic actress Ruan Lingyu and the singer and actress Zhou Xuan to illuminate her "*Xiaojie*".

In chapter four, the relationship between Wang Anyi and the Republican era author Zhang Ailing will be explored to further cement the novel as a work 'Shanghainese' in body and theme. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi writes in a

manner that hearkens back to the writing of Zhang Ailing. This is noteworthy because Zhang Ailing's work had been ignored for many years by the Chinese literary establishment.

By choosing to call her novel Lament Everlasting, a title that draws a direct line to Bai Juyi's famous poem, Wang Anyi suggests a particular reading for the novel. She invokes the iconography of Bai Juyi's poem, setting the stage for discussion of the novel around the idea of *hongyan boming*, a Chinese term that refers to the idea that beautiful women suffer unhappy lives. Wang Anyi is linking her contemporary beauty, Wang Qiyao, to a long line of distinguished beautiful women who are seen as having brought disaster to the men who have loved them.

On the surface the poem relates the tragic love story between the Tang Emperor Minghuang and his concubine Yang Guifei.⁵ The poem's subtext, however, is the story of Lady Li, a woman whose beauty became known as 'devastating'. Lady Li was the favourite consort of the Emperor Wu of the Han.⁶ "Devastating beauty" refers to the line from the Li Yannian (died 85 BC) poem about his sister Lady Li: "With a smile, she causes the collapse of a city, smiling again, she causes the collapse of a kingdom."⁷

Like Yang Guifei, Wang Qiyao's only capital is her beauty. For both women, their beauty alone determines their fate. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi examines this theme by relating the life story of Wang Qiyao, a beauty-pageant winner in 1940's Shanghai, whose beauty brings her fame, but ultimately leads to her demise.

⁵ In his poem, Bai Juyi refers to the Han dynasty to avoid offending the Tang Emperor.

⁶ Chiu, *Between the world*, 514.

⁷ Chiu, *Between the world*, 504.

Wang Anyi: A Shanghai Writer

One of the most popular and celebrated female authors in China today, Wang Anyi holds an important place among Chinese literati.⁸ Bonnie S. McDougall describes her as “one of the most prominent Chinese woman authors to emerge in the last decades of the twentieth century.”⁹ Wang Anyi began writing in the late 1970s and soon achieved considerable fame and recognition. She has written novellas, screenplays, short stories and essays, and has also been chairwoman of the Shanghai Writers’ Association.¹⁰ As a testament to her important position in the Chinese literary world, in October 2001, Wang Anyi was awarded the prestigious Mao Dun Prize for Literature for Lament Everlasting.¹¹

Wang Anyi was born in 1954 in Nanjing, but was raised in Shanghai, in a lane off Huaihai Road, Shanghai’s wealthiest and most prestigious street.¹² She had a privileged childhood, as both of her parents were well connected.¹³ Her father, Wang Xiaoping, was a writer and a stage director, and her mother Ru Zhijuan was a celebrated writer whose short story, “Lilies,” is one of the best-known Chinese short stories of the mid

⁸ *China Daily* (1/2/02), “*Lament Everlasting* on best sellers list last year.”

⁹ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2003, 96.

¹⁰ *China Daily* (12/25/01), “Top Writers tell stories of literary life.”

¹¹ Awarded to four authors every four years, it shows her standing in the contemporary Chinese literary world. The other books that received the award were *Choice* by Zhang Ping, *The End* by A Lai, and *A Trilogy on Charen* by Wang Xufeng. The award was announced on October 19, 2001. The prestigious nature of the award is shown by the August 12, 2002 *China Daily* article where Jin Bo compares the Lao She literary award to the Mao Dun award writing, “Compared with other awards in China, such as the Mao Dun and Lu Xun literary awards, it is somewhat inferior in terms of influence and size.” The Mao Dun award is China’s major literary award.

¹² Huaihai Road is located in the heart of the French Concession and was formerly known as Avenue Joffre.

¹³ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, Beijing, China: Panda Books, 1997, 255.

twentieth century.¹⁴ Growing up in her family gave her a keen sense of “the delicate relationship between writers, intellectuals, and the state.”¹⁵

Wang Anyi’s peaceful adolescence ended dramatically when the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966. In a mass exodus, urban youth moved to the Chinese countryside, as Mao Zedong dictated that young people go to the Chinese countryside to ‘learn from the peasants’. For the next few years Wang Anyi lived in Anhui province. In 1972 she was able to join the Xuzhou District Theatre Group in Jiangsu as a cello player and end her sojourn as a peasant. Her experiences in the performing arts provided material for her writing, and in 1978, she was transferred back to Shanghai to become an editor of Childhood (*Shaonian Wenyi*) magazine. Two years later the publication of her short story “And the Rain Patters On” (*Yu Sha Sha Sha*) brought her national recognition as a writer. Like many of her later stories, “And the Rain Patters On” incorporated her personal history, her notion of class difference and her highly individualized sense of self into a compelling narrative. Since 1980 she has been a very prolific and influential writer.

The Road to Lament Everlasting: An Examination of Some of Wang Anyi’s Previously Published Texts

While experimenting with numerous writing styles, Wang Anyi has explored many different themes. As the following analysis of some of her texts demonstrates, Lament Everlasting is the culmination of themes she has been exploring since beginning

¹⁴ Ru Zhijuan rose to fame in the 1950s. Her success is rare and significant, as at the time there were very few female writers. “Lilies” has been widely anthologized. See Ru Zhijuan, *Lilies and Other Stories*, Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1988.

¹⁵ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors*, 96.

to write. My analysis is limited in scope¹⁶ and I have chosen to concentrate on several key themes: Shanghai is the centre of China; class is an inescapable part of life; there is a relationship between female beauty, youth and power; personal politics are more important than national politics; and fashion is a metaphor for modernity. Additionally most of her stories tend to take place in small spaces with a sense of confinement and much of the narrative takes place inside her characters' minds.

Wang Anyi's first published story, "And the Rain Patters On", contains many of the characteristic elements that make up Wang Anyi's body of work. As in later writings by Wang Anyi, the plot is simple, but contains within it many resonant themes. The story is a series of flashbacks in which the reader learns that ten years previously Wenwen, the protagonist, had accepted a bicycle ride home one rainy night from a stranger. The ride home revealed to her the potential for magic in the world, yet ten years later she is alone, having spurned the attempts of her family to arrange a match for her.

In the story, there is very little action – the story is simply a collection of reminiscences that take place inside Wenwen's head. The monolithic, urban nature of Shanghai is contrasted by juxtaposing the benevolent peasant on the bicycle – he is representative of the qualities of life found in the countryside. Wenwen, an urban youth who has returned from the countryside, has an ambivalent relationship with Shanghai that manifests itself in her attitude toward fashion. Unlike other returning students, she cares little for it: "All of Wenwen's old classmates who have returned to Shanghai from the countryside with her have been quick to perm their hair and step into high heels."¹⁷ This attitude also demonstrated a sense of independence. Wang Anyi believes we are all

¹⁶ Though Wang Anyi has also written essays and a screenplay, the following analysis is limited to short stories and novellas that have been translated into English.

¹⁷ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 27.

individuals with individual dreams, dreams that are beyond the public realm. In 1980, this story contrasted with other stories being published by virtue of its focus on the individual rather than the collective.

Wang Anyi's "Life in a Small Courtyard" (1980),¹⁸ describes several days in the life of members of a stage troupe, and is clearly semi-autobiographical, as Wang Anyi spent time living in a similar setting. The characters in the story live in close quarters and are very involved in each other's lives. In "Life in a Small Courtyard" the dominant theme involves romantic love and matrimonial relationships, and the author proposes that love is more important than money or personal comfort. This story shows Wang Anyi's attention to the concept of class, as the two main male characters A'Ping and Huang Jian are described as class opposites.

Wang Anyi's notion of class is different from the Maoist idea of class. In the Maoist framework, to be a worker (or a peasant) is the best, while scholars (and artists) are lower in worth. Wang Anyi's notion of class is based around refinement, and is the converse of the Maoist class model. Wang Anyi sees intellectuals and artists as having the 'most class'. Bonnie S. McDougall describes Wang Anyi as an author who "shows no self-doubt about the role and values of intellectuals in society."¹⁹

Therefore in the story, A'Ping, an artist from Shanghai, is more desirable to the protagonist Song Song than Huang Jian, the affluent son of a Party official. Song Song chooses wealth in culture over wealth in finances. As in "And the Rain Patters On", in the short story "Life in a Small Courtyard", Wang Anyi suggests that Shanghai is the source for China's cultured individuals.

¹⁸ Originally published in *Fiction Quarterly* 1980 No. 4. The first English translation was published in *Chinese Literature* 1983 No. 9.

¹⁹ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors*, 63.

These themes are further developed in the short story, “The Base of the Wall”. Published in 1981 and one of Wang Anyi’s best-known works, “The Base of the Wall” is the story of two children from opposite sides of a Shanghai lane who, against the odds, befriend each other. The story is powerful in its theme of the basic humanity that can transcend political prejudice even in times of hardship or societal crisis. In “The Base of the Wall”, the two sides of the wall represent the two basic classes of society, the ‘haves’ living in Lane 501, and the ‘have-nots’ living in Lane 499. The story concludes on a discouraging note with, “The base of the wall is still there, entrenched. Almost an inch high, it sticks up from the ground in stubborn silence.”²⁰ Even though many political changes have occurred in the time that has passed, the same divisions in society remain.

“The Destination,”²¹ published in 1981, is another short story set in Shanghai. In the text, Shanghai is ‘the destination’ for a group of returning students who had been ‘sent down’ to the Chinese countryside during the Cultural Revolution. The protagonist Chen Xin returns to Shanghai after ten years in the countryside. The story is full of the trials that returning students faced attempting to re-assimilate into their previous lives. Passages such as “You Shanghainese can’t survive away from Shanghai,”²² “Shanghai’s progress and superiority,”²³ and “the department stores were full of all kinds of goods and people dressed in the latest fashions. Clean, elegant restaurants. New films at the cinemas. Shanghai represented what was new in China,”²⁴ paint a picture of Shanghai as

²⁰ *Chinese Literature*, 1983 No. 9., 124.

²¹ Originally published in *Shanghai Literature (Shanghai Wenxue)* 1981 No. 10. Also published in *Chinese Literature* Autumn 1984

²² Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 2

²³ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 3.

²⁴ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 3.

a modern urban space, exceptional in the Chinese landscape, independent and remote from the countryside.

Wang Anyi's 1982 novella "Lapse of Time" is the story of one Shanghai family and their experiences through the Cultural Revolution. Duanli, the protagonist, is married to Wenyao, a rich merchant's son. During the Cultural Revolution, the family is labelled 'Capitalist' and forced to live like paupers. Because of poverty, Duanli has many novel experiences supporting her family as a nanny – a wet nurse raised her own children. Told through the eyes of Duanli, the text continues Wang Anyi's exploration of the theme of time passing, as Wang Anyi examines social continuity through political change. Passages such as "They had now come full circle, for the place was exactly the same as before the Cultural Revolution,"²⁵ and "Time does not simply vanish without a trace; it always leaves something behind. Having everything restored to the way it was before the Cultural Revolution was impossible,"²⁶ show this theme. The Cultural Revolution was a time when Chinese society was supposed to have destroyed class barriers, yet in the story, everyone remains acutely aware of their class. Duanli, though forced to work in a factory and as a nanny, remains refined and cultured, in contrast to the working classes who seem pitiable in the story.

The supremacy of Shanghai and the importance of lineage and class in Chinese society are further developed in "The Stage, A Miniature World." Published in 1983, the story is like "Life in a Small Courtyard," in that it uses the world of the cultural troupe to examine the larger world. In the story, a theatre troupe wrestles with the question of

²⁵ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 246.

²⁶ Wang Anyi, *Lapse of Time*, 250.

whether to maintain the old ways or whether to modernize. An omniscient narrator relates the power struggles that occur within the troupe as the members vie for command. With a nod to the theme of time passing, continuity and social change, the end of the story finds the new director in the same position the old director had been in. In this sense the story is allegorical, as the “miniature world” of the stage is really Chinese society in the early reform period, a time when all parts of society had to deal with the end of the socialist social welfare system. Post-1949 Chinese society is supposed to be a society where all are equal but the reality is very different. Strong class-consciousness, rural-urban stress and an intense awareness of being an intellectual or a peasant remain. In Communist society, peasants have been mythologized as heroes, and intellectuals have been cast under suspicion. In “The Stage, a Miniature World,” these characterizations are played out.

Continuing Wang Anyi’s examination of time and the contrast between tradition and modernity, is the 1984 short story “Speaking of Old Bing”.²⁷ Wang Anyi’s concern with the passage of time remains, though the story explores different themes. Written in a slightly ‘tongue-in-cheek’ manner, the text is about an accountant, Old Bing, who has been working at the same publishing house for many years. Some of his faults, including being overly thrifty and having a very dogmatic nature, eventually come to be perceived as virtues within the organization. “Speaking of Old Bing” shows Wang Anyi’s strong belief that time may pass, but people remain essentially unchanged. Further to this is Wang Anyi’s belief that personal politics are more important than national politics –

²⁷ The English translation was first published in *Chinese Literature* Autumn 1989

Bing's character survives intact the macro-cultural changes that occurred during his working life.

Beginning in 1986, Wang Anyi began a series of works that explored romantic love. This represented a new direction for Wang Anyi, as these stories did not take place in Shanghai and did not focus on many of the themes she had used previously. Between 1986 and 1987, she wrote three stories, "Love on a Barren Mountain,"²⁸ "Love in a Small Town,"²⁹ and "Love in a Brocade Valley,"³⁰ which made up a collection known as the "Three Loves" (*San lian*). The stories seem as if they could happen anywhere at any time. The main characters are nameless and there are few narrative details to set the stories in specific locales. The common thread between the three stories is that each is a story of passion and obsession. When these controversial stories were published, Wang Anyi was unusual in presenting relationships that were outside the Chinese norm, and she was criticized for writing so openly about sexual relationships.³¹ All of the characters in these stories wrestle with love and sexuality and none of them choose the conventional path. The plots of these stories are similar and they have similar themes. However, the narrative voice is very different in the three stories. In her *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences*, Bonnie S. McDougall discusses how, in particular in the "Love in a Small Town" and in "Love in Brocade Valley", the narrative voices are different. In "Love in a Small Town", Wang Anyi remains extremely detached from her protagonist, while in

²⁸ First published in *Shiyue* 1986 No. 4

²⁹ First published in *Shanghai Wenxue* 1986 No. 8

³⁰ Published in *Zhongshan* 1987 No. 1

³¹ Patricia Sieber, Ed., *Red is Not the Only Colour, Contemporary Chinese Fiction on Love and Sex Between Women, Collected Stories*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, 8

“Love in Brocade Valley”, the narrator and protagonist are closely intertwined, even becoming one at points in the story.³²

The first of the trilogy, “Love on a Barren Mountain,” is a love story that tells the tale of an obsession that leads to infidelity and a double-suicide by the lovers. The story has two narrative strands that meet in the last half of the novella. The nameless protagonists’ lives become intertwined when they begin an affair that leads to their demise. The female, the daughter of a prostitute, is known as “the Girl from Golden Corn Lane”. An outsider from the time she was born, she is described as a beautiful woman who uses her beauty to manipulate the men around her. Married, she nonetheless becomes enamoured of the male protagonist when he begins working at the same cultural bureau. A quiet man who plays the cello magically, he has also lived much of his life as an outsider. Soon after they meet they fall in love and become obsessed with each other. Even after the woman’s husband becomes physically abusive, the two lovers keep meeting. The story ends with the two lovers committing suicide on a ‘barren mountain’. The “Girl from Golden Corn Lane” is Wang Anyi’s first ‘ill-fated beauty’. Like Wang Qiyao, the “Girl from Golden Corn Lane” is able to use her beauty to gain power over men. At the same time, her beauty ultimately leads to her death at an early age.

Where “Love on a Barren Mountain” explores obsessive adulterous love, “Love in a Brocade Valley” explores unconsummated love. The female protagonist is in an unhappy marriage. She and her husband no longer have any passion between them. A book editor, she is sent by her company to attend a Writer’s Conference. While there she meets another man and, for a brief time, feels alive again. They kiss each other and

³² For a complete discussion of the differing narrative voices in the two stories, see Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences*, 95-113.

promise to meet again some day. Soon after returning home, she realises that home is her reality and the fleeting kiss was just a dream. The story is powerful because she has the tryst, and rather than leading to disaster, her life is made more bearable. This story was especially controversial as the heroine was able to transgress dominant societal norms without suffering major consequences. As Patricia Sieber writes, neither lover “pays with their lives [his or her life] or in any other way for their erotic transgression”.³³

“Love in a Small Town” is the story of two teenagers who become clandestinely involved in a sexual relationship. Their obsessive relationship ends when the woman becomes pregnant. She elects to remain alone and, after the birth of her twins, she finds freedom from the sexual obsession and salvation in motherhood. The male finds no such freedom and spends his days tormenting his new wife and gambling. This text describes in minute detail the stages involved in falling in love. Wang Anyi relates the story in a detached manner that keeps the reader at a distance.³⁴ Wang Anyi’s handling of premarital sexual relations and the ultimate consequences borne by the two characters show her belief in the resilience of the female spirit. This is evident, as the female protagonist finds peace in raising her children, while the male protagonist remains tortured.

As shown, Wang Anyi’s ‘three love stories’ offered a fresh approach to the dynamics of relations between men and women. In each of the stories, Wang Anyi explored a different type of relationship than was normally discussed in contemporary

³³ Patricia Sieber, Ed. *Red is Not the Only Colour*, 8.

³⁴ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors*, 98. McDougall writes that Wang Anyi, as the observer-narrator, seems to be “charting a medical history of a deformed subject on the basis of personal observation, the reactions of the subject’s acquaintances, and the privileged witness into the subject’s mental states.”

Chinese literature. The stories are powerful in their originality and in their treatment of individual life choices.

“Brothers” (*Dixiongmen*), published in 1989, was another controversial work that dealt with sexuality and gender relations. The novella is about three women who relate to each other in a manner that suggests gender relations are not clear. Patricia Sieber, the editor of Red is Not the Only Colour, an anthology of contemporary Chinese fiction, writes, “Wang Anyi’s ‘Brothers’ situates the quest for ‘women’ and ‘self’ in the rhetoric of kinship.”³⁵ The story is divided into two parts and covers the protagonists’ transition from their lives as students to more settled life in middle age. In the first part, they are all young and living together as college roommates. They call each other ‘brother’ and their loyalty is to each other rather than to their husbands and families. In the second part of the story, conflict ensues when the women have to choose whether to be loyal to their friends or to their immediate families. Patricia Sieber provides an analysis of the central conflict of the story when she writes, “The first family (father, mother, and child) is a material identity, grounded in sex, a patrilineal and shared daily drudgery. The second family (the mother, the child and godmother) is a spiritual unit, revolving around deep feelings, endless conversations, joint art projects, and shared vacations.”³⁶

Published a few years later, in 1992, “Miao Miao,”³⁷ is a short story that explores the ephemeral nature of youth and beauty. Set in the village of Toupujie, the story is about Miao Miao, a beautiful young sixteen year-old whose fate is determined by her beauty. Described as “proud and ambitious”,³⁸ she works in a guesthouse. In the short

³⁵ Patricia Sieber, Ed. *Red is Not the Only Colour*, 23.

³⁶ Patricia Sieber, Ed. *Red is Not the Only Colour*, 24.

³⁷ The first English translation was published in *Chinese Literature* Spring 1992.

³⁸ Wang Anyi, “Miao Miao”, *Chinese Literature* Spring 1992, 20.

story, Miao Miao's self esteem is destroyed after she is sexually assaulted by a visiting Beijing actor. She becomes involved with a succession of different men, and her ruin is sealed. In this way, the promise of a bright future is destroyed. Miao Miao is an example of *hongyan boming*. Her beauty does not lead to her early death, but it does act as a catalyst for her downfall.

