

**Woman Question, Man's Problem:
Gender Relationships in Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan
River* and Zhang Ailing's *The Rice-Sprout Song***

by

Yen-Kuang Kuo
B.A., University of Victoria, 2007
B.A., National Taiwan University, 1991

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the theme of gender and power relationships in the works of Ding Ling (1904-1986) and Zhang Ailing (1920-1995), focusing particularly on two novels: Ding Ling's *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (1948) and Zhang Ailing's *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1954). Through this examination, this thesis demonstrates the critiques by these authors of the CCP and its policies which, while ostensibly guaranteeing equality to women, in actuality do nothing more than reinscribe traditional Confucian gender values. This thesis situates these novels historically, and places them into the context of the author's other writings. The analysis focuses on three main aspects of these two novels: violence, repression of women's desire, and female sexuality. Through a close reading informed by a feminist approach to gender relationships, this thesis demonstrates the startling similarities in the critiques of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, despite the writers' different political ideologies and situations in regard to the CCP.

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Introduction

Beginning as early as the late 19th century, and reaching a crescendo during the May Fourth period, some leading Chinese scholars began to debate the “woman question” and called for the emancipation of women. This was in response to the ever-increasing intrusion of Western imperial powers in China. The common belief was that China would remain backward and inferior to those Western powers if the country failed to achieve its modernization, for which the emancipation of women from the restriction of traditional conventions was essential. Leading scholars at the time believed that the establishment of a strong nation required a group of modernized people, yet a group of women trapped by the “fetters of Confucianism”¹ not only symbolized the backwardness of the country but demonstrated the failure of such social evolution. Therefore, achieving the modernization of the nation would first require achieving the emancipation of women.

Despite the differences in their political ideology and purpose, one of the common beliefs among May Fourth intellectuals on woman’s emancipation as the premise upon which China’s modernization would stand, was to release women from traditional patriarchal restrictions.² However, the cultural and political support for women’s emancipation was connected to nationalism, and the claim of women’s emancipation was to attract women as active members of the force for their revolutionary work. The Communists supported the idea of seeking the country’s modernization, and women were seen as an integral force to achieving this modernization. Therefore, women should be emancipated from family restrictions, and should be mobilized into social and revolutionary activities. However, for the communist activists, the emancipation of women should only come together with the social emancipation of the oppressed people, integrating women’s emancipation into socialist revolution.³ That is, women’s emancipation became entwined with the idea of proletarian revolution, associated with the emancipation of the working class and peasants. Therefore, much like the efforts of

¹ H. R. Lan and Vanessa Fong, Guest Editors’ Introduction to Part III “Transforming the Family,” *Chinese Studies in History* 31, no 2 (Winter, 1997-8): 61.

² Christina Gilmartin, “Introduction,” *Chinese Studies in History* 31, no 2 (Winter, 1997-8): 11-14.

³ H. R. Lan and Vanessa Fong, Guest Editors’ Introduction to Part IV “Gender and Class,” *Chinese Studies in History* 31, no 2 (Winter, 1997-8): 82-3.

the early reformers to connect women's emancipation to the nation's salvation and modernization, the Communists subordinated women's emancipation to a broader sense of class revolution.

During the May Fourth period (approximately 1917-1927)⁴ and afterwards, following the writings of male scholars on the "woman question" and of women's emancipation in essays and literary works, female writers emerged as champions of the freedom of women from traditional restrictions. Until relatively recent times, female illiteracy and the denial of women's access to the civil service examination created substantial barriers to women's ability to express themselves in their own writing. Even though some (though very few) women from elite families were able to obtain sufficient education, the content of that education was strictly limited. This too reinforced the reality of a male-dominated literary world that wrote about and represented women's lives, creating and constructing an ideal image of woman while also denigrating 'threatening' ones, ones who demonstrated intellectual ability, political ambition, or, most particularly, sexual audacity. Works with male-created views, or views aligning with male perspectives of women, such as *Lienü Zhuan* (列女傳 *Biographies of Exemplary Women*), or *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅 *The Golden Lotus*), either praise male standards of female virtue or condemn female sexual audacity. It is not that there was a deficiency of female writings. However, often those female works either incorporated

⁴ In a strictly narrow sense, the term "May Fourth Movement" refers to the student demonstration in Beijing on May 4th, 1919. This event was in protest against the Shandong resolution of the Versailles Peace conference in 1919, in which the territory and interests Germany had seized in Shandong were transferred to Japan. However, in popular usage, the term "May Fourth Movement" has broader connotations that include all aspects related to the idea of 'change'—social, political, cultural and intellectual revolution and transformation—before and after 1919. In this thesis, I adopt the broader meaning of May Fourth Movement. In terms of the time span covered by my usage of this phrase, though the May Fourth Incident occurred in 1919, as early as 1915 new thoughts started to emerge to challenge traditional ones, and the journal *New Youth* was founded. In 1917, spurred by intellectuals around *New Youth* and Beijing University, the emergence of these new thoughts and new reforms of literature began to gain momentum. After 1921, the movement became involved in more direct political activity, and for some years its social and intellectual aspects were relatively ignored. According to Chow, therefore, it may be reasonable to define the May Fourth period as 1917-1921 inclusive, but the effect and influence of the movement came before and continued beyond the years defined. For discussion in this thesis, whose concern primarily lies in women's issues, I loosely define the May Fourth period as 1917-1927, since the unraveling of the coalition between the Nationalist and the Communist parties in 1927 brought a halt to and had a vital impact on the Chinese feminist movement, yet the influence of the May Fourth view on women's issues continued beyond that year. For a more detailed discussion, see Chow Tse-tung, "Introduction," *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 1-15.

male values of women, such as *Nujie* (女誡 *Lessons for Women* by 班昭 Ban Zhao); or focused more specifically on the narratives of personal feelings like loneliness or anguish such as the poems by Li Qingzhao (李清照). This does not suggest that these female writers limited themselves only to personal concerns.⁵ However, with the May Fourth period and its drive to modernize China, the emergence of modern women writers allowed women their own critical voice on social and political realities, and these modern female writers expressed of a rebellious spirit of the time, which Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua called “patricide.”⁶ Many of these women emerging from this period and afterwards appear as “modern” female writers, different from the traditional type of literary woman. Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing were among these modern female writers whose works began to reinscribe women in the Chinese literary context. The emergence of these modern female writers such as Chen Hengzhe (陳衡哲), Feng Yuanjun (馮沅君), Lu Yin (廬隱), Xie Bingying (謝冰瑩), Ling Shuhua (凌叔華), Bai Wei (白薇) and later Xiao Hong (蕭紅), gave Chinese women writers the opportunity not only to rewrite but also to question and challenge the existing male discourse of gender roles.⁷ They had often received a modern education, and were also often familiar with classic Chinese knowledge. They wrote about the “woman question” debated at the time and even about politics, voiced their own conditions, and blended their own experiences into the writings that aimed better to illustrate women’s plight, something which affected even the female educated elite.⁸ Female consciousness is seen in the themes of these new female writings. These works provide insight into the first-hand experiences of women, in contrast to the potentially abstract creations of male discourse as to what “women’s experience” was or might have been, despite the best intentions of male writers to create sympathetic

⁵ For information of pre-modern female writings, see Kang-I Sun Chang, “Women’s Poetic Witnessing,” *From the Late Ming to the Late Qing: Dynastic Decline and Cultural Innovation*; and Grace Fong, “Gender and Interpretation: From and Rhetoric in Ming-Qing Women’s Poetic Criticism,” *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*.

⁶ See Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao (Emerging From the Horizon of History 浮出歷史地表)*, p. 3 in chapter 1.

⁷ Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua analyze these female writings in their co-authored book *Fuchu lishi dibiao (Emerging From the Horizon of History 浮出歷史地表)*. Also see *Writing Women in Modern China*, edited by Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson.

⁸ Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, “Introduction,” *Writing Women in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

portrayals of “woman’s plight” in their work. Male writers were generally too removed from first-hand experience to be able to capture the picture of the “woman question,” due to the fundamental difference of their social position in the gendered society.⁹

Among these female writers, Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing stand out as prominent and influential in modern Chinese literary history. Ding Ling first astonished literary critics with “The Diary of Miss Sophie” in the late 1920s, which exposed the sexual psychology and inner struggle of sexual desire of a young woman. Before long, she shifted her attentions to political writings, and remained an important left-wing/revolutionary writer before and after joining the Communists in Yan’an, despite experiencing political persecution in the late 1950s.¹⁰ Similarly, Zhang Ailing obtained her literary reputation by writing “Aloewood Ashes: The First Incense Burning” in the mid-1940s while she was in her early 20s. This work depicts how a young woman falls and loses herself to her desire for love and material consolation. Soon after the establishment of the CCP regime, Zhang Ailing left China and eventually settled in the United States. However, her works have received great attention and have influenced generations of young writers in Taiwan¹¹ and are now popular again in China. Therefore, both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing not only stand out as writers in their era but continue to be the focus of research and criticism in the academic and literary fields.

Although they emerged about one and a half decades apart, Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing shared many similarities, despite their very different political beliefs. They had much in common in their backgrounds, early life experiences and literary establishment, yet developed into ‘binary opposites’ of political ideology. Both were born into elite but declining families, had a strong mother figure, received western-styled, modern educations, and were exposed to and influenced by western thoughts and literature. Both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing lived and wrote in foreign concessions (regions of China administered and “owned” by foreign powers such as France, Germany, or Britain)

⁹ This does not suggest that male writers were blind to women’s conditions. Lu Xun in “The New Year’s Sacrifice” and “Regrets for the Past” shows great sympathy for women’s plight.

¹⁰ Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹¹ David Der-wei Wang (王德威), “From ‘Shanghai School’ to ‘Zhang School,’” in *A Comprehensive Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Literature in Taiwan, 1989-2003 Criticism Vol. 2*, ed. Li Ruitung (Taipei: Jiu ge, 2003), 719-735.

during that tumultuous period. Both expressed female concerns in their works; enjoyed early literary success; and then became established in their literary careers. Up to 1957 before the anti-rightist campaign, Ding Ling had been an important figure to the CCP for propaganda to young students and foreigners, and she had held a relatively important position in the party organization. After her escape from being placed under house arrest by KMT in 1936, she had been a firm supporter of the CCP and had resided in areas mostly within the CCP's base.