All of these stories pave the way for Wang Anyi's novel Lament Everlasting. From her earliest short stories to her later works, she has remained interested in class dynamics, relations between men and women, the passage of time, and the city of Shanghai.³⁹

Lament Everlasting

Lament Everlasting represents a further exploration of many of the themes Wang Anyi has addressed in earlier works. However, unlike the earlier works discussed above, it is a full-length novel, and is set further in the past. Divided into three parts, Lament Everlasting chronicles the relationships in Wang Qiyao's life. Part one of the novel sets the stage with a long descriptive passage about the city of Shanghai. The year is 1946 and Wang Anyi introduces the transitory nature of the city of Shanghai in this way: "The brightness of this Paris of the East exists only because it is set on darkness. This condition has lasted for several decades. Currently everything appears old and little by little reveals its true nature."⁴⁰ After establishing the character of Shanghai, Wang Anyi introduces her protagonist, Wang Qiyao. She is described as a young woman who is typical of the young women who are from Shanghai's lanes.

³⁹ The city of Shanghai was present in most of the works discussed.

⁴⁰ Wang Anyi, *Chang he ge*, Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1996, 4.

A young and beautiful sixteen year-old from a lower-middle class family, Wang Qiyao is a product of Shanghai's *longtang* (lanes or alleys). Following a visit to a film-studio, her life changes dramatically - "This forty-year story began from the day they went to the studio."⁴¹ Though her screen test is judged inadequate, the director takes her photograph and it later appears on the cover of Shanghai Shenghuo, a periodical. Wang Qiyao enters a beauty contest and is crowned "*Shanghai Xiaojie Di San*" (Miss Shanghai, Number Three).⁴² In this way, she is catapulted into the public sphere, entering the world of celebrity and film.

Wang Qiyao's ascent to notoriety continues when she becomes the mistress of a Guomindang official, Director Li, a man described as one of the wealthiest men in Shanghai. Wang Qiyao becomes his concubine and moves into one of his buildings. Unfortunately, soon after he perishes in a plane crash. It is 1948 and Wang Qiyao is nineteen years old. Ignored and isolated, Wang Qiyao is increasingly unhappy. After visiting with friends, Wang Qiyao realises that perhaps she will be the only 'Xiaojie' left – everyone else is marrying.

The second part of the novel begins after the 1949 Communist takeover of Shanghai, with Wang Qiyao retreating to the countryside around Shanghai. While in the country, Wang Qiyao has a short-lived romance, this time with A'Er, a student who is living in the village where Wang seeks refuge. A'Er relates love to the images of classical literature and reads poetry to Wang Qiyao, including Bai Juyi's "Lament Everlasting". The theme of the novel, *hongyan boming*, is stated in this section:

⁴¹ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 24.

⁴² Wang Anyi *Chang hen ge*, 66. Wang Anyi writes that number three is the best because it is the most real. 'San xiaojie qishi zui tixian minyi.'

“Beautiful ladies live unhappy lives.”⁴³ They spend a period together, but ultimately the relationship fails because she is not a scholar and because of the two characters’ ‘class’ bias. Wang Qiyao is uneducated and urban; A’Er is an educated student. A’Er finally leaves Wang Qiyao. When Wang Qiyao realizes that he will not return, she returns to Shanghai. It seems that Wang Qiyao is a child of Shanghai and she returns to her world.

The final part of the novel is set in post-Cultural Revolution Shanghai and tells the story of Wang Qiyao in her final years. Wang Anyi describes the salon world that develops around Wang Qiyao’s ‘kitchen’. Various characters join together to play mahjong and while away the days. Wang Qiyao has relationships with Kang Mingxun, a man who is the son of a concubine of a former comprador, and Sasha, a man described as half-Russian and unemployed. Wang Qiyao captivates Kang Mingxun, because he sees her as a link to Shanghai’s former cosmopolitan world. Wang and Kang’s affair is brief, as both are aware that a relationship between the two is not possible because of the different worlds that each inhabits. Though pregnant with Kang’s child, Wang Qiyao begins a relationship with Sasha. Following their brief affair, Sasha returns to Russia. Once more political events are a catalyst in Wang Qiyao’s fortune. Following the death of Mao Zedong she becomes ‘in vogue’ once again and enjoys some fame. However the novel concludes with her untimely murder by a criminal (Long Legs) who is after her rumoured wealth.

⁴³ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 141. Quoted in Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allegories in Wang Anyi’s Literary Production in the 1990s”, in *positions* 8:2 Duke University Press, 2000, 379.

The Importance of Shanghai in Wang Anyi's Lament Everlasting

Lament Everlasting begins with a description of a Shanghai alleyway at dusk. The Shanghai in Lament Everlasting is mainly the Shanghai of *longtang* – the little lanes and alleyways that make up the city neighbourhoods. As the following description shows, Wang Anyi is not writing about the Shanghai of the foreign concessions, she is concerned with the dynamic Chinese city composed of the *longtang*.

Life in Shanghai's lanes is characterized by a lack of space and by rampant gossip. In this world, women who are famous, who are beautiful, or who achieve notoriety, are subject to gossip. The Chinese word for gossip is *liuyan*, a term which means free-floating words.⁴⁴ In Lament Everlasting Wang Anyi writes that, "Gossip is the medium by which the Shanghai dwellers communicate and relate to one another".⁴⁵

The city of Shanghai has a dual role in Lament Everlasting. As shown, the city of Shanghai provides the backdrop for the story. However, Shanghai also acts as a 'mirror' to Wang Qiyao. In Lament Everlasting, the fate of Shanghai is the fate of Wang Qiyao. Her life follows the path of Chinese history with its cycles of success and decline. As Xudong Zhang writes, "running throughout" the novel "is the entanglement and intertwining of the images of a woman and the images of the city, to the extent that the two become inseparable, even indistinguishable."⁴⁶ The effect is that "the admiration and love of both men and women for Wang Qiyao" becomes "an aestheticized, sometimes eroticized homage they pay to the city and its particular past."⁴⁷

The city prospers and withers with the heroine: in her humble background, her five-minute glamour in the limelight, and her willing possession by the

⁴⁴ *Liuyan* is also the title of a short story written by Zhang Ailing.

⁴⁵ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 374.

⁴⁶ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 376.

⁴⁷ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 376.

powerful; in her undeceivable sense of life's persistent treachery, which contributes to both her calculated struggle for security and her submission to fate; in her impeccable command of details and her unfailing ability to charm; in her glamourless survival as a part-time nurse in the "new society"; in her bizarre reunion with diehard Shanghai lovers of different periods (who seek the former Miss Shanghai [*Shanghai Xiaojie*] in their quest for the residual evidence of the bygone era); and in her reluctant, unthinkably slow but nonetheless irreversible process of aging in what she considers a coarse environment.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Lament Everlasting is a biography of Wang Qiyao, but it is also a novel about an image of femininity. In this novel, Wang Anyi is drawing on and reviving an earlier tradition of literature which glorified the women of Shanghai, and in particular the courtesans of Shanghai.⁴⁹ As Gail Hershatter writes, "Stories of individual courtesans – as objects of admiration, disapproval, or vicarious adventure and danger – were a staple of urban Shanghai life."⁵⁰ Works such as Han Bangqing's (1856-1894) Flowers of Shanghai helped create the mythology around Shanghai, as it celebrated the sensual visual world of Shanghai's courtesan houses.⁵¹ Literature about courtesans created icons for the urban readers and taught about proper female behaviour.⁵² Like the hyper-glorification of female stars in contemporary society, the Xiaojie's cosmopolitan image attracted an enormous amount of interest and pride.

The 1949 Communist Revolution changed everything. Following the Revolution, literary culture changed in China. For the first few decades of Communist rule, between

⁴⁸ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 376.

⁴⁹ Works such as "Sing Song Girls of Shanghai" helped to mythologize the women of Shanghai. See Zhang Ailing, trans., Han Pangqing, "Sing Song Girls of Shanghai," in Liu Cunyan, ed., *Chinese Middlebrow Fiction, From the Ch'ing and Early Republican Eras*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1984, 95-110.

⁵⁰ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 164.

⁵¹ Gang Gary Xue, "Flowers of Shanghai: Visualising Ellipses and (Colonial) Absence" in Chris Berry, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus, 25 New Takes*, 104.

⁵² Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 164.

the advent of Communist China and the death of Mao Zedong, writers wrote within the confines of a state apparatus that controlled all literary production, as authors “returned to state employment through the educational and cultural bureaucracy.”⁵³ All literature had to promote the ideals of the Communist Party. With the fall of the Gang of Four and Deng Xiaoping’s slight relaxing of controls, authors began to explore new themes. However, until the end of the twentieth century, writers could not write texts with *Xiaojies* as heroines. By writing a novel about a Shanghai woman whose fame rests on her beauty, Wang Anyi challenged the dominant trend and reached back to themes explored in the Republican period and earlier.

At the same time, the novel is current in its subject matter. Lament Everlasting is infused with a sense of nostalgia. In modern day Shanghai, nostalgia is everywhere. The city of Shanghai has undergone huge changes, with much of the cityscape altered in the past ten years. Many old districts have disappeared due to construction and many city residents now experience melancholy for the old districts. At the same time, Shanghai residents feel pride as Shanghai reasserts its place as a great city in China. This nostalgia for the 1920s and 1930s has become a common theme for urban Chinese writers and Wang Anyi’s novel fits into this genre.

As discussed earlier, Lament Everlasting is the title of both a Tang poem and of Wang Anyi’s novel. Bai Juyi’s poem “Lament Everlasting,” written in the late-Tang period, presented the idea of the ‘ill-fated beauty’ while relating the unfortunate fate of Yang Guifei. Wang Anyi’s Lament Everlasting is a re-working of this classical theme. Written in the mid-nineties by one of the most well established literary figures in modern China, it is a work of literary beauty that is full of textual and inter-textual references to

⁵³ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Fictional Authors*, 3.

the theme of the ‘ill-fated beauty’. Xudong Zhang describes Lament Everlasting in the following terms:

On one hand, the novel is an elegy for withering beauty, a recurring theme in classical Chinese literature immortalized by the long poem (from which the novel borrows its title) about the love-and-death story of the Ming emperor of the Tang dynasty and his beloved concubine, Yang Yuhuan, written by the great eighth-century Chinese poet Bai Juyi (Po Chu-I). On the other hand, it is a saga of modern Shanghai told ruthlessly and meticulously from the viewpoint of a class living in the heart of the dreams, fantasies, and everyday rituals of a Shanghai that ceased to exist after 1949.⁵⁴

The following chapter provides an examination of the cultural geography of Republican Shanghai, a confluence of time and space that created Wang Qiyao, Wang Anyi’s *Shanghai Xiaojie*.

⁵⁴ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia”, 369.

Chapter Two:

Birthplace of Wang Qiyao: An Exploration of the Cultural Geography of Republican Shanghai

Introduction

Night Shanghai, night Shanghai,
 A City that never sleeps,
 Neon lights glowing,
 Car horns blaring,
 Singing and dancing in blissful oblivion.
 Look at her –
 Smiling face so welcoming,
 Who knows her sorrow and frustration?
 Leading a night life,
 Paying for clothing, food, and housing.
 Getting drunk without alcohol,
 Wasting youth recklessly.
 Dawn arriving brings drowsiness,
 Eyes heavy with sleep.
 Everyone heading for home,
 The heart churning with the turning wheels,
 Making a change to a new world,
 Getting to a new environment,
 Pondering the life of nights gone by,
 As if waking from a dream.⁵⁵

Republican Shanghai's cosmopolitan nature is celebrated in the late Republican era popular song "Night Shanghai" ("*Ye Shanghai*"). Isabel K. F. Wong, in her study of popular song in Republican Shanghai, writes that, "the song 'Night Shanghai' with its kaleidoscopic portrayal of Shanghai's sights, sounds, and people, came to be an important cultural symbol of Shanghai, helping to shape the mythology of this modern

⁵⁵ Isabel K. F. Wong, "The Incantation of Shanghai: Singing a City into Existence" in *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia*, Edited by Timothy J. Craig and Richard King, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002, 246.

metropolis.”⁵⁶ Originally recorded in the 1930s, “Night Shanghai” was the signature song of Zhou Xuan, the most renowned singer of the era.⁵⁷ “Night Shanghai” was the “most famous and enduring hit of the 1930s and 40s Shanghai”,⁵⁸ and it remains a powerful cultural symbol of Republican Shanghai.⁵⁹

Markers of urban modernity such as neon lights, dance halls, and car horns create the image of a city that is modern and part of the “new world”. However, the dominant metaphor in the song is the image of the taxi-dance girl. The world described in “Night Shanghai” is a glamorous world where courtesans dart about in the night, and the city never sleeps. At the same time, “Night Shanghai” writes of the pathos that afflicts the life of taxi-dance girls.

Shanghai has often been imagined as feminine and linked with the female body. This relationship is also intertwined with ideas about money and modernity. In his book The City in Modern China, Yingjin Zhang explores the imagery around the cities of Beijing and Shanghai. His chapters discussing Shanghai, and the way Shanghai is perceived in the popular imagination, focus on how Shanghai is inevitably linked with the feminine body and with modernity. Zhang discusses Han Bangqing’s Sing Song Girls of Shanghai, and Mao Dun’s Midnight, in order to provide evidence of how Shanghai is linked with the feminine in literature. He also examines the film A New Year’s Coin to show how time is also different in Shanghai. He concludes that “Shanghai is a modern metropolis where individuals repeatedly fall prey to desires for money and woman... and

⁵⁶ Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 248.

⁵⁷ Zhou Xuan will be discussed later in my paper.

⁵⁸ Isabel K.F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 246.

⁵⁹ As Wong writes in her text, the song was used as a backdrop in news footage of the former US President Bill Clinton’s 1998 visit to Shanghai.

where tradition inevitably yields to sea changes in the age of modernity.”⁶⁰ Zhang concludes that, “To an urban adventurer of the period, Shanghai was invariably gendered as female.”⁶¹

Xudong Zhang also explores how Shanghai is imagined in an article about Shanghai nostalgia. He writes that in China, Shanghai represents “an experience of a modernity dwelling on the material, social, and everyday culture of the city lived by autonomous individuals, as opposed to an intellectual project or political scheme, the mass mobilization and voluntarism or revolution and socialism.”⁶²

This identity of Shanghai is explored in Wang Anyi’s novel Lament Everlasting largely through Wang Qiyao. Republican era Shanghai was Shanghai’s golden age, when the city resembled a beautiful young woman with the promise of a bright future ahead of her. In the novel, Wang Anyi relates the tale of Wang Qiyao, a woman who, like the taxi-dance girls in “Night Shanghai”, is defined in relation to the city of Shanghai. Wang Anyi draws on cultural icons and symbols from Republican Shanghai in order to illuminate her protagonist’s life through forty years of Shanghai’s history. Like the city of Shanghai, Wang Qiyao glows in the Republican period and fades during the following decades.

Though Lament Everlasting spans four decades, its central image is of Shanghai in the 1940s. Wang Qiyao is the embodiment of Republican Shanghai, and therefore the focus of this chapter is Shanghai in the Republican period. Throughout this chapter, whenever Shanghai is mentioned, unless specified otherwise, it is Republican Shanghai

⁶⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film. Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996, 139.

⁶¹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 181.

⁶² Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 354.

that is being discussed.

Shanghai's Modern History (1842-Republican period)

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing brought an end to the First Opium War (1839-1842) and greatly affected Shanghai's development. The treaty forced the defeated Chinese government to accept provisions that included the opening of five treaty ports in China, one of which was in Shanghai. Treaty ports provided for locales within existing cities where foreigners were granted space to live (albeit on leased land) and trade. Within these enclaves extraterritoriality was practised. This meant that foreign citizens living in Shanghai were governed by their home country's laws, rather than by Chinese laws.⁶³ Though extraterritoriality was practiced, Shanghai, as a whole, was never a colony of any of the Western powers. Shanghai remained part of China. Unlike the British and French colonies in India and Africa, where foreign powers took over all government operations, in Shanghai, the foreign powers had some powers, but they were far from all encompassing. Though Western authority was "legally recognized in the concession treaties ...it was also conveniently ignored by the Chinese residents in their daily lives".⁶⁴ This was because Western colonialism in China was not a 'total system', but rather a system that operated parallel to the Chinese government. One example of how this affected life may be found in the arts. Unlike the case in India or Africa, where writers

⁶³ The Chinese proposed extra-territoriality in their negotiations with Western powers. From John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China A New History*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998.

⁶⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern, The Flowering of New Urban Culture in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 308.

and artists wrote in the foreign rulers' language, in China, writers continued to write in Chinese.⁶⁵

By the turn of the century, Shanghai had become a melting pot and was called such names as 'Paris of the East', 'Capital of the Tycoon', 'Hollywood of Asia', 'Paradise of Asia' and 'Whore of Asia.'⁶⁶ Viewed as a new frontier full of possibilities, Shanghai's streets teemed with people from Europe, North America, Africa, India, and other parts of Asia. Apart from economic and cultural 'pulls', political instability in other countries also 'pushed' migration. One example of this is the great number of Russian immigrants, known as 'White Russians', who arrived in Shanghai by the thousands following the Russian Revolution.

Shanghai became perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world. According to Leo Lee, cosmopolitanism is the idea of "locating oneself as a cultural mediator at the intersection between China and other parts of the world," and "Shanghai in the 1930s was the cosmopolitan city par excellence."⁶⁷ Yingjin Zhang agrees, writing that by the early 1940s, Shanghai "had already risen to the status of undisputed center of trade, finance, production, consumption, and entertainment in China and the leading metropolis in the Far East. Its fashion and tempo of life closely followed that of London, Paris, and New York; its daily life was linked more closely to the West than to the rest of the country to which geographically, that is to say, it accidentally, belonged. Compared with

⁶⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 310-311. The sole exception was Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang), a writer who wrote works in both Chinese and English.

⁶⁶ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1982, 1.

⁶⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 315.

Shanghai's cosmopolitan glamour and decadent excess, Tokyo was provincial, and Hong Kong was still a sleepy fishermen's village.'⁶⁸

The foreign residents living in Shanghai were collectively known as 'Shanghaiers'. They comprised a varied group made up of everything from missionaries to businessmen to prostitutes. Walking around Republican Shanghai all varieties of languages could be heard as citizens from around the world rubbed shoulders. An example of the jumble that made up Shanghai could be found on Bubbling Well Road. It was manned by Sikh policemen, and traffic flowed two ways depending on where you were on the street, as American rules applied at one end, and British rules at the other. Just as Shanghai had numerous daily papers written in languages including Chinese, English, French, Japanese and Russian, many hotels advertised that their staff was competent in at least four languages, a service prerequisite for business establishments in Shanghai.⁶⁹

As foreigners were flocking to Shanghai, domestic instability led to migration within China. Large numbers of people migrated to Shanghai because political, economic and social unrest made Shanghai appealing to Chinese residents seeking stability and new opportunities. Internal unrest in China, exacerbated by the Taiping Rebellion of 1851-1864, led to massive migrations of people from rural areas to the coastal, more urban, areas. In addition, the presence of Western industry in Shanghai was a magnet for the large number of Chinese people who were looking for employment. Furthermore, Shanghai was seen as a safe haven, as warlords were refrained from encroaching on Shanghai because of the presence of Western gunboats in the waters

⁶⁸ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 351.

⁶⁹ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 42.

around Shanghai. Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century Shanghai's population had greatly increased and the city had been transformed from a small fishing settlement to a huge cosmopolitan metropolis.

The Cityscape of Shanghai

The physical development of delineated foreign spaces within a largely Chinese community dramatically altered the face of Shanghai. Very soon after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, which led to the opening of Shanghai as a treaty port, the cityscape began its transformation into a modern urban center. As the treaty ports "became Sino-foreign cities", foreigners played an ever-larger role in China's urbanization.⁷⁰ As John K. Fairbank described, "Each treaty port centered in a foreign section newly built on the edge of a teeming Chinese city and dominated by the tall white flagstaff of Her Majesty's consulate. Its foreign institutions included the club, the racecourse and the church."⁷¹ As this description shows, treaty ports were set up to reflect the cities that foreigners had left at home.

Shanghai was divided into several distinct, largely autonomous areas that included the International Settlement (known as the "British Concession"), the French Concession (often called "Frenchtown") and the "Chinese city" (or "Old Town"). Each part of the city was set up to mirror its national group, and life varied greatly depending on which area you lived in. Even the rickshaws were different in each area, "... for around Shanghai you could tell at once, if you landed from an aeroplane, where you were

⁷⁰ Fairbank and Goldman, *China A New History*, 203.

⁷¹ Fairbank and Goldman, *China A New History*, 203.

in foreign or Chinese jurisdiction, by the condition of the rickshaws.”⁷² Within the foreign-run areas, the city resembled Western cities, and the foreign concessions had infrastructures that were very similar to those of Western cities with shaded avenues, streetlights, and electricity, running water, cars and streetcars.⁷³ Each municipality even had its own system of utilities.

Though within the International Settlement and the French Concession, Chinese and foreigners lived side by side, they lived lives very distinct from each other. As a 1920 guidebook to Shanghai wrote, “foreigners soon realize that powerful as foreign influence is, this is China and the vast overwhelming majority of people in the streets are Chinese.”⁷⁴

Each area of Shanghai had its own distinct character. In the International Settlement, life was dominated by commerce. However, the International Settlement also had libraries, the racetrack, many movie palaces, high rises and department stores. Traffic followed the British model and life was centered on the Shanghai Club. Within the French Concession, cultural life was dominated by the arts. Fuzhou Road (known as “Culture Road”)⁷⁵ had numerous bookshops, studios, and coffeehouse. The area was laid out in the French style with large tree-lined avenues. In contrast, the ‘Chinese City’, or ‘Old Town’, originally walled, was a maze of narrow winding streets with low buildings placed very close to one another. It was built around the Yuyuan Gardens with many bustling small shops, restaurants and teahouses throughout the area.

⁷² Reverend C. E. Darwent, *Shanghai: A Handbook for Travellers and Residents*, 1920; rpt. Taipei: Ch’eng Wen Publishing Company, 1973, 98.

⁷³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 7.

⁷⁴ Reverend C. E. Darwent, *Shanghai: A Handbook*, 10-12.

⁷⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 120 and Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 52. Both authors called it “Culture Road”.

'Chinese' Shanghai: The *Longtang*

During the Republican period, the average Shanghai resident lived in a type of urban landscape known as *longtang*. Three of Shanghai's four million residents lived in the *longtang*.⁷⁶ Thus, *longtang* has constituted the "dominant type of Shanghai's residential buildings for over one hundred years."⁷⁷

Longtang is the Shanghai locals' term for *lilong*. As *long* means a lane and *tang* the front room of a house, *longtang* either refers to a lane that connects houses or a group of houses connected by lanes. *Longtang* however might not be as explicit as *lilong* for the *li* in *lilong* means neighbourhood. People living in a *longtang* actually live in a neighbourhood.⁷⁸

Longtang were distinctive to Shanghai and were the result of Shanghai's unique historical conditions, in particular resulting from Shanghai's history as a treaty port. As turmoil existed in many parts of China, internal migration brought increasingly more people to Shanghai, creating a housing shortage. As a result, real estate developers constructed a large number of "temporary buildings ...modeled upon British-style residential buildings for workers in London and Manchester...buildings, each with the same structure, were arranged in rows. The space between these residential buildings was called *longtang*."⁷⁹ Houses were side-by-side, forming a wall that provided a closed community. To residents, each *longtang* was like its own village.

Longtang houses had a distinctive appearance that reflected their origin.

Longtang blended aspects of Western architecture with the special conditions found in

⁷⁶Luo Xiaowei and Wu Jiang, eds. *Shanghai Longtang*, Shanghai: Shanghai Peoples Fine Arts Publishing House, 1999, 6.

⁷⁷ Yang Yang, *Shanghai Star* July 31, 2003 from (<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/star/2003/0731/cu18-1.html>).

⁷⁸ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 366.

⁷⁹ From <http://www.china-window.com.cn/shanghai1/longtang/history/yanbian.html>. These original structures were dismantled a few years later as they were deemed a fire hazard. However, other buildings made of stone and wood were later built in the *longtang*.

Shanghai. Built in rows, the structures took up less space than traditional buildings and “made full use of the city land whose price was incredibly high”.⁸⁰ From the outside, the *longtang* houses looked like European buildings with their ornamentally carved stone gates. However, the interior of the *longtang* reflected the culture of their Chinese owners.

Originally houses in the Shanghai *longtang* had two stories built over the main floor, and averaged between one hundred and two hundred square meters in size.⁸¹ Over time the amount of living space decreased as families grew, divided and split the houses into ever-smaller spaces. Each house in the *longtang* had a kitchen, a washroom, a living room and a bedroom. Additionally, houses had a *tingzijian*, a small back room located over the kitchen, which added more living space. This *tingzijian* was often sublet to augment family income. Like ‘attic rooms’ in Europe, *tingzijian*-living became romanticized in literature of the period, as chronic poverty often forced artists and writers to take up residence in the marginal space. These writers and artists became known as *tingzijian wenren*.⁸²

Life in Shanghai’s *longtang* can be characterized by its lack of personal space. Xudong Zhang writes that, “As an architectural, social, and psychological space, the *longtang* is the embodiment of middle-class Shanghai, its privacy (or lack of it) and its material culture (or its “transcendence”); it records the ways and gestures by which this middle class shelters itself from the brutal forces of history.”⁸³ Life in the *longtang* was very intimate and yet very public. “For outsiders, entering *longtang* is like walking in a

⁸⁰ From <http://china-window.com.cn/shanghai/longtang/culture/indexe.html>.

⁸¹ From <http://www.china-window.com.cn/shanghai/longtang/history/yanbian.html>.

⁸² Yiman Wang, “*Crows and Sparrows: Allegory on a Historical Threshold*” in Chris Berry, ed. *Chinese Films in Focus, 25 New Takes*, London: The British Film Institute, 2003, 68.

⁸³ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia”, 373.

maze, for only a few passages lead residents out to the main streets. The ground floors of *longtang* buildings were usually small stores. This was a way for people living in closed *longtang* communities to connect with the outside world.⁸⁴ Privacy was rare and residents were very involved in each other's lives. Gossip was rampant and as Zhang Xudong therefore concludes, that "gossip is the medium by which the Shanghai dwellers communicate and relate to one another."⁸⁵ In Wang Anyi's words, "If the *longtang* of Shanghai could dream, its dreams would be filled with nothing but gossip."⁸⁶

At the beginning of Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi uses the device of pigeons flying over the city to create her panoramic bird's eye view of the city:

At dusk, flocks of pigeons flew around in the sky of Shanghai, looking for their nests. The roofs of the houses formed an endless duration, rolling up and down, producing a changing image of mountains and hills. From this vantage point, they were all connected into a seamless mass, without boundary, making it impossible to tell the direction ... Massive and dense, [the rooftops] looked like a wheat field, sown and harvested; they also looked like a pristine forest, living and dying by itself.⁸⁷

However, as Xudong Zhang points out, her later description of Shanghai is at the ground level, "making her narrative perspective virtually indistinguishable from that of an average Shanghai dweller."⁸⁸ In this way Wang Anyi's writing parallels the writing of Zhang Ailing's writing with its street-level perspective.⁸⁹ Wang is writing of the *longtang*, the Shanghai that the common Chinese person knew. She writes about the "spider web of modest residential lanes and buildings, the Shanghai consisting of the

⁸⁴ From <http://www.china-window.com.cn/shanghai/longtang/history/yanbian.html>.

⁸⁵ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 374.

⁸⁶ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 375.

⁸⁷ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 370.

⁸⁸ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 361.

⁸⁹ This commonality will be further explored in chapter four.

longtang.⁹⁰

Lament Everlasting introduces Shanghai through the *longtang*:

The Shanghai *longtang* constitutes a sublime (*zhuangguan*) picture. This is the background of the city.... At dusk, as the city is lit up, all those lines and spots (of trees and houses) shone; behind the glittering façade lay a massive span of darkness – the Shanghai *longtang*. The darkness looked like raging waves, pushing the spots and lines of light up and down; the darkness has its masses, whereas the bright spots and lines are merely floating upon it, as if its purpose for existing is to divide the masses... The darkness was an abyss. Even if you tossed a mountain into the abyss, it would disappear into its unfathomable depth without creating a sound.⁹¹

Architecture in Shanghai

Architecture tells the story of the foreign presence in Shanghai. It provides a strong visual statement of Shanghai's physical difference reflecting her cosmopolitan history. In the 1930s, Shanghai's architecture had more variety than other places in the world and was unique in China. Buildings such as The Peace Hotel, the Bank of China (on the Bund), and the Cathedral at Xujiahui (previously anglicized as Siccawei or Zikawei) represent examples of architecture found in Shanghai that are not in other places in China.⁹² Moreover as Tess Johnson wrote in the early 1990s, "There is no city in the world today with such a variety of architectural offerings, buildings which stand out in welcome contrast to their modern counterparts."⁹³

Each area in Shanghai was a mixture of different influences showing the diverse nature of the city, as modern art deco buildings stood next to more traditional Chinese structures. The International Settlement was composed principally of the British and

⁹⁰ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 372.

⁹¹ Wang Anyi, *Chang he ge*, 3-4. Quoted in Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia", 372.

⁹² Other Chinese cities like Tianjin have colonial buildings, but not to the scope of Shanghai.

⁹³ Tess Johnston, *A Last Look: Western Architecture in Old Shanghai*, Hong Kong: Old China Hand Press, 1993, 9.

American enclaves, and within the area, modern American buildings stood next to older British colonial style buildings.⁹⁴

Foreign architects were instrumental in creating the cosmopolitan cityscape. One example was the Czech-Hungarian architect Ladislaus Hudec,⁹⁵ who designed many of Shanghai's best known buildings. He arrived in Shanghai during the pinnacle of the Republican era and began working for the American architectural firm R. A. Curry. In 1925 he opened up his own firm, and by 1941 he had built over 40 public buildings as well as many private homes. He designed the Joint Savings Society Building, the Moore Memorial Church, the Paramount Ballroom and Theatre, the Majestic Theatre, the Park Hotel and the Grand Theatre.⁹⁶ The Grand Theatre (*Daguanming*), which became Shanghai's most opulent theatre when it was renovated in 1933, was another of his projects.⁹⁷

Located in the heart of the "ten-mile long foreign zone", the waterfront area along the Shanghai harbour-front was known as 'the Bund'.⁹⁸ As a 1920s guidebook wrote, "There is no better way to obtain an idea of the business of Shanghai than a walk along the Bund."⁹⁹ The Bund was a symbol to both the international community and the rest of China of the foreign presence in Shanghai. Along the Bund, foreign companies built their headquarters, with each trying to outdo the other in erecting large buildings that

⁹⁴ Towards the end of the Republican era, the American influence on architecture became dominant in the area.

⁹⁵ See Lenore Heitkamp, *The Park Hotel, Shanghai (1931-1934) and Its Architect, Laszlo Hudec (1893-1958): "Tallest Building in the Far East" as Metaphor for Pre-Communist Shanghai*, Department of History in Art, University of Victoria, 1998, for a full discussion of Hudec's influence in Shanghai – in particular the history of the Park Hotel.

⁹⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 10.

⁹⁷ Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture, 1922-1943*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 75. The theatre had two thousand sofa seats equipped with headsets, a grand art deco lobby, and three fountains.

⁹⁸ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 31. The Bund was "an Anglo-Indian word meaning embankment or quay."

⁹⁹ Reverend C.E. Darwent, *Shanghai: A Handbook*, 72.

showcased their countries of origin. Originally British neoclassical architecture dominated the Bund. The British Consulate, the Shanghai Club, the Sassoon House with the Cathay Hotel, the Customs House and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank were all built along the Bund. However, later other European and American companies set up in the area. The Bund became a place where countries competed to show their domination of the Shanghai skyline. In Leo Ou-fan Lee's words, the Bund "represented a landscape of colonial economic power".¹⁰⁰

Film Studios in Shanghai

Film studios added to the mythology of the city of Shanghai, as they were a concrete visual symbol of the cosmopolitan nature of Shanghai. At the same time, these studios produced films that helped to create the cultural imaginary¹⁰¹ of Shanghai. Film making brought into focus symbols and cues of the city and her culture. Therefore one of the easiest ways to understand Republican Shanghai is to look at the period with film as the lens.

As the "Hollywood of Asia", Shanghai was the centre of China's film industry in the Republican period. The film industry arrived in Shanghai on August 11, 1896, with film as part of a show at the Yuyuan Gardens.¹⁰² Though Chinese film productions only began sometime between 1905 and 1908, with the Feng Tai Photography Shop in Beijing producing films such as Tingchun Mountain and The Three Kingdoms,¹⁰³ by 1912-1913,

¹⁰⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 64.

¹⁰² Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1972, 1.

¹⁰³ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 10.

films were regularly being made in Shanghai.¹⁰⁴ Very quickly the film industry became prevalent in the city of Shanghai, and Shanghai had over thirty film studios producing an enormous number of films.

Urban Spaces in Shanghai

The cultural geography of Shanghai was affected not only by Shanghai's population, the layout of the city, her diverse architecture and her many film studios, but also by urban spaces within the city. Shanghai's urban institutions represented a mix of influences and were cosmopolitan in nature.

Department stores located along Nanjing Road in the International Settlement greatly added to the allure of Shanghai, as they displayed foreign products, goods that were unavailable in other areas of China.¹⁰⁵ A 1934 China Weekly Review article contained the following description of a Shanghai department store:

What a surprise it then is to be [sic] new arrival upon seeing the latest model of the Rolls-Royce whirring up Nanking Road and stopping in front of stores whose size and appearance compare most favourably with those on Oxford Street, Fifth Avenue, and the Rue de la Paix! The tourist steps ashore and finds that all 'home-side' brands are advertised and sold in the department stores of Shanghai. The 'Jaeger' pullover is displayed side by side with the B.V.D. underwear, and 'Houbigant' perfumes are sold in a department just above where "Florsheim" shoes attract their attention. Shanghai with its cosmopolitan department stores can well boast of its foreign and Chinese stores as 'universal providers'.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the luxury items listed in the above quotation, other household items that were commonly found in the West, but not found elsewhere in China, such as Quaker Oats, Western medicine, Western cigarette brands, and cameras were also readily

¹⁰⁴ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 14.

available in Shanghai.¹⁰⁷ Consumption was thus distinct in Shanghai from other areas of China.

Mostly located in the French Concession, coffeehouses in Shanghai were another imported institution that became very popular. The coffeehouses represented a mix of French, English and Chinese elements. As in England, coffeehouses were busiest during the late afternoon (the time of 'English afternoon tea'); as in France, coffeehouses provided a location for writers and artists to meet; and, as in Chinese teahouses, waitresses entertained the patrons. Coffeehouses were particularly frequented by artists and writers,¹⁰⁸ and became "a crucial symbol of modernity" in Shanghai.¹⁰⁹ In the mid-Republican period, Shanghai's writers were "caught in a coffeehouse craze, celebrated in numerous works of fiction."¹¹⁰

Dancehalls, like Shanghai's coffeehouses, were another cultural institution that became very fashionable in Republican Shanghai. Social dancing arrived in China from Europe and the United States after the First World War and was popularized during the 1930s.¹¹¹ According to a popular guidebook for the period, "The mention of numerous dancing academies reveals that we are in the late jazz age, the era of the tea dance and gigolo, and that trendy Europeans and Chinese needed to tango, foxtrot, and shimmy."¹¹² The dancehalls were sinicized institutions, as tea was served and many of the foreign dancehalls were given Chinese names. "For example *Ciro's* became *Xianluosi*, 'fairy

¹⁰⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 18.

¹⁰⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 22.

¹¹¹ Andrew D. Field, in "Selling Souls in Sin City: Shanghai Singing and Dancing Hostesses in Print, Film, and Politics, 1920-1949" in Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture*, 99.

¹¹² H. J. Lethbridge, Introduction to *All About Shanghai: A Standard Guidebook*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983. Quoted in Isabel K. F. Wong, "The Incantation of Shanghai," 251.

land of pleasure', and Paramount became *Bailuomen*, or 'gate to a hundred pleasures'.¹¹³ Dancehalls became strongly linked with Shanghai in the Chinese popular imagination, as popular films set in Shanghai often showed couples dancing.

Cinemas, in a city where the film trade was so ubiquitous, represented yet another imported cultural institution. According to Leo Lee, "Chinese cinema was a popular hybrid genre consisting of diverse cultural elements – both old and new, drawn from both visual and print sources – which seemed to reflect, or appeal to, the equally mixed composition of its audience in terms of both gender and class."¹¹⁴ Going to the movies in the Republican period was a popular pastime as evidenced by a 1932 guidebook, *Shanghai menjing* (Keys to Shanghai): "Now, the average man and woman have considerable knowledge about cinema, and 'going to the movies' has become a modern slogan. Young boys and girls in school do it; even old people are patronizing movie theatres."¹¹⁵ In Republican Shanghai watching movies was a "solid ritual" and an important part of life.¹¹⁶

Going to the cinema was symbol of modernity in cosmopolitan Shanghai. Yingjin Zhang, in his book *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai*, sums up the relationship between film and urban culture in Republican Shanghai: "To say the least, the movie theatre in Republican Shanghai simultaneously functioned as an icon of modern culture, through which the fashionable lifestyle of the emerging bourgeoisie was displayed and imitated, and as an institution of the entertainment industry, where

¹¹³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 114-115.

¹¹⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 117.

domestic and foreign film studios competed for market shares.”¹¹⁷ As this statement illustrates, film culture was intertwined with Shanghai popular culture.

By the end of the first three decades of the twentieth century, cinemas had become an important feature of the cityscape, especially in the foreign concessions. There were between 32-36 theatres open in Shanghai.¹¹⁸ Movie theatres ranged from opulent foreign owned theatres, like the previously-mentioned Grand Theatre, and the Odeon Theatre, which seated over one thousand people and showed first-run Hollywood films, to Chinese owned theatres that showed Chinese or second-run films. The price of admission at Chinese cinemas was always cheaper than at foreign-owned theatres. In Chinese neighbourhood cinemas the cost of admission was relatively inexpensive, about “eight copper cash”, while in the concessions, prices were over one dollar.¹¹⁹

Shanghai was the only place in China where foreign films were readily available to view, and in the early 1940s Shanghai’s theatres were booming even though a civil war was going on. A 1927 US Department of Commerce report wrote, “All the larger motion-picture producers in the United States and Europe have agents or distributors in Shanghai... The best pictures produced anywhere are released in Shanghai as soon as they are in the country of production.”¹²⁰ For example, New York’s *Film Daily* (20 March 1941) reported that the new films Tin Pan Alley, The Northwest Mounted Police, The Mask of Zorro, and Gone With the Wind were all huge hits in China.¹²¹ Lynn Pan’s Tracing it Home indicates that in 1943, the two films of the moment were For Whom the

¹¹⁷ Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture*, 75.

¹¹⁹ Jey Leyda, *Dianying*, 25.

¹²⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 83.

¹²¹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 143.

Bell Tolls (with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman) and the Chinese film Qiu Haitang.¹²²

In 1949, even as the Communists entered Shanghai, the films being shown at the Capitol Theatre were Hamlet (with Lawrence Olivier) and I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now, films that had been released in the United States earlier that same year.¹²³

Journals and Calendar Posters

“For Shanghai writers the most important pastime, aside from going to the movies, was going to the bookstores.”¹²⁴ Journals were very numerous and influential in Shanghai. In the mid-1930s, the bookstore *Shanghai Shudian* published an average of one journal a day.¹²⁵ Between 1921 and 1949, in Shanghai there were 206 journals in circulation that dealt with film alone.¹²⁶

At the same time, some foreign journals were available in Shanghai. Lee writes that American magazines such as Vanity Fair displayed modern American life to the Chinese public, helping to construct “a *modeng* fantasy for the Shanghai bourgeoisie”.¹²⁷ This modern ideal was also fuelled by journals such as Harpers, The New Yorker, Saturday Review, Esquire, and The Saturday Evening Post, all of which were available in Shanghai, and contained many articles and glossy photos which displayed the ‘new’ modern world. These journals provided a “window on Western literature, art design and a sophisticated urban lifestyle.”¹²⁸ For example, Vanity Fair’s advertisements for luxury goods highlighted the modern fantasy that affluent Shanghai residents “sought to

¹²² Lynn Pan, *Tracing it Home*, New York: Kondansha International, 1992, 39.

¹²³ Lynn Pan, *Tracing it Home*, 109.

¹²⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 120.

¹²⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 120.

¹²⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 86.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 In Shanghai, Chinese people transliterated modern as ‘*modeng*’.