In contrast, though not necessarily an opponent to the CCP, Zhang Ailing was not a CCP adherent through her life activities and writings. She had shown little interest in politics, nor had she been a firm vocal activist for women's rights. Before she left China, Zhang had resided in the city of Shanghai, in China's coastal area, where western influence and traditional thoughts and ideology had long co-existed.¹²

And yet despite their differing political points of view, both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing wrote initially about female subjectivity, and depicted how women, either "liberated" or still confined within families with traditional conventions, struggled against, or coped with their surroundings, to examine or reflect the female condition and gender relations in the transitional society. Later on, Ding Ling switched the focus of her writings to socialist ideology due to political commitments and "re-education" from the CCP. In 1948 she produced a novel, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (here after, *Sanggan River*), endorsing the CCP. Zhang Ailing, on the other had, switched to plays after the defeat of the Japanese, and then wrote two novellas corresponding to the socialist political climate after the establishment of the CCP regime. Later, in 1954 after she had left China, she produced two novels criticizing the CCP. One of these, *The Rice-Sprout Song* (here after, *Rice-Sprout Song*), along with *Sanggan River*, will form the central focus of this thesis.

Despite the differing political biases of their authors, the production of these two novels demonstrates the importance of the "woman question" in the revolutionary Communist discourse of liberation. The fact that these two novels and their authors share particular similarities while still maintaining political and ideological differences, and

¹² This brief description of the two writers' background is indebted to Chang Jun-mei's *Ting ling: Her Life and Her Work* and Tani Barlow's "Introduction" to *I Myself Am a Woman*, and to Zhang Zijing's *My Sister Zhang Ailing* (張子靜, 我的姊姊張愛玲).

while coming from very different geo-political regions in post-revolutionary China, demonstrates the importance of the presence and presentation of the condition of women in so-called “political” novels from this period. These novels comment on the process of women’s emancipation, and both situate this comment in the environment of land reform as either ongoing or newly-achieved. Thus there is a connection in these authors between the process of land reform (emancipation of the peasants), and emancipation of women. And yet both novels point out a kind of “pseudo” women’s emancipation, in which the condition of women in that newly liberated period was not substantially different from what it had been in the ‘traditional’ China. Both novels ultimately suggest the failure, or uncompleted mission, of the CCP to emancipate women. It is this point that makes the comparison of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, through the novels *Sanggan River* and *Rice-Sprout Song*, interesting and meaningful.

By situating Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing within their similar family background and early experience, analyzing their political beliefs, and by carefully analyzing the two main novels, *Sanggan River* and *Rice-Sprout Song*, this thesis intends to demonstrate that both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing critique a persistent traditional gender ideology based on Confucian doctrines that jeopardizes the CCP’s claim of having achieved the emancipation of women. More precisely, it argues that the presentation of the novels sees a criticism of the CCP’s re-inscription of the traditional gender ideology while attempting to change it.

I. The Persistence and Re-inscription of a Traditional Gender Ideology

Until 1905, with the abolition of civil service examinations, Confucianism as an official ideology had dominated the Chinese society. It emphasized sincerity and the supremacy of the male gender, and champions the authority of parents and men over children and women.¹³ Through the reinterpretation and reinforcement by Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, special virtues had been attributed to women. Among the four

¹³ R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past* (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2002), 161.

aspects considered the most important of women's virtues, two stand out; these are chastity and the submission of women to the husband.¹⁴

Though Confucian ideology faced challenges from cultural reformers and radicals during the May Fourth period and onwards, its influence was still pervasive in the society. In a discussion of Ding Ling's reminiscence of her early stage performance experience, Yan Haiping comments on Ding Ling's female fellows, so called "modern females" (*Xiandai nǚxing*) who were inspired by the idea of and devoted themselves to "women's equality," that "they re-inscribed a regime of power relations based on human classification in the midst of their attempt to change it."¹⁵ Yan's comment can be applied to illustrate better the criticism in the two novels of the Communist's mission for women's emancipation. It points out that those who aimed to change or subvert such oppressive traditions might subconsciously reinscribe them.

Despite the contradiction of their political themes, both novels expose a persistence of traditional cultural values against women beneath the official claims of women's apparently new and positive political and social status. Therefore, my interests focus on gender relationships in the new social order and power structure, and the ways they are presented in the stories told by Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing. Indeed, problems of gender equality or the "woman question" are not the issues which *Sanggan River* attempts to address, but rather the "fundamental transformation of the people's consciousness." The novel aims to show how "the peasants in the course of struggle overcome the shortcomings in their own thinking, develop, and mature."¹⁶ Neither is the 'woman question' the primary issue with which Zhang Ailing's *Rice-Sprout Song* concerns itself; rather, it is centered on the issue of "hunger."¹⁷ Zhang's question, as paraphrased by

¹⁴ Lijun Yuan, "Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen: A Reply to Chenyang Li," *Hypatia* 17, no 1 (Winter, 2002): 124.

¹⁵ Haiping Yan, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 205. According to Yan, some women students at Shanghai University planned to "stage a spoken drama about women's movement for social change." Most of these women students came from the gentry class. Despite their enthusiasm for the project, no one wanted to perform the roles of the maid. In other words, borrowing Yan's terms, "those 'modern females' aspiring to 'women's equality' could not bring themselves to perform women of lower class, which discloses their own respective or particular embeddedness in a social hierarchy and its psychic-cultural effects." See p. 205-6.

¹⁶ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 127.

¹⁷ In a letter replying to Zhang Ailing, Hu Shi first commented on and praised the novel for its demonstration of the theme of hunger.

Wang, is: “if the hunger revolution has been successfully implemented, why do the Chinese still suffer from hunger?”¹⁸ This point leads Zhang to question the Communist regime. The land reform movement involved violent class struggles against landlords and rich peasants. It generated a transformation in the peasants’ class-consciousness. In Wang’s words, “land reform is the outward form of mind reform.”¹⁹ However, if, as Wang has suggested, land reform is also mind reform, then what was left out during that process, or still persistent in the process of the transformation of people’s consciousness in terms of gender? Does this “mind reform” also include a new insight on gender? Also, how gender issues were addressed, and how people perceived and reacted to the roles of gender in the new social relations as presented in the stories, raise questions about gender equality in reaction to the official claim of women’s emancipation. Consciousness was transformed; but what were women’s roles and positions in the family and society, and how did people perceive women in the newly “liberated eras”?

This thesis examines the ways in which these novels present people’s reactions to the new social order and power structure. My reading of the novels suggests that the two texts, despite the binary opposition of their political themes, question official discourse of women’s liberation at that given period. Further, my analysis proposes that the texts ultimately expose and argue against the persistence of the old social norms and behaviours specific to gender in men’s, and even women’s concepts and attitudes. I will argue that the texts seek to criticize the CCP for its persistence in a traditional gender ideology regarding women as subordinated inferiors over whom men have authority. Despite the political transformation of China, I will argue, the texts demonstrate their disagreement with the CCP’s claims of women’s improved condition or emancipation.

For example, on the surface, Ding Ling’s celebration of the achievement of land reform also seems to cheer simultaneously women’s emancipation and leadership as represented in the character of Zhou Guiying, the vice chair of the Women’s Association and the most capable woman in *Sanggan River*, and the first one among the women

¹⁸ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 133.

¹⁹ Land reform was one of the most important policies of the Chinese Communist Revolution in rural China in its early period. On the surface level, it involved agricultural transformation and land redistribution. But land reform was not just a mere agricultural economic policy. It was also a political movement. It changed the “traditional Chinese ethical, cultural and legal system.” See Wang’s *The Monster That Is History*, p. 70-74 & 132-36.

stepping out to beat landlord Qian Wengui in the struggle meeting. However, even this “progressive” woman must endure domestic violence as a result of her complaints of sexual and material dissatisfaction. The inability of Zhou’s husband, the shepherd, to fulfill the needs of the family and his wife impairs his male pride and he turns his frustration into violence to assert his male authority. Zhang’s female protagonist Tang Yuexiang in *Rice-Sprout Song*, similarly, appears to be a capable woman, who dares to imagine a future life without being tied to the land. But such “boldness” does not prevent her from being beaten by her husband for his inability to resist state power represented by the party cadre. The impotence and frustration of Yuexiang’s husband, a model worker, in the face of power from above, are transformed into physical violence against his wife, through which he attempts to reassure himself of his authority as the head of the family. Therefore, my deconstructive reading of *Rice-Sprout Song* and *Sanggan River* subverts the “progressive” image of woman presented in these stories, and suggests that what is being transformed is “selective.” A comparative reading of the two so-called propaganda novels, which present a binary opposition of political themes, therefore, provides an alternative interpretation in reaction to the official discourse of women’s emancipation.

In this thesis, therefore, I will build on the suggestions which Gilmartin has made that the CCP “reinscribed central aspects of the existing gender system” despite their arguing for an emancipation of women from traditional restrictions at that given period.²⁰ I will argue that Ding Ling and Zhang both criticize the CCP for having re-incrined what it attempts to change. In other words, as Gilmartin argues, it aimed to liberate women, but simultaneously reinscribed the traditional gender patterns, at least at that time.

II. Violence, Desire Repression, Sexual Expression

In order to demonstrate my argument, this thesis will consist of several parts. First, I will give a brief account of the lives and experience of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing. I will describe traditional ideology towards gender relations in China, and show the challenges it faced in the transitional era, particularly during the May Fourth period. I will describe the positions on gender of the political groups in order to demonstrate the

²⁰ Christina Gilmartin, “Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic,” *Modern China* 19, no 3 (Jul., 1993): 299.

political context in which Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing developed their own attitudes and political opinions, and to provide a historical situation of their writings. I will also give a brief analysis of their earlier works, to see in terms of gender issues the thematic development or change leading to or connecting the two novels. And then, I will also offer a brief summary of the two novels and give a brief account of critique of the works of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing.

From here, I will move on to the analysis of three key themes in *Sanggan River* and *Rice-Sprout Song*. Through textual analysis, I will compare the ways in which these authors use their writing to comment on their social and historical situations. These themes are violence (directed against both men and women from either the State or their spouses); the repression of desire in women as an aspect of control; and women's sexual expression as an indication of female emancipation. In a broader sense, the repression of desire and sexual oppression are also forms of violence. Violence does not equal power. However, violence is one way in which power can be exercised. In other words, violence can be used as a means of control over the subject, and to force one to submit and be subjected to authority. Following this logic, the repression of desire and sexual oppression can also be conceived of as means of control though they, along with violence, can also become the means of rebellion against control.

Traditional gender ideology emphasizes ideals of chastity, submission, and obedience to family/husband as key virtues of women. This is because of the definite foundation of these ideologies in Confucian doctrines, which legitimize and rationalize the authority of men over their wives. This control extended over the wills, desires, and bodies of women in premodern China. Therefore, what May Fourth cultural reformers sought was mainly to release women from such familial and patriarchal restrictions, and to seek for women's individual and sexual autonomy. However, it is important to remember that men were also included in this drive for autonomy, which really was for the individual, regardless of gender. On the face of things, though, women stood to gain the most from this reform. Therefore, it is legitimate to utilize these three aspects to examine the claim of women's emancipation from the traditional restriction, and to see if the 'old' ideology regarding gender was transformed in the revolutionary process aiming to establish a new cultural, social and political state.