¹²⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 126.

emulate”.¹²⁹

This ideal was in turn replicated by Shanghai journals such as *Xiandai zazhi* (*Les Contemporains*) and *Liangyou huabao* (*The Young Companion*) that presented “an entire imaginary of urban modernity”¹³⁰ to Shanghai residents. This imaginary was not homogenous, but rather heterogeneous, reflecting the diversity that existed in Shanghai. One example of this is found in *Liangyou*, where two photographic collages in the same issue show some of the competing images in the imagination about Shanghai. On both pages, English phrases and Chinese characters coexist with the English text reading “Intoxicated Shanghai” and the Chinese text reading “Metropolitan excitements”. On the first page, the central image is a woman wearing high-heeled shoes and a *qipao*.¹³¹ She is smiling and appearing to gaze at the viewer. Around her are images of a jazz band, art deco skyscrapers, a movie poster for King Kong, a picture of a racetrack and image of the Bund.¹³² Another collage reveals more details about Shanghai’s modernity with its images of dancing girls, the racetrack, a tea set and a beer advertisement.¹³³

Like journals, calendar posters provided another visual symbol of Shanghai’s urban modernity. Begun as an advertising tool by Western companies, calendar posters represented a mix of traditional and modern elements.¹³⁴ The centre image was always a painting of a beautiful woman – usually dressed in a *qipao*, but with Western-styled hair and high-heeled shoes. The calendar was typically framed with an art deco design with

¹²⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 127.

¹³⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 75.

¹³¹ A *qipao* is the name of a style of dress that became very fashionable in Shanghai around the turn of the century. See pages 75-76 for a further discussion of the *qipao*.

¹³² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, photo insert.

¹³³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, photo insert.

¹³⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 76.

Western calendar on the left and Chinese calendar on the right.¹³⁵ As Leo Lee writes, “The division into month, week, day is manifestly Western and modern, a concept that now governed the everyday life of Chinese urbanites.”¹³⁶ The calendars, which were readily available in Shanghai, but rarely available in other parts of China, were another visible symbol of how life was very different in Shanghai.

Popular Music

“Popular songs like ‘Night Shanghai’ represented the cultural expression of cosmopolitan Shanghai residents and helped to shape the mythology of this modern metropolis”.¹³⁷ When “Night Shanghai” was performed, it was set to a jazz-like accompaniment, and sung in Mandarin, with the music supplied by White Russian musicians “giving the song a Western veneer to increase its appeal to trendy, westernized Chinese consumers.”¹³⁸

Popular song in Shanghai during the Republican period reflected ideas about modernity and the city and therefore many songs extolled the cosmopolitan cityscape with its modern amenities. One popular song from the period, “*Shili yangchang*” (“Ten-Square-Mile Foreign Zone”) describes life in the concessions.

The cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou were considered paradises;
But Suzhou and Hangzhou are no big deal,
Shanghai is the real paradise.
The Ten Square Mile Foreign Zone is wonderful;
Terrific signs and sounds,
Automobile transportation,
Houses fully carpeted and equipped with modern comforts.
Sleeping in beds with spring mattresses,

¹³⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 79.

¹³⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 79.

¹³⁷ Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 248.

¹³⁸ Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 247.

Wearing fashionable clothes,
 Big diamonds brightly shining.
 Boisterous is the atmosphere of the cabarets,
 Enchanting jazz accompanying quick and nimble steps,
 Intoxicated souls floating in dim light,
 Couples dancing in love.¹³⁹

Sung by Li Xianglan¹⁴⁰, a Chinese born Japanese singer, this song was set to a traditional Chinese folk song style with the rhythm of a foxtrot.¹⁴¹ It is a symbol of cosmopolitan Shanghai with its international elements. Additionally, the indices of modernity, automobiles, carpeted homes, fashionable clothing, cabarets, and jazz are all in the song's lyrics.

Literature

Like popular song, literature was a powerful vehicle for conveying the message of the 'otherness' of Shanghai. The setting for many works, Shanghai became synonymous with modernity and everything that accompanied it, as both Chinese and Western writers used Shanghai to elicit certain sentiments.

The mythology of Shanghai was formed in large part through the works of such writers as Mao Dun and Zhang Ailing. Both were famous as 'Shanghai writers'.¹⁴² Grouped together because of their geographical locations, writers from Shanghai were sometimes called *haipai*, a term used to separate Shanghai writers and their literary traditions, from those of writers living in Beijing (*jingpai*).¹⁴³

The male writer Mao Dun is one of China's most famous twentieth century

¹³⁹ Isabel K. F. Wong, "The Incantation of Shanghai," 250.

¹⁴⁰ She was also known by her Japanese name of Yamaguchi Yoshiko.

¹⁴¹ Isabel K. F. Wong, "The Incantation of Shanghai," 250.

¹⁴² Not all of Mao Dun's works were set in the city of Shanghai.

¹⁴³ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 133. The term *haipai* originally referred to Shanghai opera, but became applied to all things describing the Shanghai way of life.

authors.¹⁴⁴ He is the writer of many celebrated works, among which the novel Midnight (*Ziye*) is his most recognized. Midnight, a good example of a ‘Shanghai novel’, is set in the Revolutionary period. The Shanghai of Midnight is a seductive city that draws in its readers with its descriptions of a city teeming with sexuality and passion and dangerous possibilities. Mao Dun clearly uses female sexuality as a signifier for cosmopolitan and modern Shanghai. In the novel, Shanghai, with its scantily clad females as symbols of modernity, is clearly pitted against the values of traditional China.

Chapter one of Midnight paints a powerful image of Shanghai that is radically different from traditional images of Chinese cities. The novel begins:

The sun had just sunk below the horizon, and a gentle breeze caressed one’s face... Under a sunset-mottled sky, the towering framework of Garden Bridge was mantled in a gathering mist. Wherever a tram passed over the bridge, the overhead cable suspended below the top of the still frame threw off bright, greenish sparks. Looking east, one could see the warehouses of foreign firms on the waterfront of Pootung like huge monsters crouching in the gloom, their lights twinkling like countless tiny eyes. To the west, one saw with a shock of wonder on the roof of a building a gigantic NEON sign in flaming red and phosphorescent green: LIGHT, HEAT, POWER!¹⁴⁵

This description sets Shanghai apart from other Chinese cities, the lights and activity being special to Shanghai.

Old Mr. Wu, the old patriarch of the family, when confronted with proof of modernity, calls for his Daoist text, “The Supreme Book of Rewards and Punishments”.¹⁴⁶ To the old man’s eyes “the towering skyscrapers, their countless

¹⁴⁴ The most famous literary award in China is named after Mao Dun. His works have remained in constant publication and his short stories are frequently found in literary anthologies.

¹⁴⁵ Mao Dun, *Midnight* 2nd edition, Translated by Sidney Shapiro, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1979, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Mao Dun, *Midnight*, 13.

lighted windows gleaming like the eyes of devils, seemed to be rushing down on him".¹⁴⁷

Describing Mr. Wu having his stroke, Mao Dun writes that he sees "all the quivering, dancing breasts swept at Old Mr. Wu like a hail of arrows, piling up on his chest and smothering him, piling up on the Book of Rewards and Punishments on his lap."¹⁴⁸

Many passages in Midnight link female sexuality with modernity.

Zhang Ailing¹⁴⁹ (Eileen Chang), 1920-1995, is arguably the quintessential 'Shanghai writer' of the twentieth century. Zhang Ailing is known as a 'Shanghai writer' not only because she lived in Shanghai, but also because her works talk about and are mostly set in Shanghai. Lynn Pan, in her book In Search of Old Shanghai, writes, "In Chinese writing the author who best catches the feel of old Shanghai is Chang Ai-ling [Zhang Ailing]. No author is more indigenous to the place."¹⁵⁰ Zhang was born in Tianjin, but grew up in Shanghai's International Settlement. When she was 23, she became a literary celebrity when her essay "Liuyan" (Gossip) was published.¹⁵¹ Zhang gained even greater distinction when she portrayed Shanghai as a "fallen city" in her short story "Love in a Fallen City" (*Qingcheng zhilian*).¹⁵² When she was in her mid-thirties, she moved to Hong Kong, and a few years later, to the United States.¹⁵³

Shanghai has also been the subject and the setting for many texts written by authors from around the world. Cutting across genres, Shanghai is present in romance

¹⁴⁷ Mao Dun, *Midnight*, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Mao Dun, *Midnight*, 21.

¹⁴⁹ In chapter four, I will explore the relationship that exists between Zhang Ailing and Wang Anyi and between *Changhen ge* and selected works by Zhang Ailing.

¹⁵⁰ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 130.

¹⁵¹ *Liuyan* is the name of a chapter in Wang Anyi's *Lament Everlasting*.

¹⁵² Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, 247. Wang Anyi's *San lian* seem to be 'modeled' on this story, as the titles are of the same construction.

¹⁵³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 267. Lee notes that in Taiwan, fans of Zhang Ailing call themselves "Chang mi". In contrast, Zhang Ailing was condemned as a traitor by the Chinese government until the 1980s, when she began to become popular again. Though China has discouraged promotion of her writing for many years, she has remained popular in overseas Chinese communities.

novels, travelogues, and science fiction novels. Also popular were “paradise of adventurers” stories,¹⁵⁴ which painted a picture of “Shanghai as an exotic metropolis peopled by a motley collection of sinister Euro-Americans and unknowable Others”.¹⁵⁵

One of the best known Western novels set in Shanghai is J. G. Ballard’s Empire of the Sun.¹⁵⁶ The novel is semi-autobiographical and paints a compelling picture of a city just before its collapse. Through the eyes of Jim, the young narrator, the world of Shanghai changes from a colonial world of “going to the Club”, luxury cars (Mercedes and Packards) and pool parties in Shanghai suburbs, to life in a detention camp under Japanese control. The novel uses film to show the transitory (“life in Shanghai was lived wholly within an intense present”),¹⁵⁷ and unreal nature of expatriate life in Shanghai.

The following quote illustrates the cosmopolitan contradictory life found in the International Settlement during the Republican period:

A party of young Chinese women in sequined dresses tripped over a child’s coffin decked with paper flowers. Arms linked together, they lurched against the radiator grille of the Packard and swayed past Jim’s window, ... Hundreds of Eurasian bar-girls in ankle-length fur coats sat in the lines of rickshaws outside the Park Hotel, whistling through their teeth at the residents who emerged from the revolving doors, while their pimps argued with the middle-aged Czech and Polish couples in neat, patched suits trying to sell the last of their jewellery.¹⁵⁸

This is seen from a Western viewpoint, and it contains echoes of the life described in the popular song “Night Shanghai”.

¹⁵⁴ One example is G. E. Miller (pseudonym), *The Paradise of Adventurers*, New York: Orsay Publishing House, Inc., 1937

¹⁵⁵ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 53

¹⁵⁶ *Empire of the Sun* is well known to Westerners because the 1984 novel was made into a Steven Spielberg film in 1987.

¹⁵⁷ J. G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun*, 16

¹⁵⁸ J. G. Ballard, *Empire of the Sun*, 23.

Cultural Imaginary of Shanghai

In his book Shanghai Modern, The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945, the American scholar Leo Ou-fan Lee defines the ‘cultural imaginary’ as “a contour of collective sensibilities and significations resulting from cultural production ... we must not neglect the ‘surfaces’, the images and styles that do not necessarily enter into the deepest of thought but nevertheless conjure up a collective imaginary.”¹⁵⁹ The cultural imaginary of Shanghai is a result of Shanghai’s history and of her urban culture, which developed largely from print culture (journals and literature), popular music and film.

To the Chinese listener, the word “Shanghai” evokes a particular set of images around modernity and difference. Therefore since the mid-nineteenth century, Shanghai has acted as a signifier for the exotic inside and outside China. The Chinese public read about Shanghai and had mixed feelings of pride, envy and fear about Shanghai’s modernity and the exoticism of urban life. Leo Ou-fan Lee writes, “The phrase *yiguo qingdiao* (mood and flavour of a foreign country) is used to describe Shanghai.”¹⁶⁰ Shanghai has been viewed variously as a “seductive woman,”¹⁶¹ as a “paradise of adventurers,”¹⁶² a “colonial outpost for the West,” a “*gudao*” (a solitary island),¹⁶³ and as a symbol of hope and modernity for China. The cultural imaginary of Shanghai is made up of all of these components. However, my discussion will focus on the two dominant images: Shanghai as a seductive (or ‘fallen’) woman, and Shanghai as the site of modernity in China.

¹⁵⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 63.

¹⁶⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 202.

¹⁶¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 28.

¹⁶² Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 1.

¹⁶³ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 117.

Yingjin Zhang in his book, The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film discusses how novels, from the turn of the century to the Republican period, painted a picture of Shanghai which was a “Free Shanghai”, a city that was somehow ‘free’ from the rest of China and its traditional ideas and mores.¹⁶⁴ In Shanghai, young men and women could choose to live in a style very different from their lives in other parts of China because social mores were varied, and far less constrained by tradition.

Ideas about Shanghai as a “paradise built over hell” or as “a fallen woman” have persisted, and this intertwining of Shanghai, modernity and ‘fallen woman’ became the dominant image for Shanghai for much of the twentieth century. As shown earlier, novels such as Mao Dun’s Midnight popularized these ideas. This intertwining has shaped Shanghai, the real and imagined. In the popular imagination, Shanghai is often viewed as an ‘ill-fated’ woman, with the allusions to vice and ideas of an inevitable downfall.

The immensely successful 1934 film The Goddess provides an example of the intertwining of woman and the city of Shanghai.¹⁶⁵ It premiered at the Lyric Theatre in Shanghai on December 7, 1934, and quickly became a blockbuster, as well as winning critical success.¹⁶⁶ According to Kristine Harris, The Goddess “invokes the idolatrous, if ambivalent, obsession with female icons that so occupied the urban imagination of 1930s China.”¹⁶⁷ The Goddess tells the story of a poor single mother who struggles to raise her child in Shanghai. She is forced into prostitution to support her child. Through it all, she remains ‘a goddess’. The title plays on the double nature of the term, as ‘goddess’ can

¹⁶⁴ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 214.

¹⁶⁵ The Goddess was directed by Wu Yonggang and starred Ruan Lingyu.

¹⁶⁶ Kristine Harris, “*The Goddess: Fallen Woman of Shanghai*” in Chris Berry, ed., *Chinese Films in Focus*, 25 *New Takes*, London: The British Film Institute, 2003, 111.

¹⁶⁷ Kristine Harris, “*The Goddess*”, 111

mean a virtuous woman (her life as a mother), and also, a prostitute who walks the streets.

Shanghai has traditionally been gendered “as a seductive woman”.¹⁶⁸ Discussing Mao Dun’s Midnight, Yingjin Zhang writes, “the city of Shanghai is configured through numerous floating images, changing shapes and forms, and astonishingly fragmented female bodies (breasts, forearms, thighs, legs).”¹⁶⁹ He argues that Shanghai is “made readable through such figures as money and woman and such metaphors as prostitution and speculation”.¹⁷⁰

Part of this imagery is related to Shanghai’s historical reputation as a centre for prostitution in China. Gail Hershatter, an American historian of China, explores the link between prostitution and modernity in modern Shanghai in her book Dangerous Pleasures. The number of prostitutes greatly increased through the end of the Republican period with the vast economic development that had occurred in Shanghai. By 1935, approximately one out of every thirteen women was engaged in some form of activity that could fall under the term prostitution.¹⁷¹ Prostitution was maligned by society at large, but at the same time, prostitutes were the starring subjects of guidebooks, novels, travelogues, tabloids and poetry.¹⁷² The attention paid to this group of women helped to create the link between the image of the ‘fallen woman’ and the city of Shanghai in the popular imagination.

As described earlier, Shanghai was different from other Chinese cities. The main difference was its modernity. Yingjin Zhang describes Shanghai as a “universally

¹⁶⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 137

¹⁶⁹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 137.

¹⁷⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 118.

¹⁷¹ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 40.

¹⁷² Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 41.

recognizable symbol of modernity in China.”¹⁷³ Leo Ou-fan Lee concurs that Shanghai is the embodiment of Chinese modernity.¹⁷⁴ In fact, the word modern, ‘*modeng*’ in Chinese, first entered the Chinese vocabulary in Shanghai.¹⁷⁵

In his book The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film, Yingjin Zhang writes, “Shanghai is more often configured as a type of *gudao* (solitary island), isolated from Chinese tradition, cut off from China’s past, and precariously plunged into a sea of modernity.”¹⁷⁶ The presence of the foreign concessions paved the way for new forms of cultural activity and new socio-economic institutions, which led to new types of urban spaces for “urban cultural production and consumption”.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, modernity in Shanghai was a “humiliating reminder of the foreign and military presence”.¹⁷⁸

Chinese writers lived separate lives from the foreign residents in Shanghai, yet “Shanghai’s treaty port setting enabled them to conjure up a set of images and styles on a literary plane that served to construct what may be called a cultural imaginary of modernism”.¹⁷⁹ The fact that Shanghai was a treaty port allowed Chinese writers and artists to “participate in an imagined community of world literature”.¹⁸⁰ Thus images of women, and of a modernity that was fleeting and complex, became the dominant imagery around Shanghai.

Shanghai in Lament Everlasting

Throughout her writing career Wang Anyi has written about Shanghai, and

¹⁷³ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 117.

¹⁷⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, xiv.

¹⁷⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 5

¹⁷⁶ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 176.

¹⁷⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 144.

¹⁸⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 35.

Lament Everlasting is a Shanghai novel. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi draws on a larger tradition of literature, music and film that have celebrated the special nature of Shanghai. She uses the cultural imaginary about Shanghai, in particular Republican Shanghai by referring to ideas, institutions, and individuals central to the period.

In Lament Everlasting, the city of Shanghai is introduced long before the protagonist. Wang Anyi calls Shanghai, “this Paris of the East”¹⁸¹, showing her familiarity with the iconography surrounding Shanghai during the Republican period. She writes: “Shanghai’s little dots and rays of light are totally foiled by the darkness; this situation has existed for several decades. The brightness of this Paris of the East exists only because it is arranged on darkness... Currently everything appears old and little by little reveals its true nature. Slowly dawn arrives extinguishing the brightness of the city lights.”¹⁸²

As shown earlier, Shanghai was the center for China’s film industry and film culture is very present in this novel. In fact, film is the dominant metaphor in Lament Everlasting. Wang Anyi uses the metaphor of film to show the unreal and transitory nature of ‘modern’ life in Shanghai. Early in her novel, she writes, “This 1940s novel begins on a film set.” The defining moment of Wang Qiyao’s life occurs when she visits the film studio. Its importance is cemented when, at the end of the novel, there is a flashback to that visit to the studio.

So central is film to the novel that Wang Qiyao is introduced in relation to the world of film: “In the afternoon singing ‘Four Seasons’ [a song made famous by the Chinese film Street Angel] along with the record player, that’s her. Going off to see

¹⁸¹ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1996, 9.

¹⁸² Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 4.

Vivian Leigh in 'Gone With the Wind'¹⁸³, is a group of Wang Qiyao's." She is a patron of 'modern' film in the only place in China where such foreign films could be viewed. The reference to Gone with the Wind also provides foreshadowing to the tale of Wang Qiyao as Scarlett O'Hara, the heroine of the film, who is also an 'ill-fated beauty'. Even though Scarlett has many opportunities and great beauty, she ultimately loses the love of her life.

Film culture, in particular the Republican-era film Street Angel (*Malu tianshi*), provides a subtext for understanding this novel. There is a strong relationship between the novel Lament Everlasting and the film Street Angel. By choosing to have Wang Qiyao introduced humming "Four Seasons", the most famous song in Street Angel, Wang Anyi is drawing an explicit link to the film. The lyrics to "Four Seasons" are as follows:

Spring comes, and the window fills with green
 A maiden sits by the window embroidering a pair of mandarin ducks
 Suddenly, a heartless blow
 Splits the ducks in two
 Summer comes and the willow fronds grow long
 The maiden has been blown south of the river
 The scenery's lovely all over the land
 But how can it compare to the green gauzy sorghum at home?
 Autumn comes and the lotus flowers are sweet
 The maiden dreams of home night after night
 When she wakes up she doesn't see the faces of her mom and dad
 Just the moonlight shining at the foot of the bed
 Winter comes and snow flurries down
 When winter clothes are ready I'll send them to my man
 The great wall built of blood and flesh is long
 Would that I could be the ancient Meng Jiang.¹⁸⁴

Street Angel is considered to be one of the finest Chinese films ever.¹⁸⁵ Produced by the Mingxing (Star) Film Company in Shanghai in 1937, it was written and directed

¹⁸³ Gone With the Wind was released in 1939. It starred Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara.

¹⁸⁴ From <http://www.deall.ohio-state.edu/denton.2/angel-website> Translation of song lyrics by Andrew F. Jones.

¹⁸⁵ *Asia Weekly Magazine (Yazhou Zhoukan)* December 19, 1999. Street Angel was listed as one of 100 best Chinese films.

by Yuan Muzhi. Set in Shanghai in 1935, the film starred Zhou Xuan, Zhao Huishen and Zhao Dan, and was a hit as soon as it was released.

The opening montage of Street Angel is a collection of camera shots in fast sequence depicting the cosmopolitan nature of life in Shanghai: Dutch Village (name of a restaurant written in English), white horses, pigeons flying, wide open English-style parks, people in Western clothing, European cars, the Bund, electric lights, trains, skyscrapers, the lion from the Bank of China, a bustling street scene, a Western church, women in 'flapper' clothing, and more electric lights. In contrast, the next set of images includes: a wedding parade with crowds of people and loud music and a bride on a sedan chair. The final shot of the film is a slow shot with the camera panning up the side of a white art deco skyscraper.

In the film, Shanghai symbolizes modernity. This parallels the opening description in Lament Everlasting as both the novel and the film begin with a sequence of 'shots' of the modern city of Shanghai, demonstrating an inter-textual relationship between the two works.

Conclusion

The cultural geography of Republican Shanghai, formed and echoed in popular song, literature and film, facilitated the creation and dissemination of the mythology of Shanghai, a mythology that laid the framework for the emergence of the '*Shanghai Xiaojie*'. Shanghai was built on the foundation of its relationship with the outside world. It has been historically viewed by the West as a colonial outpost, and it was developed to showcase all the West had to offer. At the same time, Shanghai was viewed by the rest of

China as a symbol of modernity, of all that China could achieve.

Wang Anyi taps into the rich mythology of Shanghai in the novel Lament Everlasting when she relates the tale of her protagonist Wang Qiyao. Wang Qiyao is described as a *Shanghai Xiaojie*, a type of femininity that represents a complex blend of tradition and modernity, and she is the embodiment of the cosmopolitan nature of Shanghai. Wang Anyi takes Wang Qiyao's affinity a step further by mirroring the rise and fall of Shanghai in her life as an 'ill-fated beauty'.

Chapter Three:

Wang Qiyao –Wang Anyi’s Model *Xiaojie*

Introduction

“Is there anything more at the heart of this city than a ‘*Shanghai Xiaojie*’ [Miss Shanghai]?”¹⁸⁶

Wang Qiyao is Wang Anyi’s “*Shanghai Xiaojie*”. Specific to the city of Shanghai and to a definite time, and embodied by such women as the famed Republican-era actress Ruan Lingyu (1910-1934) and the loved chanteuse Zhou Xuan (1918-1957), the *Shanghai Xiaojie* defines the image of Republican Shanghai.

The *Shanghai Xiaojie* continues to play a dominant role in Republican iconography. A recent Chinese newspaper described the women of Shanghai in the following terms, “Shanghai, known as the Paris of the Orient, has long since been famous for its girls – of all kinds.”¹⁸⁷ In the article, Shanghai “girls” are described as “mostly modern, seductive, coquettish and heavily made-up”, “beautifully dressed”, “shrewd”, “more capable than northerners”, “always able to flirt”, “particularly clean” and having “wit and skill in worldly affairs and holding fast to femininity”.¹⁸⁸ In fact, earlier this year, the CBC did a radio piece on its Ideas Program entitled Shanghai Ladies.¹⁸⁹ The piece was one hour long and devoted to exploring the phenomena of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*. Clearly the feminine ideal in Shanghai is an enduring image.

¹⁸⁶ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 48.

¹⁸⁷ Yang Dongping, “Shanghai Girls,” *Chinese Literature* (July & August 2000), 55-57.

¹⁸⁸ Yang Dongping, “Shanghai Girls,” 55-57.

¹⁸⁹ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Produced by Kathleen Flaherty.

Early in Lament Everlasting, Wang Qiyao is crowned “*Shanghai Xiaojie di san*”, “Miss Shanghai #3”. Wang Qiyao is also a “*Shanghai Xiaojie*” in a greater sense. “*Shanghai Xiaojie*” literally means “Shanghai Miss” and refers to an unmarried woman living in Shanghai. It is also a broader term that refers to a socio-cultural image of femininity specific to Shanghai that invokes ideas about twentieth-century modernity as it developed in Shanghai.

In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi relates the life story of Wang Qiyao. In this chapter I argue that Wang Qiyao represents this type of femininity unique to Republican Shanghai, represents Shanghai, and as well, represents modernity. Wang Anyi draws textual references to Republican popular cultural markers to create a relationship in reader’s minds between her *Shanghai Xiaojie* and the ideal of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*. In addition, the writing style of Lament Everlasting is evocative of Republican Shanghai, and the language conveys specific images as the tone of the period.¹⁹⁰ The fate of Wang Qiyao is synonymous with the fate of Shanghai. My discussion follows the chapter in Lament Everlasting where Wang Qiyao is introduced.

Wang Qiyao and Republican Shanghai

“Wang Qiyao is a typical woman from a Shanghai lane.”¹⁹¹

Wang writes that Wang Qiyao is “typical”; that she is “but one” of Shanghai’s “common city dwellers”. However, as Lingzhen Wang observes, Wang Qiyao is “represented as the quintessence of the Shanghai *shimin* [urbanite] class; she embodies the down-to-earth, prudent, shrewd, pragmatic, and flexible lifestyle of the Shanghai

¹⁹⁰ The style of *Chang hen ge* will be explored in the following chapter when I argue that the novel bears striking similarities to Zhang Ailing’s writing (which was written in the Republican period).

¹⁹¹ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 22.

people, who with a *shimin* spirit and practicality found a world of their own that both indulges in and resists dominant ideological impositions that Shanghai has been made to embody.”¹⁹² As the following phrases show, Wang Anyi writes her character to represent an entire group of women: “she lives in every wing of every house or attic;” she “is a typical single woman;” and “every Wang Qiyao is always accompanied by another Wang Qiyao.”¹⁹³ In *Wang Qiyao*, Wang Anyi is creating a composite character, a character that is described in relation to Republican cultural icons like Zhou Xuan and Ruan Lingyu.

Like the vast majority of Shanghai’s residents in the 1940s, Wang Qiyao lives in a *longtang* home. Like many middle-class families living in the *longtang*, her family had a *tingzijian*: “The Wang family housekeeper sometimes sleeps in a small room under the staircase (*tingzijian*). There is only enough space to fit one bed.”¹⁹⁴

In the novel Wang Anyi wrote that Wang Qiyao participates in Republican Shanghai urban culture. In the chapter introducing Wang Qiyao, Wang Anyi writes that Wang Qiyao goes to foreign and Chinese films, visits photography studios, listens to the radio, goes shopping, dates men from joint-venture companies, wears a *qipao*, and follows fashion. In the novel, Wang Qiyao enjoys the urban amenities found in Republican Shanghai.

Shanghai, Modernity and the *Shanghai Xiaojie*

“Shanghai” is the equivalent of “modernity” [in people’s minds] and “*Shanghai Xiaojie*” brings a new sense of modernity. Nothing carries

¹⁹² Lingzhen Wang, “Wang Anyi,” in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, 2003, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. Columbia University Press, 2003, 596.

¹⁹³ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 22-23. There are many more examples in the chapter.

¹⁹⁴ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 20.

more modernity than “*Xiaojie*” [“Miss”] in the city of Shanghai. The whole thing is truly stirring. In a place like this, who would not admire modernity?¹⁹⁵

In *Shanghai Modern*, Leo Ou-fan Lee’s work on Shanghai’s urban culture, he writes that Shanghai, modernity and the women of Shanghai have been linked since modernity arrived in Shanghai. To the average Chinese person, “Shanghai and ‘modern’ are natural equivalents.”¹⁹⁶ Women have been viewed “*at the centre* of the discourse on the effects of modernity.”¹⁹⁷

The modern era arrived in Shanghai during the Republican era and developed rapidly in the first few decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹⁸ Thus by the 1930s, Shanghai was a “bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world, and China’s largest harbour and treaty port”. At the same time, the rest of the country was yet to be modernized.¹⁹⁹

Shanghai was “modern” as a result largely of contact with the West, contact that brought not only war and imperialism, but also the impetus for Chinese reform.²⁰⁰ The belief that people were “living in a new era ... was what defined the ethos of modernity.”²⁰¹ There was the widespread belief that people were living in a new time, and “by the 1920s it was generally acknowledged that ‘modernity’ was equated with ‘Western civilization’ in all its spiritual and material manifestations.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁵ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 48.

¹⁹⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 5.

¹⁹⁷ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage: A Shadow in Reverse*,” in *Chinese Films in Focus, 25 New Takes*, London: The British Film Institute, 2003, 36. (Italics were in original quote).

¹⁹⁸ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 37.

¹⁹⁹ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 37.

²⁰⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 6.

²⁰¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 42.

²⁰² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 45.

In Shanghai, this new modernity was intertwined with evolving conceptions of womanhood. Competing ideas about modern femininity existed and these ideas were explored and propagated in cultural media such as print, literature and film. Modern femininity was conceived as encompassing not just a new outward appearance, but also a new way of looking at the world. One magazine article from 1933 described a modern woman as having permanently waved hair, a made-up face, and “rich knowledge, lofty thinking, and a strong will.”²⁰³ Journals of the time often featured film stars as representative of these new women.

Film was perhaps the most powerful tool for spreading ideas about modern femininity. Though Western cinema was influential,²⁰⁴ Chinese cinema was also important in creating and disseminating the idea of what it meant to be a “modern woman”. As the following examination of two films, Three Modern Girls and New Women,²⁰⁵ and of the short stories of Liu Na’ou show,²⁰⁶ there were competing images of what it meant to be a modern woman.

The 1933 film Three Modern Girls²⁰⁷ “presents three different types of new woman.”²⁰⁸ The film was very powerful in transmitting the idea that new women were afoot in Shanghai. When it was released, newspapers described it as “a public explosion – a sensation.”²⁰⁹

In the film, the male protagonist Zhang Yu is described as being from Shenyang. He makes his fortune soon after embarking on a film career in Shanghai. Zhou Shuzen

²⁰³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 94.

²⁰⁴ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 198.

²⁰⁵ The following material draws on work by Yingjin Zhang.

²⁰⁶ The following material draws on work by Leo Lee.

²⁰⁷ *Three Modern Girls* was a silent film produced by Lianhua and directed by Bu Wancang.

²⁰⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 195.

²⁰⁹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 88.

(Ruan Lingyu), his jilted fiancé from Shenyang, follows him to Shanghai and finds work as a telephone operator. In Shanghai, he frequents the theatre and dance halls with a rich young woman named Yu Yu. The third ‘modern woman’ in the film is Chen Ruoying, a woman who loves Zhang Yu from afar. War breaks out and Zhang is injured, and returns home, only surviving due to the loving care he receives at Zhou’s hands. Chen Ruoying kills herself out of unrequited love for Zhang. By the film’s close, Zhang and Zhou are reunited holding hands.²¹⁰

Each woman represents a different model of “new woman”. Yu Yu appears to be the most modern of the three. She dresses fashionably, drives a car, smokes cigarettes, and frequents modern urban institutions. She is a divorcee and represents a femme fatale, a danger to men.²¹¹ Chen Ruoying represents a more traditional version of the “new woman”. In a sense she provides an example of *hongyan boming* (“pretty girls die young”).²¹² Her sole break with tradition is her choice to leave her family home to pursue Zhang, the object of her affections. Zhou Shuzhen, the heroine of the film, is set up as the balance between the other two women. Zhou’s reunion with Zhang takes place with “the rhetoric of class consciousness and national salvation” as the catalyst.²¹³

The film’s theme is revealed by the protagonist Zhang at a party when he states, “only those who are most self-supportive, most rational, most courageous, and most mindful of public welfare can be the most modern woman!”²¹⁴ Yingjin Zhang postulates that the “problem with Three Modern Girls is not merely that Zhou is figured as a mouthpiece of revolutionary machinery deprived of human desire but more that she

²¹⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 195.

²¹¹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 197.

²¹² Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 197.

²¹³ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 197

²¹⁴ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 198.

desires no more and no less than what leftist ideology desires her to desire.”²¹⁵ In the film, there is an explicit denial of the traditional feminine role, and a recognition, and call for, greater female participation in politics.

In New Women, produced in 1934, the heroine Wei Ming (also played by Ruan Lingyu) shows a more complex picture of a modern woman. Wei Ming is an author and teacher who originally moved to Shanghai leaving her young daughter in the care of her parents. Wei’s daughter joins her in Shanghai, but quickly contracts pneumonia, and dies as her mother is not able to afford to pay the hospital’s fees. Wei Ming is victimized by two men in the film, forced to prostitute herself and finally dies as a result of a suicide attempt. The contrasting female character in the film is Li Aying, Wei Ming’s roommate who works in a factory and at a worker’s school. At the end of the film, female workers are seen marching along singing “New Women”, a song penned by Li Aying. In the song, women are urged to refrain from “indulging in love”, or “being slaves”, and instead to “march on, new women, bravely... march forward!”²¹⁶ In this film, Wei Ming suffers because she is more interested in her individual fate than that of the collective.²¹⁷

In Shanghai Modern, Leo Ou-fan Lee discusses what it meant to be a modern woman by looking at the female protagonists of Liu Na’ou’s short stories. In Liu’s stories, the heroines are described as being a mix of Western and Chinese ideas of beauty. They have bobbed hair, are agile and athletic, have small lips (“cherry-like mouth”), and have tanned skin.²¹⁸ Liu’s detailing of the physical appearance of his heroines is “intended to mark the appearance of a new prototype of the modern woman who also

²¹⁵ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 199.

²¹⁶ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 202.

²¹⁷ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 203.

²¹⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 194-195.

embodies a new aesthetic of beauty.”²¹⁹ In contrast, *Shanghai Xiaojies*, like Wang Qiyao, were seen as representing a blend of traditional values and beauty ideals and modern, primarily European standards. Liu credited his inspiration for his modern beauty type as Hollywood stars such as Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford, women who have “passion racing like a torrent” in their hearts, but suppress this passion so that it is only revealed through their eyes.²²⁰

At the same time, Shanghai’s modernity was influenced by its contact with other Asian nations. In Japan, in the early 1920s, a type of woman known as “*modan gaaru – moga*” became trendy.²²¹ *Moga* “wore bobbed hair, sheer stockings, high heels, and often a brightly colored one-piece dress in the fashion of American film idols such as Clara Bow, Pola Negri, Mary Pickford, and Gloria Swanson.”²²² By 1928 this type of woman was reported as being in China in a North China Herald article that wrote about a “Chinese flapper” who had a bob, a powdered face and dressed like a foreigner.²²³

Hongyan boming

Even though these ideas of “modern womanhood” were present in Republican Shanghai, one of the dominant models of womanhood remained that of the “ill-fated beauty” – the idea of *hongyan boming*.²²⁴ *Hongyan boming*, (flower doomed to wither after its full blossom), alludes to the idea that “pretty girls die young”.²²⁵ Lynn Pan, in her semi-autobiographical novel Tracing it Home describes her Aunt Ying as an example

²¹⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 196.

²²⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 196.

²²¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 198.

²²² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 198.

²²³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 198.

²²⁴ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 197.

²²⁵ Yingjin Zhang’s translation of phrase.

of *hongyan boming*, writing that “Ying’s life was an illustration of the Chinese saying, She who is beautiful is ill-fated.”²²⁶

In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi draws on this model. The character A’Er “sees his object of love through the glorifying images of classical literature. He reads Wang Qiyao poems from the Book of Odes (*Shijing*), the poet Li Bai, and Bai Juyi’s famous poems “The Lute Song” and “Lament Everlasting”. Yet the nostalgic, sorrowful images of the poems, with their allusion to changes of dynasties, the displacement of people, their exile, and their tragic death, cast an ominous shadow on the woman before him. All the poems he quoted and presented to his idol point to one old Chinese idiom: ‘Beautiful ladies lead miserable lives (*hongyan boming*)’.²²⁷ In his mind, A’Er can never separate his love for Miss Shanghai from his worship of the city for which the woman is named.”²²⁸ In reality, A’Er has fallen as much in love with the imagery as with the woman Wang Qiyao.

As explored earlier, Wang Anyi establishes a relationship between her protagonist Wang Qiyao and Yang Guifei in Bai Juyi’s poem by choosing the title of his poem as the title of her novel. Both Wang Qiyao and Yang Guifei are remembered, and achieve(d) power, through being seen. In Bai Juyi’s poem, the Emperor sees her leaving a bath and becomes obsessed with her. In Wang Anyi’s novel, a photographer puts Wang Qiyao on the cover of Shenghuo, and this is the image that Wang Qiyao becomes known for. Wang Qiyao’s photo on the cover of Shenghuo captures her image for eternity. Like Yang Guifei, in Bai Juyi’s poem, Wang Qiyao suffers an untimely death. The cause of

²²⁶ Lynn Pan, *Tracing it Home*, 62

²²⁷ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 379.

²²⁸ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 379.

both women's deaths can be traced back to the image of the 'ill-fated beauty'. Wang Qiyao is Wang Anyi's late 20th century embodiment of the theme of the ill-fated beauty.

Beauty contests: A visual link between Shanghai, modernity and femininity

Yet another image of a modern woman in Shanghai is that of the beauty queen. As the following quote from Lament Everlasting shows, beauty contests were a strong visual sign representing modernity in Shanghai. Contests where participants were judged on their beauty, rather than on their literary or artistic accomplishments, arrived in Shanghai as Shanghai rapidly modernized in the Republican period.

Wang Anyi explores this tradition when she talks about the *Shanghai Xiaojie* contest. She writes:

In the peaceful atmosphere of 1946 that is matchless in thousands of years, good news spreads, with bad news as the prelude. This city is full of optimistic spirits. Everything is viewed in an optimistic way, changing the face of adversity. It is also a city of joyful spirits, unable to live one day without it. When a flood strikes Henan province, provinces all over the country offer donations of some kind. This city organizes a campaign for donations, like everything else, coming in a showy manner – the beauty contest for *Shanghai Xiaojie*. The news of this contest travels faster than the wind, reaching every household in a blink of eyes. “Shanghai” is the equivalence of “modernity” and “*Shanghai Xiaojie*” brings a new sense of modernity. Nothing carries more modernity than “*Xiaojie*” in the city of Shanghai. The whole thing is truly stirring. In a place like this, who would not admire modernity? ... Is there anything more at the heart of this city than “*Shanghai Xiaojie*”?²²⁹

In Dangerous Pleasures, Gail Hershatter writes about the history of beauty contests in China. There has been a long tradition of 'beauty' contests in China. A Chinese form of beauty contest, that of the “flower-list election” existed in the Suzhou

²²⁹ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 48.

area from the mid-seventeenth century.²³⁰ They began in Shanghai in the 1860s when courtesans competed for titles in the ‘flower world’, a term used to refer to the complex subculture that housed Shanghai’s courtesans.²³¹ The flower-list elections were originally set up to parallel the civil-service examinations that were only open to males. However, they differed in the fact that female competitors did not volunteer to compete.²³² Patrons of courtesans entered their favourite courtesans onto a ‘flower-list’. The woman who received the greatest number of recommendation letters²³³ was awarded the highest title, *zhuangyuan* – which paralleled the highest rank a male civil servant candidate could be awarded.²³⁴

As in beauty contests, these women were judged on appearance and performing skills; however they differed in that the “object made visible to be judged was not the woman herself, but the letters of recommendation written by customers on her behalf.”²³⁵ Patron’s letters often included poems about the courtesan’s beauty and fashion skills²³⁶, and were therefore like literary documents.

After winning these contests, winners were known by their rank, and received positive compensation. The increased publicity led to increased business for the courtesan’s house that in turn led to higher fees for the courtesan.

By the first two decades of the twentieth century, the flower-list elections had begun to evolve from elite courtesan contests that were held annually into contests that were increasingly becoming more like those being held in the West. By 1917, the contest

²³⁰ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 165.

²³¹ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 165.

²³² Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 165.