Throughout this thesis, I will utilize a feminist approach to my interpretations of these works. As women writers writing about women and the effects of political ideology on their lives, and about the persistence of a traditional ideology oppressive of women's freedom (which is obviously contradictory given the apparent ideological equality which the CCP claimed for women), it is possible to read Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing as feminists, and to read them through feminist theory. Doing so will demonstrate these two writers' criticism of the failure or uncompleted mission of the CCP to enact its ideology to bring freedom and equality to women. Further, a feminist reading will expose the traditional gender ideology reinscribed in the Communist body politic, which was essentially still patriarchal, grounded in the traditional gender ideology. For "patriarchy," I draw on Gilmartin's definition: "a preindustrial social formation in which power is vested in the senior male members of a kinship, and property, residence, and descent proceed through the male lines. Although junior males and children were also subjected to patriarchal domination, women were subjected to a distinct form of subordination, including their restriction from access to public life."²¹

Although there are certain issues with applying a western concept of feminism onto the Chinese context and although I draw on Gilmartin's idea, patriarchy is not an imported concept in China. Patriarchy in the Chinese context has its roots in and has been nourished by Confucian doctrines. It was embedded in Confucian doctrines that formulated the traditional gender ideology assuming and requiring special virtues of women. In the Han dynasty, the notion of the superiority of husband over wife was asserted. Song-Ming Neo-Confucianists further advocated the "Three Bonds" that affirm a hierarchical order with the authority of the sovereign over the subject, of father over son, and of husband over wife.²² Accordingly, the subordinated role of woman has long been asserted in China's history.²³

²¹ Christina Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 235.

²² Chenyang Li, "Introduction," *The Sage and the Second Sex*, ed. Chenyang Li (Illinois: Carus Publishing Company, 2000), 4-5.

²³ It should be noted that, as indicated later in this introduction, it does not suggest that Confucianism has been static without development or without resistance or struggle.

Through the civil examination system, which created the gentry class that actually governed the vast Chinese countryside, Confucian doctrines became a social phenomenon that remained persistent in Chinese society even after the civil exam system and the gentry class were officially abolished.²⁴

During the May Fourth period, this type of traditional attitude towards gender became the subject of critical discourse, discourse which continued into the early years of the Communist regime. According to Mao Tse-Tung, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party during much of Ding Ling's and Zhang Ailing's lifetimes, besides the domination of the three systems of authority, namely political authority, clan authority and religious authority, women are also dominated by men, that is, the authority of the husband.²⁵ Through such rhetoric, Mao sought to create gender equality in Chinese society by establishing CCP policies to promote this goal, as summed up in his famous statement, "Women hold up half the sky." As a result, the CCP strove to have women cadres and women party members. Women participated in public affairs, and women did 'male work' (for example, driving tractors). Nonetheless, women's authority was limited to the Women's Bureau (All-China Women's Federation).

For many male cadres, their conception of women's liberation was for women to do male's work, or to be involved in social work, thus projecting an image of progress and liberation. But their ideological reality demonstrated little innovative thought about relationships between men and women. What they perceived as 'women's domain' or 'place' was still consistent with the Confucian view of women (especially of women's sexuality). For those male cadres, their notion was that because women participated in men's work, this constituted gender equality—in effect, though the hardware might change, the software remained the same.

Gilmartin offers many useful insights into this particular aspect of the CCP ideology during the years of the land reform movement. Her argument offers an explanation as to why the efforts of the Communist feminists and their early members to solve the "woman question" and hence emancipate women turned out to be mere rhetoric.

²⁴ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²⁵ Mao Tse-Tung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Dongfanghong chubanshe, 1967), 552.

Gilmartin argues that despite the efforts contributed by the early members of the Chinese Communist Party for women's emancipation, they simultaneously reinscribed the patriarchal traits within the party organization in the formative years in contradiction to those efforts.²⁶ For example, the Communist feminist discourse was male-dominant, and was primarily male-produced. Despite publications about specific women's issues and struggles by female members after women began to join the CCP, men held authority as the Party's theoreticians and over the editorship of the major party journals. Besides, from the onset, women encountered difficulties accessing Party membership and leadership, except in the women's program. Two women, Gao Junman (Chen Duxiu's spouse) and Wang Huiwu (Li Da's wife. Li Da was a member of the Central Bureau of the Party, then the highest leadership body in the Communist organization), were asked to head up the women's program, including the establishment of a women's journal, *Funü sheng* (Women's Voice) and the Shanghai Pingmin Girls' School. They were the actual executants but were overseen by a male Party leader. Moreover, they were not admitted to Party membership; rather, "their roles were legitimated through their relationships with prominent Communist leaders."²⁷ Though women started to be admitted to the Party membership upon the establishment of a Women's Bureau at the Second Party Congress in 1922, this decision came from the Comintern rather than the Party itself. Furthermore, despite the possibility to voice their opinions, women were not able to effect changes in policy through the vote, since women were denied access to official delegations at the first four Party congresses. Last, but not the least important, most male Communists seemed to still hold traditional expectations of gender roles, in particular in the division of labour within the domestic realm, assuming that it was the responsibilities of the wife to take care of domestic duties and child raising.²⁸ Therefore, while the belief in gender equality promised by the CCP attracted early female members, these female members encountered "gender differences in political behaviour and roles" that "marked the origins of a fundamentally patriarchal core in the Party's organization

²⁶ Christina Gilmartin, "Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic," 299.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁸ See Gilmartin, "Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic," 299-329.

and operations.”²⁹ Such gender patterns bear two characteristics: relationships with significant male members legitimized female’s roles in the party organization; and patriarchal notions of power shaped their political behaviours and roles. Men were involved in decision and policy making while women engaged in matters that seldom went beyond the Women’s Bureau.³⁰

However, while many Communist males held traditional expectations of gender roles, women’s self-images also contributed to the formulation of such political identities that defined women’s “second-class status.”³¹ Affected by traditional representation of women, Communist women tended to the roles of “organizers” and “managers,” their duties not highly valued, and could “be seen as an extension of women’s traditional roles as mothers and housekeepers.”³² They failed to break through the psychological barrier to question their assumed domestic responsibilities and to assume “more egalitarian political roles inside the Party,” but accepted them “as an extension of their biologically determined reproductive roles.”³³

Gilmartin’s argument provides an explanation for the differentiation of the political behaviours and roles between men and women described in the novels which will form the central subject of this thesis. Women’s participation in politics is limited to the Women’s Bureau, doing nothing substantially important. The division of political duties between men and women corresponded well with gender roles in the minds of men and women. For example in Ding Ling’s work, while men gather to discuss the struggle meeting against the landlord, Qian, the Women’s Association is nothing more than a social club where women gossip.³⁴

Drawing on Gilmartin’s arguments, I will demonstrate that in the novels, males held traditional gender ideology towards women. In fact, some female characters do so, too. In addition, I will demonstrate how the novels present this traditional gender ideology in men and even women themselves, and will point out how Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing

²⁹ Ibid., 311-312.

³⁰ Christina Gilmartin, “Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic,” 313-317.

³¹ Ibid., 320.

³² Ibid., 320.

³³ Ibid., 320-1.

³⁴ Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 172.

show the discrepancies in what the revolutionary individuals tried to do, and what they actually did because of what existed in their thoughts on women's roles (gender). From May Fourth cultural and political reformers to Nationalists and Communists, political change was the goal for which intellectuals and reformers struggled, but all failed to rid themselves of the mentality influenced by traditional ideas on woman. They subconsciously reinscribed it while they aimed to change it. Therefore, no matter what political change may have accompanied it, the "woman question" remained as an integral element of the social mentality. This is evident in the two novels of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing.

In addition, I will also take a political approach to these writers, and critique them as either proponents or opponents of a particular ideological apparatus. Writing under the guideline of Mao's thought that directed the state ideology, Ding Ling's work can be said to be part of the ideological apparatus. However, this does not suggest that Ding Ling was blind to the situation in which she was situated, without criticism of the Party's policies and its attitude toward women. In contrast, in that Zhang Ailing stood apart from the CCP, her work itself can be said to be a critique of that ideological apparatus. In the novel, Zhang Ailing illustrated the irony contained within that ideology by exposing the contrast between the utilization of the apparatus of the CCP to control people and the peasants' real life. The two parts of my approach work together to illustrate the nature of Ding Ling's and Zhang Ailing's criticism of the CCP's ideology towards female emancipation, and to demonstrate the internal contradictions of that ideology.

It is notable that, in many instances, my argument may seem to over-simplify the role or position of Confucianism. However, I do not suggest that Confucianism has always been static or without development, or that women have always and in every instance been oppressed. In fact, even during the Song-Ming period, which strictly required women's virtues, the remarriage of widows, particularly due to economic difficulties, was accepted for women from the low social stratum. In addition, there were female emperor, female officials, and scholars throughout Chinese history. Besides, elite women in most times enjoyed more resources even than men from the lower social strata. According to Eastman, starting from the late-sixteenth century, both educational facilities and book publishing became relatively common, and to some extent, women benefited

from the increased educational opportunities of the time. Though access to the expanded education was granted to primarily elite women, and estimates reveal that female literacy rates in the early nineteenth century was equivocally between only 1 and 10 percent, this does indicate a gradual improvement of (at least, some) women's position. Nonetheless, "until the late nineteenth century, such liberating tendencies were [still] of limited effect."³⁵ Thus, I must say that it is not an "absolute" that all women suffered from Confucian "oppression." However, while it is true that, historically, Confucianism has not always had an "absolute" conception of women's status as lower than that of men, and while it is also true that Confucianism has been an object of resistance or criticism, in this thesis I must resort to a very general view of history. What I am arguing here is based on a very general view of Confucianism and its attitude toward women. Confucianism, even when it is an object of resistance, remains the dominant force in Chinese social structure and in practice. Its attitudes toward women both reflect and reinforce existing dominant gender roles.

Finally, I will include a note here on the versions of the two texts used in this thesis. *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (太陽照在桑乾河上) was originally written in Chinese and first published in 1948. It was translated into English, and the English version used in this thesis was published in 1954 by Foreign Language Press in Beijing. According to Su Weizhen (蘇偉貞) in 《孤島張愛玲》 (*Zhang Ailing in the Lonely Island*), *The Rice-Sprout Song* (秧歌) was first written in English by Zhang Ailing, and later rewritten in Chinese; but it is the Chinese version that was published first in 1954. The English version of the novel was published in 1955.³⁶

In this thesis, I quote from the English versions of the two novels. However, in places, these versions may either be imprecise or lacking in details. Therefore, in places crucial to my argument, I refer to the Chinese texts and include my own additions besides what I have quoted from the English ones. These situations are indicated in the footnotes.

³⁵ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20.

³⁶ See Su Weizhen, 孤島張愛玲 (*Zhang Ailing in Lonely Island*), 79-81. Also see David Der-wei Wang in "Foreword" to *The Rice-Sprout Song*, xiv.