²³³ *Ibid.* These letters were public documents that were published in the tabloid presses.

²³⁴ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 165.

²³⁵ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 165.

²³⁶ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 166.

had become more public, with participants who had paid to vote in a marked contrast from the earlier system.²³⁷ A few years later, in 1920, Shenbao, Shanghai's oldest newspaper, contained advertisements for the contests. However, by the end of the 1920s, the old style contests had largely ended.

In the 1940s beauty contests again became popular in Shanghai. Unlike in the earlier flower-list elections, in these contests, judges chose winners solely based on her beauty. As in the earlier contests, winners were later known by their rank. In Lament Everlasting, after winning a prize in the beauty contest, and being crowned Miss Shanghai Number Three, Wang Qiyao was known by her rank – *Shanghai Xiaojie di san*.

Shanghai Xiaojie and Film Culture

In the afternoon singing 'Four Seasons' along with the record player, that's her. Going off to see Vivian Leigh in 'Gone With the Wind' is a group of Wang Qiyao's.²³⁸

The ideal of the *Shanghai Xiaojie* was formed through media, film being the most influential. Popular Chinese films set in Shanghai such as Song of the Fisherman, The Goddess, New Woman, New Year's Coin and Crossroads presented images about modernity and femininity. These films set in Shanghai showed characters wearing Western clothing or hybrid Sino-Western outfits²³⁹ drinking coffee or cocktails, listening to jazz, riding in motorcars and generally living a life very different from the reality of the rest of China.

Female characters were often used to symbolize the complexity of modernity in Shanghai. In The Goddess, the metaphor of prostitution is used to illustrate the inequality

²³⁷ Gail Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 168.

²³⁸ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 20.

²³⁹ Like the ones Zhao Dan wears in the film Street Angel

of living standards that were present in Shanghai; in the film, the Republican film star Ruan Lingyu is a prostitute trying to free herself from her pimp. Another film New Woman, which also starred Ruan Lingyu, was based on the true story of Ai Xia, an actress who committed suicide after being hounded by the press. Wei Ming, the protagonist of New Woman, is a tragic figure who tries to live an independent life as a writer. Unfortunately she is thwarted by the patriarchal society she lives in, and she ultimately commits suicide. New Year's Coin is a film that shows Shanghai society at all levels by following a coin as it passes through the hands of many people. Crossroads follows the story of four young people who, after graduating from school, find their lives very different than they had imagined life would be. Elements of Western life, such as streetlights, foreign fashions and foreign music, were present in all of these films.

In his excellent discussion of Shanghai in literature and film, Yingjin Zhang writes that as soon as film arrived in Shanghai “women became not just an attraction but an obsession.”²⁴⁰ He postulates one reason for this was that “new women constitute a new productive force... in many ways a disruptive force in modern Chinese society.”²⁴¹ The film industry propagated the new ideas about women and spread it to the populace.

Wang Qiyao hums along to “Four Seasons”, a song made famous in the film Street Angel. As discussed earlier, Street Angel was an immensely popular film when it was released. Based on an American film with the same name, the film starred Zhou Xuan (1918/1920-1957) as the female lead.²⁴² In the film, Zhou Xuan’s character is a young beautiful woman who is forced to sing in a teahouse in order to survive. Like the character she plays, Zhou Xuan grew up in poverty and suffered at the hands of many

²⁴⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature*, 188.

²⁴¹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature*, 189.

²⁴² There is some debate as to the year of her birth.

men.

Zhou Xuan was known for her “golden throat” (*jinsangzi*)²⁴³, and for her ability to sing in both the Shanghai dialect and in Mandarin, though always with a Suzhou accent.²⁴⁴ She is one of the most recognized cultural icons of the Republican period. In fact, according to Audrey Yue: Zhou Xuan, “at the heart of a cult of romantic nostalgia which ... accompanied the growth of modern Shanghai since the 1990s” has become representative of the Republican era.²⁴⁵ In *Lament Everlasting*, Wang Anyi writes, “Occasionally the sound of a soft voice speaking in a Shanghai dialect with a touch of Suzhou bringing to mind Wang Qiyao’s name.”²⁴⁶ In this manner, Wang Anyi is drawing a clear link between her *Xiaojie* Wang Qiyao and the famous *Xiaojie* Zhou Xuan.

Zhou Xuan recorded more than one hundred songs, and these songs appeared in over forty-two films.²⁴⁷ Zhou Xuan was an archetypical *Shanghai Xiaojie*. She lived a tumultuous life from the time she was born. She was born in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province to a very poor family.²⁴⁸ She was almost sold into prostitution, but was instead sold to a dance troupe when she was eleven years old.²⁴⁹ She became very famous in Shanghai, had numerous affairs and died at the age of thirty-nine from mental illness,²⁵⁰ “broken by heartless men”.²⁵¹ Her songs captured the spirit of life in Republican Shanghai.

²⁴³ Andreas Steen, “Zhou Xuan: ‘When will the gentleman come back again?’” in *Chime*, 14-15 (1999-2000), 127. She became known as *jin sangzi* after winning a singing competition in 1934.

²⁴⁴ Audrey Yue, “*In the Mood for Love: Intersections of Hong Kong Modernity*,” in Chris Berry, ed. *Chinese Films in Focus, 25 New Takes*, London: The British Film Institute, 2003, 133

²⁴⁵ Audrey Yue, “*In the Mood for Love*,” 133.

²⁴⁶ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 24.

²⁴⁷ Jonathon Stock, “Reconsidering the Past: Zhou Xuan and the Rehabilitation of Early Twentieth-Century Popular Music” in *Asian Music* (Spring/Summer 1995 Volume 26) Number 2, 121.

²⁴⁸ Andreas Steen, “Zhou Xuan,” 126.

²⁴⁹ Andreas Steen, “Zhou Xuan,” 126

²⁵⁰ Andreas Steen, “Zhou Xuan,” 124.

²⁵¹ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 133.

Popular song often linked Shanghai women to the city of Shanghai. In *Shanghai Xiaojie*, a popular Republican era song, Shanghai women are celebrated and linked with the modern city of Shanghai, the “metropolis of the East”.

Shanghai is the metropolis of the East,
Shanghai maidens are charming,
Progressive in their thinking.
With healthy and shapely bodies,
Brave, alive, and intelligent,
Creating a new epoch for mankind,
Achieving honour for women.
Shanghai is the metropolis of the East,
Maidens of Shanghai are charming.²⁵²

As this song shows, the image of modern Shanghai was connected to an image of femininity. This is further evidence of Yingjin Zhang’s hypothesis that Shanghai has often been imagined as feminine. Shanghai women are related to the metropolis of Shanghai representing modernity in a positive way: the physical beauty and modernity of Shanghai women as a paradigm for the city itself.

Wang Qiyao goes to see Gone with the Wind, the most popular film showing in Shanghai in 1941.²⁵³ As explored earlier, Shanghai was the city in China that regularly showed foreign films. By including this information, Wang Anyi shows her familiarity to Republican urban culture.

In Lament Everlasting, Wang Qiyao is compared to the Republican era screen legend Ruan Lingyu in the following passage where Kang Minxun, one of Wang Qiyao’s lovers, ponders Wang Qiyao:

He seems to have seen graceful lights and colours behind Wang Qiyao, like a mirage. However, this woman in front of him gives an impression of dim lamps in a lonely nunnery. One time when they are playing Mahjong,

²⁵² Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 253.

²⁵³ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 143.

the lights above create some shadows on her face. Her eyes are shining in the dark shadow, looking deep and serene. All of a sudden, she raises her eyebrows and lets out a chuckle, while pushing down the Mahjong tiles (to signal the completion of a game). The sound of her chuckle reminds him of Ruan Lingyu, Of course Wang Qiyao is not Ruan Lingyu, but who is she, really? In fact, he has touched the edge of the answer to the puzzle, but has let the answer slide away. Another time when he is walking by a photo studio, he sees a photo of a bride in the wedding gown, looking familiar. His mind clicks and he suddenly remembers a photo that was displayed at the same place a long time ago. If he had thought of Wang Qiyao at that very moment, he would probably have solved the puzzle. But he didn't and once again lets the chance pass him by. The more he is with Wang Qiyao, the more frequently the puzzle disturbs him. In her quiet elegance he sees extreme beauty which pervades the air around her. Through the haze he still sees an air of romance in Wang Qiyao's quiet elegance. Who is she, really? The city seems to have only a little of the past left in its mood, which is the clanging of the trolley (the clang clang sound of the trolley on its tracks). When Kang Mingxun hears this sound he feels sad. Wang Qiyao is a small part, a shadow, of this mood that can be occasionally glimpsed. Kang comes to a decision: he must discover her past, but where to go to do this?²⁵⁴

Jay Leyda, in *Dianying, An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, describes Ruan Lingyu as “one of the great actresses of film history, as perfectly and peculiarly adapted to the film as we recognize Greta Garbo to be.”²⁵⁵ Ruan Lingyu was called the ‘Garbo of the Orient’.²⁵⁶ One of Shanghai’s most famous silent film stars,²⁵⁷ Ruan Lingyu was made famous through such films as *The Peach Blossom Weeps Tears of Blood*, *Three Modern Girls*, *Goodbye, Shanghai*, *Perfumed Snowy Sea*, *The Goddess* and *New Women*. Her fame has lived on through the modern day proliferation of calendar posters, the sale of her films, and as well, by the production of recent films such

²⁵⁴ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 190.

²⁵⁵ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 87.

²⁵⁶ Kristine Harris, “*The Goddess*”, 111.

²⁵⁷ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 31.

as Centre Stage.²⁵⁸ Described as “an experimental biopic,” Centre Stage is about the “life and legend of Ruan Lingyu.”²⁵⁹

The life of Ruan Lingyu is an example of an archetypical *Shanghai Xiaojie*. Beautiful in a coifed treaty port way, Ruan Lingyu represented the contradictions of Shanghai as she both represented the modernity Shanghai represented, and as well, traditional ideas of beauty. She wore a *qipao*, had short waved hair, and wore make-up and chandelier earrings, yet remained demure in front of the camera. Born in 1910 in Shanghai, she lived a short life in the spotlight. She made her first film in 1926 when she was only sixteen. At the time, film actresses were “equated with loose women and prostitutes.”²⁶⁰ By the 1930s, actresses began to attain more prestige, and Ruan Lingyu “attained a glamorous life.”²⁶¹ However, actresses were “still placed ... on this prostitute-courtesan continuum” and Ruan was a casualty of the time she lived in.²⁶² Tragically, her life ended less than a decade later. At the age of twenty-five on March 8, 1935, Ruan Lingyu committed suicide.²⁶³ Over one hundred thousand mourners attended her funeral.²⁶⁴

Ruan Lingyu’s life was affected by gossip. Her suicide note blamed gossipmongers: “Gossip is a fearful thing”.²⁶⁵ In Lament Everlasting, in “Wang Qiyao”, Wang Anyi writes: “The maid is very busy from morning to night, but she still has time

²⁵⁸ *Centre Stage* was produced in 1991. Directed by Stanley Kwan, the film starred Maggie Cheung as Ruan Lingyu.

²⁵⁹ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 31.

²⁶⁰ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 34.

²⁶¹ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 34.

²⁶² Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 34.

²⁶³ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 37.

²⁶⁴ Berenice Reynaud, “*Centre Stage*,” 36.

²⁶⁵ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 96.

to gossip about her master and his family”.²⁶⁶ Later in a chapter called “Gossip”, Wang Anyi explores how gossip flows through the city. Xudong Zhang writes, “Gossip is the medium by which the Shanghai dwellers communicate and relate to one another.”²⁶⁷

Living the life of a *Xiaojie*, a life with ‘glamour’ opened the door to scandal. Like Ruan Lingyu, Wang Qiyao was also the victim of gossip.

Ruan Lingyu fit the beauty model of ‘*Xiaojie*-hood’. With her stylized looks, she was a blend of the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, tradition and modernity. Ruan Lingyu’s image in public was closely tied with her roles.²⁶⁸ She was viewed as a tragic beauty – she always looked slightly wistful and in all of her roles, she was the victim of tragedy.

The standard for beauty in Shanghai was set by film. As Jay Leyda writes, “Only on Chinese calendars can one find counterparts of the ladies who were ‘developed’ to attract film audiences of the treaty ports in the 1930s, and these standards have changed little since then...the Shanghai standard for beauty is one thing left unchanged by the revolution”.²⁶⁹

Shanghai Xiaojie – Fashionable Woman

Wang Qiyao looks amazingly beautiful wearing an iridescent blue *qipao*, slender and graceful, with emotion-filled eyes and pitch-black bangs on her forehead. Wang Qiyao follows fashions, not setting the trends, but also not falling behind. As a group, they follow one another trying to be modern and fashionable. They don’t have their own ideas; they just copy the fashions from others. They are not after the fashion’s origin, just simply wanting to reflect them. They embody the fashion of Shanghai; they are representatives of the fashions. They cannot promote them; it’s not their goal. They don’t have creative talent or an independent spirit; they are simply faithful and obedient to the trends. They embody the spirit

²⁶⁶ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 20.

²⁶⁷ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 374.

²⁶⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture*, 83.

²⁶⁹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, 86.

of their age. They take it for granted; it is their duty to embody the spirit of the age. If someone famous appears, no matter who he is, or what he does, they become his or her loyal fan. They read the serial love stories in the papers. Some bravely write to the stars and authors only in the faint hope of perhaps getting an autograph. In the fashion world, they are the bricks of this society. Even their emotions are affected – how they express emotion is inspired by fashion. Putting fallen leaves in books, putting dead butterflies in rouge boxes, make them feel sentimental – even their tears are copying others. They practice emotions inside before they let their hearts feel. It is not all fake, but the sequence is off. Everything in the world has its prototype; there is always someone to lead the way. The expressions in Wang Qiyao's eyes is a bit wistful, under her eyes are shadows, the shadow of sentiment. They easily show emotion and people find it attractive. ... Young trendsetters create these fashions in the papers. Fashion knows and understands what she needs.²⁷⁰

Fashion is an important visual in defining the *Shanghai Xiaojie*. From the advent of the twentieth century, Shanghai has been viewed as the fashion capital for China. The historical link between fashion and the Xiaojie is evidenced by this 1930s guidebook to Shanghai: “the tailors in Shanghai set the mode for feminine dress all over China”.²⁷¹ Additionally, department stores held regular fashion shows.

In her memoir *Tracing it Home*, Lynn Pan described the glamorous Shanghai women who mixed Chinese and Western elements in their style. She describes women as wearing *cheongsams (qipaos)*, “the Chinese sheath with the high collar and side slits” and showing their knowledge of the latest fashions by wearing European accessories.²⁷² She writes that in the winter her mother “would be wrapped in furs – brown beaver and cream lynx and leopardskin with its broken black rings.”²⁷³

The physical appearance of the *Shanghai Xiaojie* can be characterized by a blending of traditional and modern ideas of beauty. Often *Shanghai Xiaojies* wore a

²⁷⁰ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 22-24

²⁷¹ H. J. Lethbridge, *All About Shanghai*, 71.

²⁷² Lynn Pan, *Tracing it Home*, New York: Kondansha International, 1992, 36.

²⁷³ Lynn Pan, *Tracing it Home*, 36.

mixture of Chinese and Western garments, combining a *qipao* with a fur coat and high-heeled shoes. Gail Hershatter writes that wearing non-traditional clothing allowed women to show their knowledge of the modern.²⁷⁴

The outfit most associated with the *Shanghai Xiaojie* is the *qipao*, or *cheongsam*. A *qipao* is a long sheath-like gown with long slits up either side that has a high collar and buttons horizontally across the upper chest. Originally based on a Manchu style of robe, the *qipao* became the outfit most associated with Shanghai women. Shao-yi Sun, in "Fashioning the Shanghai woman: Gender, Politics, and Power," writes of the *qipao* as a symbol of the modern girl breaking away from social conventions.²⁷⁵ A woman wearing a *qipao* summons up certain exotic images in the beholder.

The lifestyle of the *Shanghai Xiaojie* was legendary and created by the film world. Shanghai's young women were famous for frequenting the cinema, coffeehouses, department stores, and dance palaces. Lynn Pan writes, "While the rest of the nation was still sunk in rusticity, here were young girls clacking about in Italian heels, photographic studios, department stores, special offers and seasonal sales..."²⁷⁶ To Chinese viewers, in the Republican era, the *qipao* symbolized modernity and a certain glamour. To the western viewer, the *qipao* was a symbol of 'otherness'; the mysterious 'Orient' embodied in the female body. In the Republican period, Shanghai women wearing the *qipao* became symbols of a new modernity that Shanghai offered.

²⁷⁴ Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, 84.

²⁷⁵ Shao-yi Sun, "Fashioning the Shanghai Woman: Gender, Politics, and Power" from an abstract of a paper presented at the April 1998 UVIC Conference on Asian Popular Culture.

²⁷⁶ Lynn Pan, *In Search of Old Shanghai*, 58.

The *Shanghai Xiaojie* had styled hair, often in Western styles, and wore makeup. Elaborately coifed hair or bobbed hair symbolized a break from tradition.²⁷⁷ Blushed cheeks and red lipstick with powdered faces were signs of a life of ease. The popular Republican-era song “*Zui ren de kouhong*” (Intoxicating Lipstick) shows the place of makeup in Shanghai popular culture. Shanghai was the first place in China where women commonly wore makeup.²⁷⁸

That intoxicating lipstick,
 Like a rainbow after a shower.
 How captivating! How enticing!
 How intoxicating!
 That intoxicating lipstick,
 Like a spring breeze on a wintry night.
 How warm! How soft!
 How sensuous!
 Why is it that we only meet tonight?
 Tonight I am stirred for the first time,
 That red lipstick firmly imprinted in my mind.
 That intoxicating lipstick!
 That intoxicating lipstick!²⁷⁹

Shanghai Xiaojie and Nostalgia

The expressions in Wang Qiyao’s eyes is a bit wistful, under her eyes are shadows, the shadow of sentiment. They easily show emotion and people find it attractive... A woman like Wang Qiyao can be found reading a book, doing embroidery, whispering secrets with other young women and crying frustrated tears over her parents inside the archways of every Shanghai lane. Shanghai’s lanes always have a girlish feeling, and this sentiment’s name is Wang Qiyao. This feeling has a beauty to it. It is not unreachable. Instead, this feeling is approachable and charming, humble and warm. Though somewhat affected, it is still acceptable since it has a good intention of pleasing others. It is neither generous nor noble. It is not about grand things such as epic, it is about small things, common and touchable. Just life. It is transferable, but not disposable. It is not based on profound knowledge, but reasonable. It is limited in scope, but it also makes it more interesting than grand things. It is a bit tricky, simple, but

²⁷⁷ Ruan Lingyu, the famed Shanghai actress, had short coiffed hair.

²⁷⁸ Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 253.

²⁷⁹ Isabel K. F. Wong, “The Incantation of Shanghai,” 253.

adorned - a simple life, but more interesting. It is a bit vulgar, but a kind that has been rinsed by civilization. Its glamour is built on practicality. Wang Qiyao's name is written in the delicate moonlight shining on the walls of Shanghai's lanes and is written in the falling pink blossoms of the oleander tree. Occasionally the sound of a soft voice speaking in a Shanghai dialect with a touch of Suzhou also brings to mind Wang Qiyao's name. The sound of the gong from the man selling gruel seems broken into Wang Qiyao's nights. The young dilettantes from *Sancengge* are writing poems for her. Wang Qiyao's tears are like the dew on the leaves of the parasol trees. When the flirting maids sneak through the backdoor late at night, Wang Qiyao is already deep in her dreams. Only because of Wang Qiyao do Shanghai's lanes have feeling. It is as if this feeling forces its way through the cracks in the routines of daily life, like the yellow blossoming weed that seems to appear growing in the cracks in a wall, growing without attention, without conscious awareness. This feeling has the power of staining and melting, like moss growing on walls, enriching from wind and dew, ambitiously flourishing and expanding. Because Shanghai's lanes have this sentiment, there is also pain, and the name of this suffering is also called Wang Qiyao. Occasionally there is a wall covered with vines inside Shanghai lanes, this long green ivy with its sense of antiquity, it is the long-lived thing of sentiment and its longevity is also eternal pain because time has written all over it. The remains press down so hard that you must gasp for breath. *This lament everlasting is Wang Qiyao.*²⁸⁰

In this section Wang Anyi writes how it is the *Shanghai Xiaojies* of Shanghai that give Shanghai its feeling and its sense of history. According to Wang Anyi, it is the average people, the people of the *longtang*, who set the tone for Shanghai. The tone of this passage is one of melancholy.²⁸¹

Conclusion

The image of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*, as popularized during the Republican era, is a recurring image. It was suppressed for almost half a century, but it has re-emerged in

²⁸⁰ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 23. My italics.

²⁸¹ Many of Wang Anyi's recent works have tackled the subject of melancholy, and may be classified as "tales of sorrow". Xiaobing Tang, "Melancholy Against the Grain" in *Chinese Modernism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000, 318.

fashion and in cultural life. Novels such as Wei Hui's Shanghai Baby (2001) and Mian Mian's Candy (2000) show that the mystique of the Shanghai woman remains a dominant image in the Chinese cultural lens. Almost seventy years later, it is still used in advertising and still captures a place in the hearts of Chinese people. The image of the *Shanghai Xiaojie* represents for many a time when Shanghai was in its glory, a time when Shanghai was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world.

Appendix to Chapter Three:

Translation of "Wang Qiyao" chapter from **Lament Everlasting**

Wang Qiyao is a typical woman from a Shanghai lane. You'll see her coming through the back gate every morning carrying an embroidered satchel. You'll see her in the afternoon humming "Four Seasons" along with the radio. You'll see a group of women like her, off to see Vivian Leigh in *Gone With the Wind*. You'll see two best friends at the photography studio to get photos taken – each is a Wang Qiyao. And you will always see her in every wing of every house or attic. Inside Wang Qiyao's family's guestroom, almost always there is a set of mahogany furniture. In the house it is always a little dark, the rays of light from the sun are dim, the sun on the window-sill is trapped, and not able to get in. The vanity table has three mirrored panels; the compact is a bit damp, sticky. The lock on the wood box has been polished so that it is very shiny as though it has been opened and closed many times. Listening to the radio for Suzhou opera or stock information, the reception is hard to receive so the sound from the radio is a bit unclear. Wang Qiyao's housekeeper sometimes sleeps in a small room under the staircase, it is only enough space to fit one bed. The maid has to do everything, even bringing the washing water from the master. The maid is very busy from morning to night, but she still has time to gossip about her master and his family, and to have an affair with the neighbour's driver. Most of the fathers normally listen to their wives, they are all obedient, and this gives Wang Qiyao a sense of female pride. Mornings in Shanghai are filled with fathers heading to the office in the trolley car. In the afternoon, the trolley cars are filled with mothers heading to the fabric shop to buy more fabric for *qipaos*. Under the hardwood floor of Wang Qiyao's house, there are mice running, and so they have to get a cat to deal with the mice, so it always smells in the rooms. Usually Wang Qiyao is the eldest child in her family; as such she has been her mother's confidante since she was young, discussing cloth, visiting relatives together, and listening to her mother talk about men's natures and using her husband as an example.

Wang Qiyao is a typical single woman, all the interns in the joint venture companies pay attention to her. On a scorching hot summer day after the plum rains, looking at her mother's trousseau, she dreams of her own trousseau. Behind the display window of the studio, you could see Wang Qiyao in her last days as a maiden wearing a wedding dress. Wang Qiyao looks amazingly beautiful wearing an iridescent blue *qipao*, slender and graceful, with emotion-filled eyes and pitch-black bangs on her forehead. Wang Qiyao follows fashions, not setting the trends, but also not falling behind. As a group, they follow one another trying to be modern and fashionable. They don't have their own ideas; just copy the fashions from

others. They are not after the trend's origin, just wanting to absorb them. They embody the fashion of Shanghai; they are representatives of the fashions. They cannot promote them; it's not their goal. They don't have creative talent or an independent spirit; they are simply faithful and obedient to the trends. They embody the spirit of their age. They take it for granted; it is their duty to embody the spirit of the age. If someone famous appears, no matter who he is, or what he does, they become his or her loyal fan. They read the serial love stories in the papers. Some bravely write to the stars and authors only in the faint hope of perhaps getting an autograph. In the fashion world, they are the bricks of this society. Even their emotions are affected – how they express emotion is inspired by fashion. Putting fallen leaves in books, putting dead butterflies in rouge boxes, make them feel sentimental – even their tears are copying others. They practice emotions inside before they let their hearts feel. It is not all fake, but the sequence is off. Everything in the world has its prototype; there is always someone to lead the way. The expression in Wang Qiyao's eyes is a bit wistful, under her eyes are shadows, the shadow of sentiment. They easily show emotion and people find it attractive. They eat like birds, walk delicately like cats, they have pale skin; you can see veins in their translucent skin. They suffer through the summer's heat and also through the winter's cold. They must use herbs to keep their body in harmony. Young trendsetters create these fashions in the papers. Fashion knows and understands what she needs. Sister-like emotions run between them, this feeling could last a whole life. It is a mark of each other's girlhood, like a monument, a witness, that seems to freeze time. Throughout their whole life, many things can be replaced, but only their sister-like relationship remains unchanged. This relationship is unusual, for it has no feeling of facing adversity together, nor do they feel affection for each other. There is neither indebtedness nor complaints, neither much involvement nor burden. There is no sense of belonging, neither a hindrance nor a protection. They want to believe they are bosom friends, but how many secret emotions can a girl have? They are more like companions, the kind of companion one has in daily life, such as walking to and from school together. They have the same hairstyle, wear the same shoes and socks, and walk hand in hand like lovers. When you see a couple of young girls like that, don't think they are twins, it is a sister-like relationship, Wang Qiyao style. They snuggle with each other, it seems somewhat overdone, but their faces look so sincere that you have to take them seriously. In fact their companionship is like loneliness keeps forlorn company, one can be no help of the other. However, it turns out to have taken away the practical consideration in their relationship, making it pure. Every Wang Qiyao is always accompanied by another, sometimes as her classmates, sometimes as her neighbours, or even one of her cousins. It becomes their social life in their dull girlhood. Their opportunity for social life is so limited that whenever there is one, they would spare no efforts (in making the most out of it),

thus ordinary social encounters becomes friendship. Wang Qiyao are loyal and sincere. Beneath the surface of the pursuit for fashions, there is a touch of sincere devotion. Their sisterhood is true, though somewhat insipid. When one Wang Qiyao gets married, the other will be her bridesmaid with a little sadness - it is a farewell. Everything is subdued - the colour of the bridesmaid's dress a little darker, the style a little more old-fashioned, and the makeup on her face a little lighter. The bridesmaid doesn't want to look more beautiful than the bride - a little self-sacrifice. That is the feeling of their sisterhood.

A woman like Wang Qiyao can be found reading a book, doing embroidery, whispering secrets with other young women and crying frustrated tears over her parents inside the archways of every Shanghai lane. Shanghai's lanes always have a girlish feeling, and this sentiment's name is Wang Qiyao. This feeling has a beauty to it. It is not unreachable. Instead, this feeling is approachable and charming, humble and warm. Though somewhat affected, it is still acceptable since it has a good intention of pleasing others. It is neither generous nor noble. It is not about grand things such as epic, it is about small things, common and touchable. Just life. It is transferable, but not disposable. It is not based on profound knowledge, but reasonable. It is limited in scope, but it also makes it more interesting than grand things. It is a bit tricky, simple, but adorned - a simple life, but more interesting. It is a bit vulgar, but a kind that has been rinsed by civilization. Its glamour is built on practicality. Wang Qiyao's name is written in the delicate moonlight shining on the walls of Shanghai's lanes and is written in the falling pink blossoms of the oleander tree. Occasionally the sound of a soft voice speaking in a Shanghai dialect with a touch of Suzhou also brings to mind Wang Qiyao's name. The sound of the gong from the man selling gruel seems broken into Wang Qiyao's nights. The young dilettantes from *Sancengge* are writing poems for her. Wang Qiyao's tears are like the dew on the leaves of the parasol trees. When the flirting maids sneak through the backdoor late at night, Wang Qiyao is already deep in her dreams. Only because of Wang Qiyao do Shanghai's lanes have feeling. It is as if this feeling forces its ways through the cracks in the routines of daily life, like the yellow blossoming weed that seems to appear growing in the cracks in a wall, growing without attention, without conscious awareness. This feeling has the power of staining and melting, like moss growing on walls, enriching from wind and dew, ambitiously flourishing and expanding. Because Shanghai's lanes have this sentiment, there is also pain, and the name of this suffering is also called Wang Qiyao. Occasionally there is a wall covered with vines inside Shanghai lanes, this long green ivy with its sense of antiquity, it is the long-lived thing of sentiment and its longevity is also eternal pain because time has written all over it. The remains press

down so hard that you must gasp for breath. This lament everlasting is
Wang Qiyao.²⁸²

²⁸² Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 20-23.

Chapter Four:

Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing: Fashioning Shanghai Women

Introduction

Wang Anyi ... seemed to recreate the Shanghai world of Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) with her Songs of Eternal Sorrow [Lament Everlasting].²⁸³

For more than forty years after the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Zhang Ailing (1920-1995) was viewed as a traitor by the Chinese government.²⁸⁴ Thus, her literary works were in obscurity in Mainland China.²⁸⁵ Since the late 1980s, Zhang Ailing's writing has again been welcomed into the ranks of the modern Chinese literary world.²⁸⁶ Xudong Zhang, a scholar who has written on Wang Anyi and post modernity in China, writes that Zhang Ailing has been "fetished by those seeking to define a cultural heritage of modern China beyond the official genealogy of the People's Republic (for whom Shanghai is a stand-in for a modernity that is more 'universal' than is claimed by the Chinese revolution and socialism)."²⁸⁷ He writes that "nostalgia has become a way for Shanghai residents to absorb a socio-economic shock, culturally, as the tidal wave of commodities and consumption is seen through the misty veil of past images made vivid by an avalanche of old photos, calendars, postcards, cigarette boxes, and commercial ads

²⁸³ Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000, 127

²⁸⁴ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, Foreward by David Der-wei Wang, vii. The government of the PRC regarded Zhang Ailing as a traitor because she had left China for Hong Kong after the Communist revolution. While in Hong Kong, she was employed the American government's Information Service as part of an anti-Communist literary campaign. Zhang Ailing is her Chinese name. She also wrote under her English name, Eileen Chang. For the sake of consistency, I will use Zhang Ailing, except in quoted material where another author has used her English name.

²⁸⁵ In Hong Kong and Taiwan she remained popular throughout the period.

²⁸⁶ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 353

²⁸⁷ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 353. In 1961, C. T. Hsia, the American Chinese literature specialist, described her as "the best and most important writer in Chinese today" in C. T. Hsia, ed. *The History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 136.

beautifully reprinted and sold as ‘classics’ (*jingpin*).”²⁸⁸ As this nostalgia for the past has increased, the literary establishment has sought to find a successor to Zhang Ailing. Scholars such as Perry Link and Xudong Zhang have argued that Wang Anyi is a clear successor to Zhang Ailing.

It is simple to associate the two authors Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing. Both are female authors from Shanghai who achieved fame at a relatively young age by writing works set in Shanghai that detail life in Shanghai. Both writers’ most enduring works highlight the lives of Shanghai’s middle class urbanites. Both authors also have written screenplays set in Shanghai.²⁸⁹ Another commonality is their love of film: both Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing have stated that film culture was very important to them, and both authors have used the cinema as a site in their texts. Leo Lee writes that for Zhang Ailing, “the most ubiquitous public site in Chang’s fiction is surely the cinema, and going to the movies the most popular pastime.”²⁹⁰ In particular, because Wang Anyi’s 1996 novel Lament Everlasting shares many of the same themes and similar narrative structures with Zhang Ailing works like “The Golden Cangue” (1943), The Rouge of the North (1967), and “Love in a Fallen City” (1943), there is a connection between the two authors.

Xudong Zhang discusses the relationship between the two writers’ writing in a recent article. He writes “Wang Anyi’s writing on Shanghai in the 1990s can be regarded as a forceful response to Zhang Ailing’s work in the besieged city half a century ago.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 355.

²⁸⁹ Wang Anyi co-wrote the screenplay for the 1996 film *Temptress Moon*. Directed by Chen Kaige, the film *Temptress Moon* starred Leslie Cheung and Gong Li, and was set in the Republican era.

²⁹⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern, The Flowering of New Urban Culture in China*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 275.

²⁹¹ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 356.

However, he writes that the “this kinship relationship ... is meaningful only upon an explicit rejection of the superficial semblance and thematic continuity between the two.”²⁹² Xudong Zhang sees the relationship as deeper and more complex.

Wang Anyi herself discards the idea that she is an heir to Zhang Ailing, stating that her “personal and literary experiences were shaped by the collective history of the People’s Republic: that contemporary Chinese literature must somehow come to terms with its place in the neo-colonial world system.”²⁹³ She is implicitly stating that her writing will be different from Zhang Ailing’s because of the different historical realities that each was ‘steeped in’. Xudong Zhang argues that what connects the two writers is the fact that neither sees history as a static thing, but rather each views history as subject to a “sustained narrative elaboration that transforms the silence of a petrified history into a duree of concrete historical time”.²⁹⁴

What is the relationship between these two writers, and in particular, between Wang and Zhang, and between Wang’s Lament Everlasting and Zhang’s works such as “The Golden Cangue,” “Love in a Fallen City”, and The Rouge of the North. Though written many decades later, Wang’s Lament Everlasting deals with many similar themes, including the theme of the ‘ill-fated beauty’, to Zhang’s literary works. One commonality is that in works by both authors, the implication is that the future of Shanghai is desolate.²⁹⁵

Wang’s Lament Everlasting shares themes with several of Zhang Ailing’s works. In Zhang’s novella “The Golden Cangue”, Zhang writes of a world where everything is

²⁹² Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 356.

²⁹³ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 356.

²⁹⁴ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 357.

²⁹⁵ See the aforementioned texts.

murky under the surface and relationships are based on unequal power relations, and where love is illusory. The story ends with a melancholy note implying that time flows on but nothing really changes. In her novel, Wang Anyi takes the reader on a journey through the world of life as a former beauty queen through forty years of Chinese history. Like “The Golden Cangue”, and “Love in a Fallen City”, Lament Everlasting, has a melancholy conclusion.

Zhang Ailing – Daughter of Shanghai

Zhang Ailing was born in 1920 to a distinguished family living in Shanghai’s International Settlement,²⁹⁶ with her grandmother’s father, her grandfather, and her father all having ties to gentry.²⁹⁷ The Zhang family fortunes deteriorated after the creation of the Republic of China.²⁹⁸ Her father was an opium addict who frequented brothels, and Zhang’s mother was frequently absent traveling overseas.²⁹⁹ Her mother and father separated when she was a young teenager and she was subject to abuse by her father and stepmother. When Zhang was sixteen, she ran away from home after having been imprisoned in her home for a month. A few years later in 1940, Zhang was awarded a scholarship to study in Hong Kong. For two years she was a student at the University of Hong Kong. She returned to Shanghai in 1943 and began her writing career with a publication in the literary journal *Ziluolan* (Violet). Zhang was a prolific writer who published more than a dozen short stories between 1943-1944. She quickly became the

²⁹⁶ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse, Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945*, New York: Columbia Press, 1980, 200

²⁹⁷ C. T. Hsia, *The History of Modern Chinese*, 136. Her grandmother’s father and her grandfather were both scholars and officials.

²⁹⁸ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, x.

²⁹⁹ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, xi.

most popular writer in Shanghai.³⁰⁰ Her first collection of short stories was called Romances (*Chuanqi*) and sold out in four days.³⁰¹

Zhang also wrote ten film scripts, *Bu liao qing* (Evermore Sorrow) and *Taitai wansui* (Long Live the Wife) for the Wenhua Film Company,³⁰² and eight others while living abroad.³⁰³ In her screenplays, she explored many of the same themes she explored in her literary works: “the private, feminine space of love, marriage, family, and domestic conflicts.”³⁰⁴ Her screenplay for *Taitai wansui* is especially powerful in its portrayal of the complexities of women’s lives in “postwar middle-class Shanghai.”³⁰⁵ In 1952, she left China and went to Hong Kong. Three years later, she moved to the United States where she lived out the rest of her life largely as a recluse.³⁰⁶ She married again³⁰⁷, and published three novels in English, Naked Earth, The Rice Sprout Song and The Rouge of the North, but never achieved commercial success. She died alone at the age of seventy-five in Los Angeles.³⁰⁸ Leo Lee writes that “the ‘mystery’ of her last years only adds more glamour to her legend: she was like a retired movie star past her prime, like Greta Garbo.”³⁰⁹

In the 1920s, Shanghai was the Chinese center for literary production and consumption. Shanghai became the center for literary activity because foreign concessions offered a haven to intellectuals, and because of Shanghai’s large publishing

³⁰⁰ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, vii.

³⁰¹ Leo Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 268.

³⁰² Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang, Woman’s Film, and Domestic Culture of Modern Shanghai,” in *Tamkang Review*, Vol XXIX, No. 4, 12. The English titles of the films are by Poshek Fu.

³⁰³ Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang,” 11.

³⁰⁴ Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang,” 14.

³⁰⁵ Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang,” 19.

³⁰⁶ She wrote another eight scripts for a Hong Kong company while living in the United States.

³⁰⁷ Her first husband was Hu Lancheng, a literary critic who was later accused of being a traitor by the Chinese government.

³⁰⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 267

³⁰⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 267

establishment.³¹⁰ Additionally, treaty port newspapers “provided the breeding ground for a new genre of mass literature which was gradually emerging after the turn of the century.”³¹¹ In fact, many of Shanghai newspapers began running a “supplement called ‘News of Leisure’ which in turn created a greater demand for literary supplements.”³¹² This in turn fed the publishing industry.

Zhang Ailing was part of the Greater Shanghai literary scene, a scene that was distinct from the Beijing literary world. The Shanghai school of literature was known as *haipai* and was thought of as romantic and modern.³¹³ Writers in Shanghai worked to concentrate on the ordinary everyday parts of life rather than concentrating on the larger historical events around them. Poshek Fu describes the Shanghai literary world: “This strategy of de-contextualisation, this de-emphasis on morality, and the fascination with the banality of everyday life were in fact all constituent parts of a discourse dominating the literary world in occupied Shanghai.”³¹⁴

Though *haipai* literature was known as “romantic”, Zhang Ailing was not considered a romantic writer.³¹⁵ In her works, it was fate that controlled lives, not individual will. Edward Gunn writes, “What the anti-romantic writers shared were their doubts that individual needs could be attained and their concern with the theme of self-delusion, upon which both individual ambitions and social institutions were based.”³¹⁶ Zhang Ailing “stood out from this motley group of writers... because of her lyrical evocation of a past that was at once romantic and brutally oppressive, and because she

³¹⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 29.

³¹¹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 5.

³¹² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation*, 5.

³¹³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, 25

³¹⁴ Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang,” 21.

³¹⁵ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse*, 199.

³¹⁶ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse*, 271.

used her “powerful imagination, as a woman writer, to embed the banality of everyday details and the ambiguity of moral behaviour during a time of crisis into the private drama of love, marriage, and domestic relations.”³¹⁷

My analysis of Zhang Ailing’s work is limited to three works, “*Qingcheng zhilian*” (Love in a fallen city)³¹⁸ (1943), “The Golden Cangue”(1943), and The Rouge of the North (1967). The first two works were written while Zhang was living in Shanghai, and the third was written while Zhang was living in the United States. The Rouge of the North, which is largely a re-writing of “The Golden Cangue,” was the last novel Zhang wrote in English.³¹⁹

Zhang Ailing’s story, “Love in a Fallen City” relates the love story between Bai Liusu, a young poor divorcee, and Fan Liuyuan, a wealthy older playboy. Set in both Shanghai and Hong Kong, the story tells how Liusu and Liuyuan both ‘play games’ with each other, but ultimately find happiness as a couple.

Liusu, 28, is a divorcee who is living unhappily with her extended family. An old family friend, Mrs Xu, comes to visit to tell the Bai family that Liusu’s ex-husband has died. A bitter argument ensues and Liusu realises that her family believes she should return to her husband’s family and take her place as the grieving widow. Her brother tells her, “As long as you live you belong to his family, and after you die your ghost will belong to them too!”³²⁰ Mrs Xu, a matchmaker, endeavours to make matches for both Baoluo, another daughter in the family, and Liusu. A meeting is set up between Baoluo

³¹⁷ Poshek Fu, “Eileen Chang,” 21-22.