Chapter 1: Socio-Political Background and Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing

I. Traditional Gender Ideology

Confucianism as an official ideology has dominated Chinese society. Before China's encounter with the West and the resulting political threat and liberal cultural influence, which led directly to the shaking of traditional values, what had regulated social and gender relations were traditional ideals based on Confucian doctrines that sustained a patriarchal hierarchical society. Gender ideology was primarily based on Confucian thoughts on gender that emphasized the authority of the senior male in the family and that of men over women. These thoughts regulated woman's role and position in the family and society.

Therefore, patriarchy in the Chinese context has its roots in and has been nourished by Confucian doctrines. It was embedded in Confucian doctrines that formulated the traditional gender ideology, and embodied in the requirement of women to maintain their so-called virtues, particularly women's chastity and submission to family/husband. In the Han dynasty,³⁷ the Confucian official, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.), in his work *Chun Qiu Fan Lu* (春秋繁露 Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals), formulated the so-called "Three Bonds" that eventually promoted the superiority of the husband over the wife according to his *Yin-Yang* doctrine³⁸. He promoted the notion of *Yin-Yang* dichotomy with *Yang* being superior over *Yin*, stating that "The Yin is the correlate of the Yang, the wife of the husband, the subject of the sovereign. There is nothing that does not have a correlate, and in each correlation there is the Yin and Yang. Thus the relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife, are all derived from the principles of the Yin and Yang. The sovereign is Yang, the subject is Yin; the father is Yang, the son is Yin; the husband is Yang, the wife is Yin.

³⁷ The known Han dynasty consisted of Western Han dated from 206 B.C.-A.D. 8 and Eastern or Later Han A.D. 25-220.

³⁸ According to Li, Dong's *yin-yang* doctrine claims that *yang* and *yin*, two opposing forces, are the two principles governing the universe, and these principles can be applied to human relations with *yang* corresponding to the ruler, the father and the husband, and *yin* corresponding to the subject, the son and the wife. The former is superior to, and dominates, the latter. See Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study," in *The Sage and The Second Sex* (Illinois: Carus Publishing Company, 2000), 23-42.

The three cords [*Gang*] of the Way of the [true] King may be sought in Heaven.”³⁹ In addition, the book *Li Ji (The Book of Rites)*,⁴⁰ one of the five classics of Confucianism, promoted women’s specific virtue, the so-called “Threefold Obedience”: “Woman following man is the beginning of the correct relation between husband and wife: obedience to the father before marriage, to the husband after marriage, and to the son after the husband’s death.”⁴¹

Song and Ming neo-Confucians further advocated the “Three Bonds” that affirm a hierarchical order with the authority of the ruler over the subject, of father over son, and of husband over wife.⁴² They reinterpreted and reinforced womanly virtues, emphasizing four aspects: “(1) physical, social and intellectual separation, (2) submission of the woman to the husband within the family, (3) emphasis on women’s chastity and prohibitions against remarriage, and (4) the exclusion of women either from direct or indirect political activity.”⁴³ Moreover, though it originated in the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368),⁴⁴ the Court officially institutionalized “chaste widowhood” during the Ming dynasty, honouring women for maintaining their widowhood.⁴⁵ The Neo-Confucian Cheng Yi (程頤) even expressed the extreme opinion regarding womanly virtue that, in response to widows’ remarriage, it is insignificant to die by starvation, but of importance if one were to lose one’s chastity.⁴⁶

Though it is notable that it was tolerated for widow to remarry due to economic difficulty or pressure from their in-laws, and female chastity was less considered as “a

³⁹ Quoted from Feng in Lijun Yuan’s “Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen,” *Hypatia* 17 (1): 115. Also see in Li’s “The Confucian Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study,” in *The Sage and The Second Sex*, 36.

⁴⁰ *Li Ji* was edited by the Western Han Confucian Dai Sheng (戴聖), collecting essays mostly by pre-Qin Confucian scholars, who were believed to be Confucius’ disciples or the followers of Confucius’ disciples.

⁴¹ Quoted from Li Jun in Yuan’s “Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen,” 114.

⁴² Li Chenyang. “Introduction,” *The Sage and the Second Sex*, 4-5.

⁴³ Quoted from Raphals in Yuan’s “Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen,” 124.

⁴⁴ According to Theiss, in the Yuan dynasty, “the state issued new regulations specifying the age, social status, and length of widowhood required for official recognition of faithful widows, thus for the first time systematizing what had until then been a rather random and occasional process.” See Janet M. Theiss, “Femininity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom,” in *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, ed. Susan Browness and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002), 47.

⁴⁵ Li, “Introduction,” *The Sage and the Second Sex*, 5.

⁴⁶ Lijun Yuan, “Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen,” 123. Also see Li, *The Sage and the Second Sex*, 5.

cardinal virtue” among the lower classes, particularly in the villages,⁴⁷ this does not suggest an acceptance of sexual autonomy or free sexual relationships for women. Instead, the Confucian ideal of womanly virtues as orthodox values was used to judge and evaluate women not only by local governors but also by common civilians. Some criminal cases from Qianlong’s reign in the Qing dynasty reveal the values promoted by the literate elite of the common people and that of the officials who governed the local countryside, in terms of womanly virtues, especially chastity.⁴⁸ They show how common people used “‘female virtue’ in social practice as symbolic capital... to enhance or destroy the status and reputation of individual women or their families.”⁴⁹ These also show how the magistrates, officials cultivated by Confucian doctrines and nourished by the civil examination system, judged and evaluated women under Confucian ideals of womanly virtues in the judicial context. In this context, “only virtuous women could be authentic victims, while the unvirtuous were often saddled with moral responsibility for crimes, even those committed against them.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, when facing controversy over female virtue, women’s obedience to family authorities became the means to evaluate their chastity.⁵¹ Thus, how women justified their behaviours and how people perceived women’s behaviours, can provide a profile of the common value of civilians in social practice about womanly virtues based on Confucian doctrines.

Some scholars argue that the notion of “Three Bonds” originated from *Fajia* (Legalism) in the work *Han Fei Zi* (韓非子) rather than Confucian classics, and that it was not the intention of Confucius to oppress women. Rather, they argue, those who should be held responsible for extreme opinions of womanly virtues that cause women’s oppression are the Neo-Confucians who reinterpreted and distorted Confucius’ doctrines.⁵² They make efforts to distinguish between Confucius (and early

⁴⁷ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20.

⁴⁸ Janet M. Theiss, “Femininity in Flux: Gendered Virtue and Social Conflict in the Mid-Qing Courtroom,” 47-66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55-6.

⁵² See Li, *The Sage and the Second Sex*, p. 4 & 36. Also see Tu Wei-ming, 儒教 (台北: 麥田出版, 2002), 128-9. (*Confucianism*. Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 2002).

Confucianism) and later Confucianism. Despite this and despite the fact that the subject under Confucian restriction is not limited to women, women as a whole have suffered the most. Yuan points out that neither Confucius's idea of the Junzi's (gentleman, cultivated man) virtues for the pursuit of self-cultivation or Neo-Confucians' promotion of women's specific virtues to allow women's self-transformation contributed to the pursuit of a social ideal of equality. Instead, "it encouraged people, including women, to make efforts in keeping supposedly harmonious orders of a patriarchal society, which was deeply gendered in all social institutions, norms, and customs."⁵³

In its social practice, the civil examination system created and nourished the gentry class cultivated by Confucian doctrines. They were the ones who actually governed the vast Chinese countryside. According to Eastman, the gentry class dominated Chinese society almost till the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ As the criminal case records of the Qing judicial court reveal, in its social practice, Confucian doctrines as state orthodoxy represented by the judicial officials governing the local countryside, were to regulate, measure and evaluate women's deeds. Therefore, women were not only placed at the bottom of this hierarchal power chain, but were defined as playing subordinate roles in the family and society. While their sexual desire was restrained, those women who contradicted Confucian ideals of womanhood were denounced and considered as immoral. Such gender ideology embodied in the judicial court, literary expression (such as *lie nü zhuan*) and everyday practice (such as physical restrictions like footbinding, female submission and obedience, restrictions on education, etc.), and Confucian doctrines regarding gender, had become a social phenomenon that, to great extent, remained persistent in Chinese society even after the official abolishment of the civil examination system and the gentry class, and even after facing severe challenge during the May Fourth period.

⁵³ Lijun Yuan, "Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen," 125.

⁵⁴ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestor*, 195. For detailed discussion on the Chinese gentry class, see Yu Ying-shih, 中國知識階層史論 (古代篇) (On the history of the Chinese intellectuals), and 士與中國文化 (The intelligentsia and Chinese culture).

II. The Woman Question and Women's Emancipation: Woman in the Transitional Era

1. Before May Fourth

In the late 19th century, traditional political and cultural structures faced severe challenges. Despite the reflections of a few indigenous intellectuals on women's plight before the May Fourth movement, it was not until May Fourth itself that traditional values faced truly radical, unprecedented challenge. According to Ropp, criticism, both orthodox and heterodox, of moralistic impositions of Neo-Confucianism on women had already emerged during the Qing period. Concerns about widow chastity, widow suicide, widow remarriage, female illiteracy, and foot-binding had been expressed. In particular, *Flowers in the Mirror* (鏡花緣 *Jing hua yuan*), the work of novelist Li Ju-chen (Li Ruzhen 李汝珍), was considered to be rich in feminist views independent of western influence. However, such advanced views on women remained incapable of overthrowing the dominant cultural values.⁵⁵

The Taiping rebellion unwittingly carried out an unprecedented radical "feminist revolt." Its earliest female members, from the Hakka people, had discarded footbinding, and female members not only participated in the military uprising but also served in its governing organizational body. For the first time, rights to land shares were granted regardless of gender, though this was mainly rhetorical. However, this does not suggest the complete emancipation or independence of women. Sexual discrimination against women continued as women were used as a means of rewarding military bravery. In addition, the notion of authoritarian control over individual life also continued, as civil officials replaced the role of parents in determining one's marriage and partner.⁵⁶

With the premise of a universal view on women, the Christian missionaries contributed to the "emancipation" of Chinese women through their redemption program. The program aimed for religious conversion, modern education and the eradication of

⁵⁵ Paul S. Ropp, "The Seeds of Change: Reflections on the Conditions of Women in the Early and Mid Ch'ing," *Signs* 2 (1): 5-23. Also see Roxane Heater Witke, *Transformation of Attitudes towards Women During the May Fourth Era of Modern China*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of California, 1970. The facsimile was produced by microfilm-xerography in 1977 by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan. See pp. 10-13.

⁵⁶ Roxane Heater Witke, *Transformation of Attitudes towards Women During the May Fourth Era of Modern China*, 14-8.

vicious social practices such as female infanticide, commoditisation of young women, footbinding and prostitution. Despite facing severe attacks from the local gentry and populace, their views on women were adopted later by the cultural reformers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁵⁷

The Western invasion in the late 19th century indirectly contributed to the acceleration of the political and cultural transition in China. Under both the threat and influence of the western powers, many intellectuals started to question traditional values and believed in the need for modernity for national strength and salvation. The Neo-Confucian, strict moralistic standard on women was then attacked, and issues around women's chastity, widow suicide, foot-binding and female illiteracy generated rigorous debates among the educated elites. Modern schools for girls were established. Immediately after the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95), an Anti-footbinding Society and girls' school were established in Shanghai by Kang Youwei's (康有為) brother, Kang Guangren (康廣仁). In addition, cultural reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao (梁啟超) argued, based on the view of Eugenics, against female footbinding or illiteracy for the potential impediments to the building of national strength, and hence linked the emancipation of women to nationalism.⁵⁸

2. May Fourth Views on Women

The modernizing cultural elites of the May Fourth furthered such views on women's emancipation. Regardless of their political biases, May Fourth cultural reformers held a common belief in the need for modernity for success in building a strong and progressive nation state. The oppressive and conservative nature of traditional cultural values was considered to be an obstacle to modernization. The traditional family system was under question and attack. Intellectuals such as Lu Xun (魯迅), Hu Shi (胡適), Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) and Liu Bannong (劉半農) all called for the reform of the family system within which women were the primary victims. Chen Duxiu established the journal *New Youth* (新青年), which later became a vital vehicle for Chinese

⁵⁷ Roxane Heater Witke, *Transformation of Attitudes towards Women During the May Fourth Era of Modern China*, 19-21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-9.

enlightenment. Issues concerning women such as women's education, political and legal rights, personal fulfillment and suffrage were in debate. Furthermore, the period saw the breakdown of certain cultural taboos and issues about women's sexuality as being public concerns.⁵⁹ Despite the progressive views on women of the Communist and left-wing intellectuals, however, in their arguments women's literacy and economical self-sufficiency had to come prior to political and legal rights. Meanwhile, women's emancipation was integrated with and subordinated to class emancipation with the assumption that class inequality was an all-inclusive social problem.⁶⁰ And despite the emergence of women's voices, the May Fourth movement forged a male discourse of women's emancipation as the predominant voices were male. Moreover, according to Glosser, though commonly referred to as that of either nationalism or individualism, the real driving force of the May Fourth attack on the traditional family system lay primarily in "socioeconomic" issues that motivated urban young men to call for family reform in their "search...for a new identity in a modernizing, industrializing society."⁶¹ In other words, it can be said that women's emancipation was the "side product" of the attempt by the young urban educated males to seek both their own liberation from the restriction of the traditional family and their own position in the new social order in the post-monarchical society where the socioeconomic conditions had undergone rapid change. It is also notable that despite the promotion of women's education in this era, marriage and motherhood were still considered as women's destiny in the mind of the common people.⁶²

In terms of political parties, this period saw a conservative retreat from the earlier advanced views on women. Both Nationalist and Communist parties adopted the May Fourth perspective on women in the 1920s. They held the belief that "[a]n improvement

⁵⁹ Christina Kelley Gilmartin, "Introduction: May Fourth and Women's Emancipation," *Women in Republican China*, ed. Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), xii-xiv.

⁶⁰ H. R. Lan and Vanessa Fong, Guest Editors' Introduction to Part IV Gender and Class, *Chinese Studies in History* 31, no 2 (Winter, 1997-8): 82-3.

⁶¹ Susan L. Glosser, "'The Truths I Have Learned': Nationalism, Family Reform, and male identity in China's New Culture Movement, 1915-1923," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 121.

⁶² See "Introduction" to *Writing Women in Modern China: an Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson (New York : Columbia University Press), 1998.

in women's conditions was always... an integral component of strengthening the state."⁶³ Also, distinct from the nationalism prevalent in many Western countries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both parties, during the period of their coalition, mobilized women into mass movement rather than excluding them from the political sphere. After 1927, however, the break of the two parties brought a halt to the May Fourth feminist ideals about women.⁶⁴ The Nationalists retreated to conservative cultural values as manifested in their New Life Movement of 1934; and the Communist Party in the 1930s adjusted or discarded much of its early women's program in dealing with the attack from the Nationalists on their women's policies.⁶⁵ As a result, as Gilmartin states, "Not only were female political identities restricted but patriarchal conceptions of political power became unassailable."⁶⁶

III. Ding Ling, Zhang Ailing, and Their Relation to the CCP

1. Life Experience

Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, although being born about fifteen years apart, shared many similarities in their backgrounds and experiences. They were both born into affluent, intellectual, traditional yet declining elite families: Ding Ling from a local gentry class family in Hunan, and Zhang Ailing from a declining aristocratic family in Shanghai.⁶⁷ Ding Ling's father died when she was four years old. Instead of enclosing herself in the family's inner compound, devoting herself to her children, and placing her hopes for their future on her son's future success, as many widows in her times did, Ding Ling's mother chose to attend a modern school and would later send her daughter to modern schools as well.

As for Zhang Ailing, her parents divorced while she was at an early age. Her father soon remarried and later restrained Zhang Ailing in the house. This caused her to escape

⁶³ Christina Kelley Gilmartin, 'Introduction,' *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, 7.

⁶⁴ Christina Kelley Gilmartin, "Introduction: May Fourth and Women's Emancipation," in *Women in Republican China*, xix-xxii.

⁶⁵ Christina Kelley Gilmartin, 'Introduction,' *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, 8-11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁷ According to Zhang Ailing in the essay "Siyu" (Whispers), she was born in Shanghai, and then her family moved to northern China when she was two, and then moved back to Shanghai again when she was eight.

to her mother, and therefore to maintain an indifferent relationship with her father. Zhang Ailing's mother, on the other hand, left to study abroad at a time when most Chinese women were still trapped by repressive social norms. Her mother was also the one who insisted on Zhang Ailing attending modern schools despite the opposition of her father. In other words, for both of the two writers, the image of their mother appeared to be progressive and independent, while their families lacked an authoritative father figure.

Moreover, both of them were on their own from a young age. Ding Ling escaped from an arranged marriage and worked by every means available to maintain her living in her late teens; Zhang Ailing made a living from writing in her early twenties. Above all, both of them started their writing career and established their fame in their early twenties. Ding Ling was much concerned about women's rights and independence while Zhang Ailing was fully aware of the importance of financial freedom to women's autonomy. It can be said that their early life experience and the imprinted images of their independent and progressive mothers affected their ideas of women.⁶⁸

They both lived and worked within a turbulent period of China's history, and their writings both incorporate, reflect, and comment on that period. In fact, being women themselves is of importance for they wrote from women's perspectives of women's interior reality. These perspectives revised the male view of women and women's conditions often constructed and represented by male writers in the literary past. More importantly, Ding Ling stands out as a pioneering woman writer to chronicle women's desire, love, and sexuality. As Feuerwerker points out, "It was typical of literary criticism of that time to comment on the unprecedented audacity (*dadān* 大膽) with which Ding Ling depicted the conditions and emotional states of women."⁶⁹ In contrast to Ding Ling's direct sexual depiction of women's interior struggle for love and sexuality, Zhang Ailing focused more on women's repression, both sexual and emotional. This repression highlights the lack of female freedom and the destructive future for women, limiting their position in the power hierarchy of the patriarchal society. Therefore, it can be said that

⁶⁸ This brief description of the two writers' background is indebted to Chang Jun-mei's *Ting Ling, Her Life and Her Work* and Tani Barlow's "Introduction" to *I Myself Am a Woman*, and to Zhang Zijing's *My Sister Zhang Ailing* (張子靜, 我的姊姊張愛玲).

⁶⁹ Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 20.

both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing presented similar themes regarding women in their early writings regardless of their narrative practice.

2. Attitude towards the CCP

Despite the similarities in their family backgrounds, Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing developed differently in literary pursuits and political experience. Ding Ling was committed to the Communist Party and keen on the women's liberation movement. Her early writings prior to the late 1930s are informed by female consciousness and feminist concerns. After that, Ding Ling's writings had much to do with the Communist revolutionary missions. According to Chang, there was increasing interest in socialist and leftist literary themes in Shanghai by the end of the 1920s.⁷⁰ "Weihsu" and the two stories "Shanghai in Spring 1930, I" and "Shanghai in Spring 1930, II" characterize this fashion. In 1932, Ding Ling joined the Communist Party. However, though Ding Ling turned to politics, issues about women remained in her literary concerns. Works such as "In the Hospital," "When I was in Xia Village" and "Thoughts on March Eighth," that were produced between 1941-1943, are not only critical of the CCP's political policy but also of its treatment of women.

Compared to Ding Ling, Zhang Ailing is said to be "cynical about the myth of national salvation, a firm believer in individualism, and a connoisseur of fin-de-siecle aesthetics."⁷¹ Her best known stories, typically full of trivia, are largely about "romantic expenditure and romantic expediency."⁷² Politically, Zhang Ailing never shared the kind of enthusiasm that appeared in Ding Ling, neither was she a vocal advocate of women's liberation. Prior to her departure for Hong Kong, she published two novellas, "Eighteen Springs" (1950-1) and "Little Ai" (1951-2), carrying pro-Communist messages. After she

⁷⁰ Chang Jun-mei, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work* (Taipei: Institute of international Relations, 1978), 52.

⁷¹ David Der-wei Wang, "Foreword," *The Rice-Sprout Song*, xv. In *Monster That is History*, Wang refers to Zhang Ailing as "priestess of the Shanghai decadent cult in 1940s" (p. 276). According to Wang, "Partially because of her family heritage and partially because of her personal bent in the aesthetics of desolation, Chang (Zhang Ailing) is at her best in recounting tales of moral aberration against the background of a stale society. These tales, though couched in realist rhetoric, constantly suggest a chilling gothic world" (p. 276). In addition, borrowing Rey Chow's terms, Zhang Ailing's narration is full of "sensuous, trivial and superfluous textual presences," a "decadent style" of writing. See Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, p. 85.

⁷² *Ibid.*, x.

left China, she published two books with anti-Communist themes, namely *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1954) and *Naked Earth* (1954). These works reveal her skepticism of Communist ideology and propaganda.

Despite the speculation about the motive of her dramatic turn in these works, however, traces in her short stories, prose or prefaces to book publications more or less indirectly reveal Zhang Ailing's views on the CCP. The short story "Fuhua Langrui" (Flowers at Sea 浮花浪蕊), describes the feeling of the female protagonist about the coming of the CCP as "the eve of the end of the world," and that "it is like to surrender one's future into the hand of others, and be strangled from behind." Another story "Xiang Jian Huan" (相見歡 Joy over the Reunion), states that "the shrewd businessmen have all moved on to Hong Kong because of the Communists."⁷³ Moreover, in a letter that appears in the preface to *Yuyun* (餘韻 The Lingering Cadence) published in 1987, Zhang Ailing wrote that "she very much disliked 'Little Ai,' and that the dream of the female protagonist Little Ai to pursue an affluent future died out upon the establishment of the Communist regime."⁷⁴

IV. Early Works⁷⁵ and Thematic Developments Leading to the Two Novels

Despite the apparently political themes and the criticism of ideological propaganda in these two novels, they do not represent a major shift in the thinking or engagement of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing from their earlier works. Though the themes, content, and concerns of these novels may seem to depart considerably from their earlier writing, in Zhang Ailing's case in particular, in actuality these two novels do not deviate from the female consciousness which has been a part of their writing from the outset.