³¹⁸ The translation of *Qingcheng zhilian* as “Love in a fallen city” is the translation provided by the translator Karen Kingsbury.

³¹⁹ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, vii

³²⁰ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a Fallen City”, Karen Kingsbury, Trans., in *Renditions* (Spring, 1996) No. 45, 62

and Fan Liuyuan, her potential suitor. Liusu and other family members go along to chaperone the date. However, the evening does not go as the family had planned, as Fan Liuyuan, the potential male suitor, flirts with Bai Liusu instead of paying attention to Baoluo. A few days later Mrs Xu again visited and announced that she was leaving for Hong Kong and that she wanted Liusu to join her as her guest. Once they arrived, Liuyuan met them at their hotel in Hong Kong, and on their first night out, tells Liusu, "I love you, I will love you for the rest of my life."³²¹ A flirtation follows over the next few weeks, but the relationship does not progress further. Liusu decides to return to her family in Shanghai, and after a short time, Liuyuan cables for her to return. She returns and they sexually consummate their relationship. However, the following day he tells her that in one week he will leave for England for one year, but that he will rent a house for her in Hong Kong. He was to leave on Dec 7, 1941. However, due to the war, he wasn't able to leave, and a short time later, they were married.

The story ends on a melancholy note: "Hong Kong's defeat had given her victory. But in this unreasonable world, who can say what was the cause, and which the result? Who knows? Maybe it was in order to vindicate her that an entire city fell. Countless thousands of people suffering, and what followed was an earth-shaking revolution... Liusu did not feel her place in history was anything remarkable...the legendary beauties who felled cities and kingdoms were probably all like that."³²²

The Chinese phrase that is the title of this story is usually translated as "Love that topples cities", a phrase that refers to the idea of 'femme-fatale' in the Chinese literary

³²¹ Zhang Ailing, "Love in a Fallen City", 74.

³²² Zhang Ailing, "Love in a Fallen City", 92.

tradition.³²³ According to Edward Gunn, the above passage on Hong Kong alludes to the love of “femmes fatales that eventually ‘topple cities’ and kingdoms.”³²⁴ Alternatively others such as Ke Long see the passage in a different way speculating that the passage is about the author Zhang Ailing. “If ‘Hong Kong’ is replaced by ‘Shanghai’ and ‘Liusu’ by ‘Eileen Chang’, the passage fits Eileen Chang perfectly: it is precisely from the ruins of fallen (i.e., occupied) Shanghai that Chang emerged as a literary star.”³²⁵ Yingjin Zhang argues “Eileen Chang’s world is typically a fallen city, populated by old fogies, playboys, opium addicts, alcoholics, gamblers, and so on. It is a ‘dead world’ concealed by the ‘black curtains’, ‘a place without light,’ or a pure presence of desolation and darkness.”³²⁶

“The Golden Cangue,” also written in 1943, is Zhang Ailing’s most critically acclaimed work. As evidence, in 1961, the American scholar C. T. Hsia described it as “the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature”.³²⁷ It is a text divided into three parts which tells the story of Cao Qiqiao from her arrival as a beautiful young woman into the Qiang family to her eventual transformation to a bitter old woman.

In the first part, Cao Qiqiao’s life as the wife of Second Son, a disfigured invalid, is described in all of its claustrophobic detail. Qiqiao is described as a young woman who smokes opium and who bitterly complains about everything and insults everyone around her. The reader is acutely aware how unhappy Qiqiao is to be in her situation.

In the second part, ten years later, Qiqiao is a widow living in bitterness. The matriarch of the family has died, and as a widow, Qiqiao has been left very little money.

³²³ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse*, 215.

³²⁴ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 245.

³²⁵ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 246.

³²⁶ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 247.

³²⁷ C. T. Hsia, *The History of Modern Chinese*, 137.

Eldest Brother, Qize, Qiqiao's brother-in-law, who she had flirted with once in the past, comes ostensibly to visit, but really to borrow money. His visit reminds her that she has been unhappy for a long time: "No matter what, she had loved him before. Her love had given her endless pain."³²⁸

In the final part of the story she effectively destroys both her son and daughter's chance for happiness by fostering their addiction to opium and thwarting their attempts to find mates. The novel ends on a bitter note:

For thirty years now she had worn a golden cangue. She had used its heavy edges to chop down several people; those that did not die were half killed. She knew that her son and daughter hated her to the death, that the relatives on her husbands' side hated her, and that her own kinsfolk also hated her.... The moon of thirty years ago has gone down long since and the people of thirty years ago are dead but the story of thirty years ago is not yet ended – can have no ending.³²⁹

The Rouge of the North was written a quarter century after "The Golden Cangue," and is a re-working of the same story. The plots for the two texts are almost identical. As in "The Golden Cangue," the plot of The Rouge of the North follows the protagonist from her youth to her bitter old age. In the story, Zhang 'details the predicament of an old-fashioned household in a changing time.'³³⁰ Like "The Golden Cangue," the central theme is "**woman** and her status in the Chinese family system."³³¹

While the novel The Rouge of the North shares a plot with "The Golden Cangue," there are key differences. Qichao has a son and a daughter, while Yindi, the protagonist of The Rouge of the North, only has one child, a son. As The Rouge of the North is a full-length novel, the story contains more narrative details than in "The Golden Cangue."

³²⁸ Zhang Ailing, "The Golden Cangue", in C. T. Hsia, Ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, 166

³²⁹ Zhang Ailing, "The Golden Cangue", 190-191.

³³⁰ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, vii.

³³¹ Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, xvii. Woman is bolded in the original.

One example is the subplot where the protagonist flirts with Third Master, her husband's brother;³³² in The Rouge of the North, there is much more attention paid to this event.

Continuity in themes

This section will provide a discussion of some of the continuities in theme, style and narrative devices that exist between the writing of Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing. As stated earlier, this analysis is limited to the following works: Wang Anyi's Lament Everlasting, and Zhang Ailing's "Love in a Fallen City," "The Golden Cangue," and Rouge of the North. My discussion is focused on the following matters: Shanghai is the most motivating factor in their writing; class is an inescapable part of life; there is a relationship between female youth, beauty, and power; and personal politics are more important than public politics. Additionally, both writers share a certain writing style: both write 'claustrophobic' stories (most of the events take place in small confined spaces); they write interior stories (most events take place in character's minds, rather than in the outside world), and both share a frustration with things known, but not said.

Shanghai is their main focus, and in particular, the nuances of life in Shanghai, and or ordinary Shanghai residents. Wang Anyi writes, and Zhang Ailing wrote, stories about the everyday life of Shanghai's urban residents. Both authors see ordinary people as heroes, and both authors' texts are full of minute details.

In Wang Anyi's writing, the narrator is often "virtually indistinguishable from that of an average Shanghai dweller."³³³ Wang Anyi also resembles an ethnographer with her "fascination with the superficial and frivolous that enables Wang to delve deep

³³² Zhang Ailing, *The Rouge of the North*, xiv.

³³³ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 361.

into the heart of Shanghai as an interiority, a supernature, a dream, and a nostalgic utopia.”³³⁴ *Lament Everlasting* focuses not only on Shanghai’s exciting cosmopolitan sites, but also on life in the *longtang*. As described in an earlier chapter, Shanghai’s *longtang* (lanes and alleyways with courtyard houses) makes up the backdrop of Shanghai. For Wang Anyi, the *longtang* is “the embodiment of middle-class Shanghai”, and it is the *longtang* that “records the ways and gestures by which this middle class shelters itself from the brutal forces of history”.³³⁵

In Zhang Ailing’s own words, “Shanghai people are distilled from traditional Chinese people under the pressure of modern life; they are the product of a deformed mix of old and new culture. The result may not be healthy, but in it there is also a curious wisdom.”³³⁶

Lee writes that “with her details Chang forces our attention to those material ‘signifiers’ that serve not only to tell a different story about Shanghai’s urban life but also to reconfigure the spaces of the city – private and public, small and large – in accordance with her own vision.”³³⁷ By noting the myriad details of people’s lives, she is like an “ethnographer”³³⁸ who captures the habits and choices of her characters. In Zhang’s essay “My Own Writing” (*Ziji de wenzhang*), she writes, “I believe that although they are weak – the average people are not as forceful as heroes – it is precisely these average people who can better represent, more so than heroes, the sum total of this age.”³³⁹

Edward Gunn writes, “Chang is more characteristically concerned with those who have

³³⁴ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 359.

³³⁵ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 373.

³³⁶ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 269.

³³⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 271.

³³⁸ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 248.

³³⁹ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 282.

little control over their environment and the sadness of their pathetic struggles to escape or remake their world.”³⁴⁰ In “Love in a Fallen City”, Zhang concludes with “she was just a selfish woman. In this age of chaos and disorder, there is no place for individualists, but there is always a place for an ordinary married couple.”³⁴¹ Most of Zhang’s heroines tend to live in either rundown apartment buildings or inside old-fashioned houses in *longtang* (alleyway courtyard).³⁴² Zhang Ailing wrote of a “world of small public and private spaces – alleys and side streets off the main thoroughfares, dark attics or balconies, rooms in old houses stuffed with old furniture, passageways used for kitchens in a crowded residential building.”³⁴³

Both authors are keenly aware of class. Wang Anyi’s worldview is strongly formed by her awareness of class codes in Shanghai. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Qiyao is always aware of her place in society. In Lament Everlasting, everyone is cognizant of his or her place in society. As a woman from a lower middle class family, Wang Qiyao can only live her life within certain parameters. Her life choices are more-or-less preordained. While Wang Qiyao does ‘rise’ to a certain level of fame, she still remains someone from the *shimin* class. Her relationships are defined from her keen sense of class-consciousness. “For Wang Anyi, it is impossible to understand Shanghai without intimately knowing its elaborate class codes and its irrepressible passion for trivial details of mundane gratification grounded on this class-determined culture.... The depth of the city lies in its middle-class longing... and in its undivided loyalty to a lost

³⁴⁰ Edward M. Gunn, Jr., *Unwelcome Muse*, 204.

³⁴¹ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a Fallen City”, 91.

³⁴² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 272.

³⁴³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 272.

form of life that once actually existed *right here*.”³⁴⁴ Like Zhang Ailing, who wrote forty years before her, Wang Anyi sees class relations as the real fabric behind the city of Shanghai.³⁴⁵

In “Love in a Fallen City”, Zhang Ailing shows her class awareness when Mrs Xu states, “Poor people, even if they want to, can’t make an end to things. Even if you shave your head and become a nun, when you ask for alms you’ll still have to deal with people – you can’t just up and leave the human race.”³⁴⁶ In “The Golden Cangue”, Qichao is scorned because her natal family operated a sesame shop.

“Beautiful ladies lead miserable lives (*hongyan boming*).”³⁴⁷ This phrase, the dominant theme in Lament Everlasting, is present in Zhang Ailing’s works. Though Liusu, in “Love in a Fallen City” is able to gain some freedom from her family, she also has to make sacrifices in order to marry Liuyuan. The concluding paragraph of “Love in a Fallen City” leaves a melancholic note: “There are legends everywhere, but they do not necessarily have such a happy ending.”³⁴⁸ In “The Golden Cangue”, Qichao’s beauty enables her to marry into a wealthy family. However, it does not give her a happy life. Her financial security is her ‘golden cangue’ – it is a double-edged sword that is always touched with pain. By marrying, she escaped from the sesame oil shop, but entered into a world where she is like a beautiful bird that has had her wings clipped and is no longer able to fly. In another passage, the theme is alluded to: “Her love had given her endless pain.”³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 360.

³⁴⁵ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 358.

³⁴⁶ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a Fallen City”, 65.

³⁴⁷ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 51 (Translation by Xudong Zhang)

³⁴⁸ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a Fallen City”, 92.

³⁴⁹ Zhang Ailing, “The Golden Cangue”, 166.

Personal politics are more important to daily life than national politics (or external events). Neither Wang Anyi nor Zhang Ailing write texts that discuss politics. Both writers are aware that for most Shanghai urbanites, collectivity is defined by consumption, rather than by national politics.³⁵⁰ Neither author is concerned with the historical political realities, but instead both focus on the social lives of their characters. For Zhang Ailing the “politics of the everyday is thus given priority over the politics of nationalism” and this “displacement of the historical by the personal further reveals her fundamental suspicion of the monumentality of history on the one hand and her interest in the triviality of everyday life on the other.”³⁵¹ Like the characters found in Zhang Ailing’s writing, Wang Anyi’s characters often seem alienated from “real time”.³⁵² The characters often seem displaced from the larger sociopolitical contest of society, but rather, immersed in the cultural minutiae of a specific location. Wang Anyi communicates her “sense of history through the thicket of literary and sociological concreteness, through the ‘trivial details’ (*suosi de xijie*) that constitute the physical and mental life-world with which her characters stick in a selfless fashion.”³⁵³

For both Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing, most events take place in the characters’ minds rather than in the public realm. In Lament Everlasting, there is little dialogue; most dialogue is in the form of interior monologues inside Wang Qiyao’s head. For example, in the following passage, the reader learns more about Wang Qiyao’s thoughts, than about what is happening in the room.

Wang Qiyao is sitting on another sofa, watching them, and suddenly realises her days of being the star have passed. Oh the glories of

³⁵⁰ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 364.

³⁵¹ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese*, 249.

³⁵² Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 363.

³⁵³ Xudong Zhang, “Shanghai Nostalgia,” 360.

yesteryear! It truly was a taste of infinity. This piano pierces her ear and her heart, making her feel it impossible to go on. As she sits at the piano, Zhang Lili, though her expression is plain, yet very elegant, formlessly had created a distance from her, creating a distance between Cheng and Wang Qiyao. Wang Qiyao suddenly felt grief; like the feeling of letdown that always occurs after a great happiness has passed. Great joy is never long-lived.³⁵⁴

Both authors share a similar sensibility about the opaqueness of life. There is a shared sense of frustration about things known, but not said. This is evident in all of the works discussed in this chapter. In Lament Everlasting, this is evident in Wang Qiyao's relationship with Mr. Cheng. In "The Golden Cangue," Zhang Ailing shows this when she writes about her protagonist's relationship with the family dowager, and with her brother-in-law.

In addition to sharing themes, Wang Anyi and Zhang Ailing use many of the same narrative devices to illuminate their works. One example is a mirror – mirrors are used in order to show a passage of time as well as to show the character of the protagonist. Mirrors, as in a camera lens, can also act as a 'reflector' for the city of Shanghai.

In Lament Everlasting, Wang Qiyao is introduced through the lens of a camera, a mirror. Wang Qiyao is first discovered when she is at the film studio. At the same time, visiting the film studio allows her to experience the world behind the film studio. "She becomes both an object of an aesthetic gaze and a witness to the unveiled interiority of the concealed, intimate daily world of the urban middle class."³⁵⁵

In Zhang Ailing's "Love in a Fallen City", a mirror appears twice in the story. At the beginning of the story, Liusu looks into her bedroom mirror and examines how her

³⁵⁴ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 78.

³⁵⁵ Xudong Zhang, "Shanghai Nostalgia," 377.

appearance has changed with time. As a fiddle begins to play, Liusu performs for the mirror: “Her steps seemed to trace the lost rhythms of an ancient melody. Suddenly, she smiled – a private, malevolent smile – and the music came to a discordant halt. Outside, the *huqin* still played, but it was telling tales of fealty and filial piety, chastity and righteousness: distant tales that had nothing to do with her.”³⁵⁶ Later, when Liusu and Liuyuan consummate their relationship, a mirror ‘shoots’ the scene: “Liusu felt her head spin, and she fell against the mirror, her back pressed tightly against its icy surface. His mouth did not leave her. He pushed her into the mirror, they seemed to fall down into it, into another shadowy world – freezing cold, searing hot, the flame of the forest burning all over their bodies.”³⁵⁷ The two descriptions both refer to other worlds, and “lead us to thoughts of melancholy” as Zhang Ailing’s words draw a link to “the world at its end.”³⁵⁸

In “The Golden Cangue”, Zhang Ailing uses a mirror in order to show the passage of time. To show ten years has passed, Zhang uses a mirror: “A gust of wind came in the window and blew against the long mirror in the scrollwork lacquered frame until it rattled against the wall. Qichao pressed the mirror down with both hands. The green bamboo went on swinging back and forth in the wind – one could get dizzy watching it for long. When she looked again the green bamboo curtain had faded, the green and gold landscape was replaced by a photograph of her deceased husband, and the woman in the mirror was also ten years older.”³⁵⁹

Conclusion

³⁵⁶ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a fallen city”, 67.

³⁵⁷ Zhang Ailing, “Love in a fallen city”, 85.

³⁵⁸ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 300.

³⁵⁹ Zhang Ailing, “The Golden Cangue”, 157.

Lament Everlasting represents Wang Anyi's modern day re-writing of a type of literature popularized by Zhang Ailing. In Lament Everlasting, I believe Wang Anyi is exploring many of the same themes as Zhang Ailing did fifty years earlier, and as such, can be seen as a successor to Zhang Ailing's literary tradition.

Lament Everlasting: A Continuing Discourse

“This lament everlasting is Wang Qiyao.”³⁶⁰

“Lament Everlasting” is both the title of Bai Juyi’s poem and Wang Anyi’s novel. As illustrated, the poem’s theme of ‘the ill-fated beauty’ resonates in Wang Anyi’s 1996 novel Lament Everlasting. Though Wang Anyi’s novel was written over a thousand years after Bai’s poem, his theme is reflected in her novel. While Bai’s poem relates the tale of the emperor’s consort Yang Guifei and her unfortunate fate, Wang’s novel is about Wang Qiyao, an ordinary woman who has an extraordinary life. Wang Qiyao, like Yang Guifei, is an ill-fated beauty. Wang Qiyao achieves renown after a photographer puts her photo on the cover of a journal, and she becomes a minor celebrity after placing third in a beauty contest. Yet, her life is ill-fated. Like the city of Shanghai, she endures many trials, and in late middle age, she is murdered for her rumoured wealth.

In this thesis I have argued that Wang Qiyao, a *Shanghai Xiaojie*, represents an ideal of beauty than that developed in Shanghai in the Republican period. Wang Anyi reached back to Republican Shanghai for her inspiration for Lament Everlasting with the novel intertwining the life of Wang Qiyao with the trajectory of Shanghai history.

In chapter one, I provided an introduction to the novel, and an analysis of how her previous writing led to this novel. My reading of Lament Everlasting is based on my idea that there is a strong connection between this novel and other works of literature and art,

³⁶⁰ Wang Anyi, *Chang hen ge*, 23.

including Bai Juyi's poem, Republican era films and literature, and the writing of Zhang Ailing. The chapter concluded with a brief summary of the remaining chapters.

In chapter two, I examined the cultural geography of Republican Shanghai, the culture that created the character of Wang Qiyao. After providing a brief summary of Shanghai's modern history, I looked at the cultural and physical cityscape. Primarily drawing on the work of Yingjin Zhang and Leo Ou-fan Lee, the chapter provided a description of the special nature of the Shanghai cityscape in the Chinese popular imagination. Both authors agree that the character of the city of Shanghai has often been viewed as female and linked to modernity.

In chapter three, I explored the ideal of the *Shanghai Xiaojie*, in particular looking at Wang Qiyao, the protagonist of Lament Everlasting. Wang Anyi described Wang Qiyao as being a "*Shanghai Xiaojie*", a person specific to this city and this era. In this chapter I looked at Ruan Lingyu and Zhou Xuan as examples of other '*xiaojies*'. The relationship between modernity and the *Xiaojie* was also explored.

The relationship between Wang Anyi and the Republican era author Zhang Ailing was explored in chapter four. I argued that in Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi writes in a manner that is reminiscent of the writing of Zhang Ailing. Factors such as both writers' intimate relationship to the city of Shanghai; the 'claustrophobic' sense of space in the stories; and the focus on personal events rather than historical events, suggest a relationship between the two authors.

By choosing to call her novel Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi links her contemporary beauty, Wang Qiyao, to a long line of illustrious beautiful women who have suffered ill fates. Like Yang Guifei, Wang Qiyao's only resource is her beauty.

For both women, their beauty seals their fate. In Lament Everlasting, Wang Anyi has written a powerful novel examining this theme relating the life story of Wang Qiyao, a beauty-pageant winner in Republican Shanghai, whose beauty brings her fame, but ultimately leads to her demise.

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