⁷³ According to Zhang Ailing in the preface to *Wanran Ji* (惘然記 Disillusionment), the two stories were initially written in the 1950s and revised many times after. These two stories were re-collected in the anthology *Wanran Ji* (惘然記 Disillusionment) published in 1983. For the particular sections mentioned in the content, see *Fuhua Langrui* in *Wanran Ji*, p. 53; and *Xiang Jian Huan* also in *Wanran Ji*, p. 82. Su Weizhen made a thorough survey of Zhang's writings for the possible reasons Zhang Ailing chose to leave Shanghai after the establishment of the PRC. This includes the sections described in the content. See *Gudao Zhang Ailing* (Zhang Ailing in the lonely island 孤島張愛玲). (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 2002), 74-8.

⁷⁴ Su Weizhen, *Gudao Zhang Ailing* (孤島張愛玲). 77.

⁷⁵ By early writings, I refer to the works written before the early 1930s, for Ding Ling, before she shifted her literary attention and creation to political issues; and, in the case of Zhang Ailing, the works written around the mid-1940s, particularly 1943 and 1944. But for the discussion in this section, I also include some writings from their later period prior to the publication of the two novels studied in this thesis.

Politically, their early works offer glimpses of the attitudes of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing towards the CCP. In them, we can find examples of Ding Ling's revolutionary hope for women's liberation, and for that of the common people as well. We can find Zhang Ailing's skepticism about the future of both women and common civilians in the political context of the CCP. We also find an awareness in their early works of the gender bias of traditional ideology, in particular a sensitivity to the problems of family restraint and restrictions on female sexual expression. Therefore, their early works offer glimpses of the thematic development which their literary careers would show, and provide insights for the discussion of the two novels.

Ding Ling transforms her concern for the desolation and perplexity of women about their social position in the transitional era into an attempt to present a promising future in the pursuit of socialist revolution. That is, the shift of Ding Ling's literary focus, from women's subjectivity onto socialist concerns, marks a political ideological transformation. Ding Ling's primary focus, both in her first short story "Mengke" and the astonishing piece "The Diary of Miss Sophia," is a woman's struggle to achieve her personal pursuits or develop her sexual psyche in the changing social conditions that were not yet ready for women's liberation. The tone in her first story, "Mengke," towards 'revolution' is, if not oppositional, at least skeptical. When Yanan, a young man whom the protagonist, Mengke, knew in her childhood, brings Mengke to a gathering of some young anarchists, the unrestrained "sexual attitudes" of these young people astonish her. Mengke's later avoidance of Yanan, if not rejection, reveals her attitude towards "revolution."⁷⁶ When imagining herself as a revolutionary, Mengke feels "chilled" and disillusioned because of the impression of "that Chinese lady Sophia," whose sexual "audacity," if not out-and-out "promiscuity," constitutes and distorts the representation of "revolution."⁷⁷ In other words, the impression Mengke has of Sophia colours her understanding of the notion of "revolution." She comes to think of this word as representing nothing more than a vague, popular fashion characterised by the unchained behaviour of some unrestrained young people. In "The Diary of Miss Sophia," politics

⁷⁶ Ding Ling, *Selected Short Stories of Ding Ling* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 23-4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

does not appear to be part of the author's literary concern at all. The theme of these two early pieces presents Ding Ling as either unconcerned by politics or else skeptical of it.

Ding Ling's piece, "Weihsu," from early in 1930 begins the phase which Chang Junmei has characterized as using her "love versus revolution" formula.⁷⁸ In "Weihsu," the male protagonist faces the dilemma of choosing between a "revolutionary spirit and bourgeois decadence,"⁷⁹ yet his lover eventually converts herself to a revolutionary. Following "Weihsu," in "Shanghai in Spring 1930," which includes two contrasting stories, the revolutionary spirit wins out over a bourgeois lover. Despite the criticism of the stories' notion of "revolution" as "vague and superficial," "symbolized by secret meetings or appointments,"⁸⁰ these stories mark the emergence of a "political" Ding Ling, and the political themes provide the precedent for the novel *Sanggan River*. What is more important is that here women find, through revolutionary participation and devotion, a way out of the desolation and perplexity which appeared in the stories of the earlier phase. These female characters realize that they, as women, can, like men, contribute, create and establish a future for themselves. In "Shanghai in Spring 1930 I, II", the female characters, Meilin and Mary, represent two different types of women: the "unawakened bourgeois" and the "progressive revolutionary."⁸¹ Meilin becomes the prototype of the progressive women in Ding Ling's later writing. She realizes her value through participation in and pursuit of revolutionary work, which not only fulfills her role and value as a human being, but offers a promising future for women, in building a new socialist and modern state. These stories, including the later piece, "Tian Family Village" (田家冲 Tianjiachong), published in 1931, which describes a young woman from a landlord family devoting herself to revolutionary work for social justice for peasants, start to show the construction of women's roles as revolutionaries which would shape Ding Ling's future female characters.

⁷⁸ Chang Junmei, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work*, 52.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸¹ According to Chang, Ding Ling's male and female characters take turns to face the dilemma between "revolutionary spirit" and "bourgeois decadence." Here I use Chang's personalization of the characters. See *Ting Ling, Her Life and Her Work*, 53-4.

As Yan states, some critics like Mao Dun consider the story “Water,” written in 1931, as initiating Ding Ling’s later phase, in which she shifts away from “her early feminism.”⁸² In the story “Tian Family Village” mentioned above, Ding Ling’s focus shifts from urban dwellers to peasants. However, while in “Tian Family Village” peasants still submit to the oppression and exploitation of the landlord class, “Water” clearly depicts the awakening of peasants from the injustice and oppression of the landlords and corrupting officials. It can be said that “Water” marks the beginning of the “later Ding Ling,” developing a socialist inclination that centers on the awakening of the oppressed people and the transformation of their consciousness to confront injustice and oppression.

Though even in *Sanggan River* Ding Ling’s belief in and longing for revolutionary change for women, and her adoption of the Party political line, define her work as part of official propaganda, this does not suggest that Ding Ling was ignorant of the misdeeds of the CCP. As Barlow points out, “Ding Ling’s writing embraced while calling into question the national subject of Chinese Communist Party feminism.”⁸³ The 1941 stories “When I Was in Xia Village” and “In the Hospital,” and the essay written in 1942, “Thoughts on March Eighth,” raise questions and criticisms about the CCP’s masculine politics which maintain a gendered, hierarchical order. This attitude prefigures the political tone of *Sanggan River*.

On the contrary, Zhang Ailing’s indifference to politics, and also her comments on the CCP in some works, mark her stories as critiques of that ideological apparatus. In contrast to Ding Ling, whose belief in politics or revolution as the path to women’s liberation indicates a certain idealization of the CCP, Zhang Ailing remains skeptical of politics, of the idea that politics (revolution) can bring solutions to concrete problems. Rather than construction, in the vision of Zhang Ailing revolution signifies destruction. In the preface to the second edition of *Chuanqi* (傳奇 Romance), Zhang Ailing states that “Our age plunges forward and is already well on its way to collapse, while a bigger catastrophe looms.”⁸⁴ This statement explicitly emphasises a declining political climate

⁸² Haiping Yang, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948*, 193.

⁸³ Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Druham: Duke University, 2004), 191.

⁸⁴ See *Zhang Ailing Xiaoshuoji* (Taipei: Crown publishing company, 1985), 5. The translation follows David Der-wei Wang in “Foreword” to *The Rice-Sprout Song* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1998), viii.

that destroys, rather than constructs, the life of the common people. Skeptical of the revolutionary hope for women, Zhang Ailing's early writings focus more on "those who have little control over their environment and the sadness of their pathetic struggles to escape or remake their world."⁸⁵ Prior to her leaving China, she produced two stories, namely "Eighteen Springs" and "Little Ai," that promote the CCP as something positive. However, Zhang Ailing later commented negatively on such writing in a letter that appears in the preface to *Yuyun* (餘韻 The Lingering Cadence), and traces in her short stories, prose or prefaces to book publications more or less reveal her views on the CCP as I have stated in the previous section. Therefore, if, for Ding Ling, the coming of the Communists signifies a promising future that is full of hope and progress, for Zhang Ailing, the CCP signifies the end of an era that is itself full of hope and possibility. These views are later reflected in *Rice-Sprout Song*, despite critical speculation of the motive behind Zhang Ailing's creation of it. Such diverse attitudes shape the tones of these authors towards the CCP in the two discussed novels.

Despite her belief in and hope for women's emancipation through the pursuit of revolution, Ding Ling was not ignorant of the problems of the enduring traditional gendered values against women in the process of social and political transformation. Though socio-political change allowed the release of women's desire and gave them some limited opportunity to pursue their own personal goals, as well as to participate in politics and public affairs, the very tradition of gendered prejudice that requires women's submission to family and authority, persistently lasted against women. For Zhang Ailing, skeptical of politics, women's emancipation is more or less related to economic independence. Zhang Ailing's belief in economic independence that grants, at least to a considerable extent, women's autonomy is a recurrent issue in her early works. Like Ding Ling, aware of the persistence of traditional gendered prejudice against women, Zhang Ailing embeds her resistance to and criticism of the traditional gendered values against women in her stories by the use of recurrent motifs that continue and develop in *The Rice-Sprout Song*.

⁸⁵ Edward M. Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 204.

One of the motifs Zhang Ailing utilizes to resist traditional gender ideology is the presentation of female subjectivity. She does this by depriving men of traditional patriarchal authority, through male-power “castration.”⁸⁶ In Freudian castration theory, the mother is the first sexual object of the child for both sexes. During the phallic stage, the Oedipus complex is developed. In boys it causes “castration anxiety” while in girls it generates “penis envy.” Due to the natural attachment of the child to the mother, the father becomes the rival of the child for the mother’s attention. When noticing that the mother has no penis, the boy assumes that the mother has been castrated due to punishment by the father. Though the boy wants to possess the mother, fear of being castrated compels him to abandon his desire for her and come to identify with the father. The resolution of the Oedipus complex in this process of identifying with the father then enables the establishment of the boy’s masculine identity and the preservation of his heterosexual desire.⁸⁷

Some feminists comment on this phallogocentric view of male superiority, pointing out that Freud neglected to explore the symbolical meaning of the penis. They argue that women have never been dispossessed of a penis since in fact they have never possessed one at all. Instead, women are symbolically, that is, socially, not physically, “castrated.”⁸⁸

But she has been deprived of something else that men enjoy: namely, autonomy, freedom, and the power to control her destiny. By insisting, falsely, on female deprivation of the male organ, Freud is pointing to an actual deprivation, and one of which he was clearly aware. In Freud’s time the advantages enjoyed by the male sex over the inferior female were, of course, even greater than at present and they were also accepted, to a much larger extent, as being inevitable, inescapable. Women were evident

⁸⁶ Lim Chin Chown (林幸謙 Lin Xingqian), “Castration Parody and Male ‘Castration’: Eileen Chang’s Female Writing and Her Anti-patriarchal Strategy,” in *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*. ed. Peng-hsiang Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 127-144. A Chinese version on the same topic by the same author under the Chinese name 林幸謙 (Lin Xingqian), see *Nu Xing Zhu Ti De Ji Dian* 女性主體的祭奠 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daixue chubanshe, 2003), 99-217.

⁸⁷ See Sigmund Freud, “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex.” in *Freud on Women*, ed. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990). “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes (1925),” in *Women & Analysis*, ed. Jean Strouse (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974).

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Janeway, “On ‘Female Sexuality,’” in *Women & Analysis*, 58. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out this point in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 272.

social castrates, and the mutilation of their potentiality as achieving human creatures was quite analogous to the physical wound...⁸⁹

Therefore, “femaleness” then “*means* castration.”⁹⁰ Hence, metaphorically, the fear for castration in boys can be said to be the fear of losing the “power” attached to that male identity. In this regard, castration then means to be “feminized,” losing the symbolic power and authority possessed by the “phallus.”

While, in Western societies, patriarchal culture refers to “achievement, competition, material success, aggression, [and] possession” as “male” qualities, the penis, the symbol of maleness, then represents all that the male has and is unwilling to lose, such as his identity.⁹¹ In traditional Chinese society, similar social expectations are valued as male qualities. It was the males’ privilege and responsibility to attend civil examinations, through which to obtain an official title and upward social mobility, and to establish a family, through which to produce the male inheritors carrying on the family line. Patriarchal culture valued maleness, to which privilege and authority were attached and granted. Therefore, as I interpret it and use the notion here in a metaphorical way, losing the authority attached to the male sex granted by the patriarchal culture symbolizes a form of “power castration.” This does not suggest the literal removal of the male genital organ but rather a figurative, symbolic castration of the authority attached to male status and identity. Therefore, Zhang Ailing’s utilization of such male “power castration” allows subversion of the traditional patriarchal authoritative image.

Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua point out that Zhang Ailing’s literary, imaginary world is one of women’s territory in which a father figure is absent; this echoes the May Fourth rebellious spirit of “Patricide (弑父).”⁹² Lim extends this notion and suggests that Zhang’s work contains what he calls “castration parody,” which “refers to the male role

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Janeway, “On ‘Female Sexuality,’” 58. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out this point in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 272-3.

⁹⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 2nd edition (New Haven and London: Yale Nota Bene Book, 2000), 272.

⁹¹ Jean Strous, “Introduction,” *Women & Analysis* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), 6.

⁹² Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Henan: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), 253.

as incompetent and weak, deprived of traditional patriarchal authority.”⁹³ Lim argues that Zhang Ailing embodies female subjectivity in her work either through the absence of male authoritative characters in the textual space, which allows the voice of matriarchs to dominate the narrative; or through the depiction of male characters as either “physically disabled” or “spiritually disabled.”⁹⁴ These men are “impotent, incompetent, weak... deprived of the authoritative personality, heroism and manhood as the traditional patriarch with little male authority.”⁹⁵ Through the creation of her literary characters, Zhang Ailing hence subverts and redefines “the patriarchal personality and male image given by traditional patriarchal society.”⁹⁶ Stories like “Ashes of Descending Incense: First Brazier,” “Love in the Fallen City,” and “The Golden Cangue” manifest female subjectivity in their female characters, namely those “Lao Taitai” (Old Ladies), who as the matriarchs and authoritative figures dominate this textual space.⁹⁷ Zhang Ailing’s male “disabled” characters, spiritually disabled in particular, are generally depicted as “impotent, obscene and fatuous old and young diehards and playboys,”⁹⁸ who either “[gain] money and dowry from their wives... [or] are good for nothing themselves but good at spending their wives’ money.”⁹⁹ Mr. Zheng in “A Withered Flower,” Ah Xiao’s husband in “Indian summer: Ah Xiao’s Autumnal lament,” and Qiao Qi in “Ashes of Descending Incense: First Brazier” and Jingen in *Rice-Sprout Song* all serve as good examples of this male-power castration.¹⁰⁰

As Lim argues, these male characters are “castrated,” deprived of traditional patriarchal authority. However, this further suggests the issue of “role displacement.” In Chinese traditional family economics, patriarchal authority manifests itself partly in the males/husbands’ roles as economic supporters. Failure to carry out this traditional

⁹³ Peng-hsiang Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley, “Introduction,” *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, ed. Peng-hsiang Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 18-9.

⁹⁴ Lim Chin Chown (Lin Xingqian), “Castration Parody,” 130.

⁹⁵ Lim, 128.

⁹⁶ Lim, 130.

⁹⁷ 林幸謙 Lin Xingqian, *Nuxing zhuti de jidian* 女性主體的祭奠, 102-3.

⁹⁸ Lim, “Castration Parody,” 130.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

responsibility jeopardizes traditional patriarchal authority and results in a role displacement through which these male characters are “castrated” to become dependent, as if they were now performing the traditional ‘female’ roles of relying on the support of the family/husband. In “Ashes of Descending Incense: First Brazier,” Qiao Qi represents such role displacement. Zhang Ailing’s famous line in “Love in the Fallen City” states that marriage is long-term prostitution.¹⁰¹ Traditionally, marriage is a means for women to seek a stable life. Therefore, according to the logic of Zhang Ailing’s famous line, it can be said that marriage is a “trade” through which women seek the support of men for a stable life.¹⁰² Thus, that Qiao Qi “trades” himself to the female protagonist Weilong for easy money signifies the first role displacement of Qiao Qi in which he is “castrated” and fulfills the role of a woman who trades herself in marriage for a stable life. Since patriarchal authority partly embodies itself in the roles of males/husbands as financial providers, as stated above, the role of Qiao Qi is secondly displaced as he is reduced to the role of the one provided for.¹⁰³ Such utilization of role displacement as a form of male power castration provides a basis for the depiction of the character Jingen in *Rice-Sprout Song*.

Compared to Ding Ling, who champions the importance of politics in the pursuit of women’s emancipation, Zhang Ailing untiringly repeats the significance of economic independence in the pursuit of women’s autonomy, and thus echoes the May Fourth Enlightenment spirit. May Fourth intellectuals, leftist or liberal, such as Chen Duxiu and Zhang Weici (張慰慈), all emphasized the importance of women’s economic independence in freeing themselves of patriarchal control.¹⁰⁴ Lu Xun also strongly emphasized economic independence as the premise for women’s liberation. In a speech entitled “What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?” delivered in 1923 at the Peking Women’s Normal College, Lu Xun questioned the future of Ibsen’s heroine Nora and

¹⁰¹ See in *Zhang Ailing Xiaoshuoji* 張愛玲小說集 (Taipei: Crown publishing company, 1985), 235.

¹⁰² Such female characters are seen in Zhang’s stories such as Bai Liusu in “Love in the Fallen City,” and Lingqing in “The Heart Sutra.”

¹⁰³ Lin Xingqian makes similar point. But his arguments focus on the subversion of the patriarchal authority. See *女性主體的祭奠*, 174-8.

¹⁰⁴ See Chen Duxiu in “The Woman Question and Socialism,” *Chinese Studies in History*. 31.2 (winter 1987-8): 90-4; and Zhang Weici in “Emancipating Women by Reorganizing the Family,” *Chinese Studies in History* 31, no 2 (Winter 1987-8): 63-8.

stated two possibilities for the future of a Chinese Nora, of either falling back under the patriarchal control or prostituting herself because of a lack of economic resources, and because of the hostility of the unprepared social environment.¹⁰⁵ Lu Xun further stresses the point embedded in the tragedy of Zijun, the Chinese version of Nora, in “Regrets for the Past” written in 1925.¹⁰⁶ As Barlow points out, “...the world will have to change substantially before emancipation can find a socially safe place for the self-directed women to live,”¹⁰⁷ and “[u]ntil there is change, Nora and Zijun... will be the ultimate losers.”¹⁰⁸

Echoing the May Fourth precedents, the recurrent theme of female economic independence in Zhang Ailing’s stories reasserts its importance in pursuing women’s autonomy. There are some economically independent women among Zhang Ailing’s female characters. These women acquire some degree of economic self-sufficiency that allows them to enjoy a measure of self-autonomy and rid themselves of traditional bondage. However, once these women have acquired economic power, they are assimilated to the traditional patriarchal system and adopt patriarchal authoritative roles, oppressing the young generation dependent on their financial support. In other words, they reinscribe the oppressive paternalistic roles and continue the values of the oppressive system. In “Ashes of Descending Incense: First Brazier,” Mrs. Liang as a widow subverts both the image of traditionally-virtuous widows and the social expectation of the special virtues required of women. Behaving like a man, she indulges herself in social life and hunts for sexual pleasure. Her behaviour manifests a subversion of the patriarchal oppression of female sexual desire.¹⁰⁹ However, assimilating herself into and adopting a patriarchal role, Mrs. Liang manipulates and exploits her niece Ge Weilong, whose initial economic dependence partly results in her future tragedy. Similarly, Cao Qiqiao in “The Golden Cangue” struggles to acquire economic resources for herself from the inheritance of her late husband. She, too, in line with the patriarchal institution, turns to control and

¹⁰⁵ Shuei-may Chang, *Casting Off the Shackles of Family: Ibsen’s Nora Figure in Modern Chinese Literature, 1918-1942* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 68-70.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 72-8.

¹⁰⁷ Tani. E. Barlow, “Introduction,” *The Power of Weakness* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), 24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ Lin Xingqian. *Nu Xing Zhu Ti De Ji Dian* 女性主體的祭奠, 110-111.

manipulate the life of her offspring. The inability of the daughter Changbai to liberate herself from such bondage results from her emotional and economical dependence.

In addition to such dependent female characters, there is another type of woman, who seeks through marriage a stable life and escapes from family confinement, yet eventually is re-caught in the trap of economic reliance. In “Love in the Fallen City,” Zhang Ailing tells an optimistic story in which the wish of the female protagonist, Bai Liusu, to ensure a stable life through a “good marriage” is eventually granted. However, Zhang Ailing ironically states that what grants Liusu’s wish comes from the fall of Hong Kong in the war.¹¹⁰ But for the war, Liusu would have no chance to acquire such “achievement.” Liusu’s divorce and lifestyle mark her as a “modern” urban woman distinct from those traditionally submissive ones; however, deep down she cannot escape from the social reality and traditional view against women, seeking marriage as a means of reconstructing economic security. Her compromise occurs after her money is exhausted. Therefore, the loss of economic resources forces her initial compromise. With an explicit purpose, she loses the battle in her relationship with the male protagonist Fang Liuyuan. When Fang arranges her second visit to Hong Kong without prospects of marriage, she can only accede to the pressure of her family, who regard her as a financial burden. Thus, lack of economic resources forces her second compromise. Efforts made to escape from the tensions and pressure of family through grabbing an economically stable man eventually turn out to be another “trap” for women. Such irony manifests the unreliability of marriage as a means of women’s independence.

Zhang Ailing writes about the “system,” a cloistered space within which her women characters, who are generally confined with such system, often jostle against each other.¹¹¹ While such a “system” often causes the future destruction of women, economic independence provides an alternative for them, allowing relative autonomy within the confine of this system. Contrasted to those “castrated” men, women are the survivors though they are often still subordinated to the patriarchal order.

If Zhang Ailing’s female characters acquire relative autonomy through economic security, the struggle of women in Ding’s early work reveals the tensions between their

¹¹⁰ See *Zhang Ailing Xiaoshuoji* 張愛玲小說集, 251.

¹¹¹ Discussion with my supervisor.

“awareness of the role of women in family and in society” and rejection of such a role.¹¹² The discontentment and despondency of Sophia in “The Diary of Miss Sophia” and of Yisha in “A Suicide’s Diary” manifest the conflict between the will of self-directed women and unwelcome social conditions against such liberation. In “The Diary of Miss Sophia,” the lifestyle of Sophia—residence in an apartment, consumption of milk, reading of newspapers—represents a “modern world,” distinct from a traditional lifestyle, that identifies her with its western “imagined community” rather than with Chinese reality.¹¹³ In addition, the depiction of Sophia’s sexual psyche seemed audacious at the time. However, Sophia’s self-repression behind that audacity implicitly exposes a false image of the “modern girl.” Sophie maintains a western lifestyle that ostensibly marks a sense of modernity and hence independence, yet she is economically dependent on her family. Though she leaves home at an early age, she is always accompanied by relatives or friends. When she plans to move to West Mountain for her illness, she feels desolate and uneasy and asks friends to visit her.¹¹⁴ Thus, she is emotionally dependent. While she laughs at her friends’ abstinence from sexual contact for fear of pregnancy, she is struggling with her own desire for the man Lin Jishi.¹¹⁵ She desires his body, yet is full of emotional struggle, unable purely to enjoy the amorally sensual pleasure as would a man. Thus, in facing her sexual desire, she discredits purely sensual pleasure by linking sensual pleasure to emotional connection and by discrediting male desire. Sophia’s dilemma and struggle are due to her internalized patriarchal gendered values that denounce female sexual desire. She is attracted to Lin Jishi, full of his image, thinking to move closer to him, yet she warns herself that a woman being sexually unrestrained will not obtain a good reputation,¹¹⁶ and that a decent and self-respecting woman will never have the improper behaviour she has.¹¹⁷ She denies herself her true desire when she doubts whether she can really admit what she truly needs.¹¹⁸ Therefore, contrary to that

¹¹² Jun-mei Chang, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work*, 40.

¹¹³ Haiping Yan, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948*, 176.

¹¹⁴ Ding Ling, *Selected Short Stories of Ding Ling* (Beijin: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 75.

¹¹⁵ Ding Ling, *Selected Short Stories of Ding Ling*, 54.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

“modern” lifestyle, Sophia’s inner struggle and self-repression reveal her to be trapped in the bondage of that very traditional gendered value against women. Her very struggle indicates the conflict between female desire and *Lijiao* (teachings/doctrines of Li, or proper behaviours), which requires special virtues of women that cause the repression of desire. The revelation of Sophia’s inner feelings then manifests female sexual repression rather than an audacious female sexual psyche. While rejecting the traditional role of women, Sophia is still trapped in a society with lasting gendered values against women.

In “Mengke,” Ding Ling criticizes masculine politics embedded in the actions of the misbehaving male teacher. The very person representing the figure of authority to educate and enlighten young students, and help them to be independent of old oppressive traditions in a new era, turns out to be abusive of his power and is exempt from punishment. This motif is later employed in *Sanggan River*: the very people who seek to liberate women from feudal oppression turn out to preserve gendered prejudice against them. When Mengke has to seek employment to support herself, she only finds herself under the gaze of capital consumption as a commodity of the commercial society. Women are still either sexual objects of the male gaze or sexual commodities in the newly adopted “western”-styled industrial economic society. Ding Ling’s criticism of social conditions under which women change from being the “property” or sexual objects of feudal patriarchs, or else sexual victims of masculine politics, to the commodities of the capital commercial society, exposes a still-present gendered prejudice against women.

Ding Ling soon finds revolution to be a solution for these women to their despondency. These women are transformed from discontented and self-obsessed city dwellers, as Sophia in “The Diary of Miss Sophia” and Yisha in “A Suicide’s Diary,” to progressive revolutionaries, as Meilin in “Shanghai in Spring 1930, I” and the daughter of the landlord in “Tian Family Village,” and Luping in “In the Hospital.” The personal struggle of women in Ding Ling’s earlier work yields to participation in socialist revolution believed to grant women’s liberation.

However, the progressive women soon find themselves caught in the conditions for which revolutionary work fails to effect a “substantial change,” and under which the traditional gendered values still persist against them. What is seen in Ding Ling’s early criticism recurs in the essay “Thoughts on March Eighth,” published in 1942, that targets

the “narrow-mindedness and self-righteousness”¹¹⁹ of masculine politics in the Communist revolutionary base. Ding Ling states that “all kinds of women comrades are often the target of deserved criticism.”¹²⁰ She further criticizes the “backwardness” that is used as an excuse for a male cadre to divorce his aging wife. Ding Ling later employs in the narrative of *Sanggan River* such criticism of the utilization of political language to excuse personal purposes or flaws. The ostensible “liberation” of women in the “liberated” area remains unequal to the representations of the “liberated” base of the anticipated promising future for women.

“When I was in Xia Village” sees Ding Ling further criticise traditional gendered prejudice, which fails to disappear together with the progress of the revolution. “Chastity” is still used to judge the “value” and “righteousness” of women. Zhenzhen is “polluted” in three ways: (1) she is sexually assaulted, so she is no more “chaste;” (2) the assaulters are Japanese, alien racial invaders, so she is “contaminated;” and (3) she prostitutes herself, having sexual intercourse with more than one man. In the traditional mentality, she should save herself for her (future) husband, who supposedly owns her body and virginity. The contemptuous attitude of Zhenzhen’s fellow villagers towards her not only exposes, in a fashion like that of Lu Xun, the numbness of many Chinese as embodied in these villagers, but also the inherent notions and values of women in traditional culture which remain among the common people. As Wang puts it, “In the cause of liberating the collective body of Chinese, first her own body must be taken and ruined by the enemy.”¹²¹ Zhenzhen “can derive self-esteem only through wilful-self-abandon.”¹²² However, her “prostitution” is much more severe because of her violation of the code of chastity, rather than her being a “traitor” in the mind of the villagers. They ostracize her “in accordance with a most unliberated code of chastity.”¹²³ Therefore, while men exploit women’s bodies to serve their political purposes, they simultaneously feel contempt for this very body; and while men entice women into revolutionary work

¹¹⁹ Jun-mei Chang, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work*, 90.

¹²⁰ Ding Ling, “Thoughts on March Eighth,” in *The Power of Weakness*, 93-4.

¹²¹ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That is History*, 67.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

by using sex for a “grand” mission that grants a promising future, they simultaneously devalue such “unchaste” women who use sex to entice men. Through Zhenzhen’s experience, Ding Ling questions “the brutal oppression of women in the context of a revolutionary society.”¹²⁴

Zhenzhen’s experience demonstrates “a dimension of violence”¹²⁵ against women. The physical violence against her from the Japanese sexual assaulters is self-evident. The ostracism and contempt from the villagers signify symbolic violence against her. As Wang argues, “Zhenzhen’s story indicates as much the cruelty of the Japanese invaders as the callousness of Chinese defense forces.”¹²⁶ In “The East Village Incident,” serving for the promotion of the Communist spirit, Ding Ling further depicts the inability of men to protect their families resulting in them turning to violence against women. The young peasant Chen’s wife, Qiqi, is sold to the landlord Zhao to redeem his father held by Zhao for debts. Chen cannot endure the fact that Qiqi’s body is invaded by Zhao and beats and kicks her when they secretly meet in the woods on the mountain. The dual violence against Qiqi comes not only from the landlord Zhao but her own husband. Her husband blames her for her loss of chastity that is in the very beginning caused by her husband’s family, who treat her as property and trade her for the safety of the old Chen. Being a poor peasant, Chen’s inability to secure his own woman, whose ownership signifies symbolic patriarchal power, in turn symbolizes a kind of “power castration.” Therefore, it is not until Chen uses violence against his wife, and only then, that he is able to reassure himself of his ownership and male authority over her as her husband. Ding Ling’s criticism of such male violence against women continues later in *Sanggan River*.

V. The Novels: *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* and *The Rice-Sprout Song*

1. Summary: A Promising Future vs. A Destroyed World

Ding Ling’s *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* aims to present the triumphant side of the land reform movement. The story is about the achievement of peasants to

¹²⁴ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 114.

¹²⁵ Wang, *The Monster That is History*, 68. In the same page, Wang further argues that Zhenzhen’s case demonstrates “the continuing usefulness and disposability of the female body.”— a dimension of violence against women.

¹²⁶ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That is History*, 67.

overthrow the landlords' oppression and ultimately achieve the mission of land reform under the assistance of a work team from the CCP. It takes place in a village called Nuanshui, where the Communist Party has already taken power. Initially, the village's land reform movement is at a stalemate, for the villagers still fear the possibility that the Nationalist Party may come to fight and take over anytime. Though they already underwent a struggle meeting that brought down Landlord Hou, Landlord Qian Wengui, who does not own much land, yet who is one of the most dominating and oppressive of the local landlords, still remains untouched. By sending his son to the Liberation Army, and marrying his daughter to the official, Zhang Zhangtien, Qian has built connections with the Party that make the villagers hesitant to purge him. The secretary of the Nuanshui Party Branch, Zhang Yumin, is not the only one who is indecisive about the land reform work. The village's Chairman of the Peasant's Association, Cheng Ren, also appears to be ambivalent about purging Qian, for Qian has learned of the romance between Cheng and his niece, Heini, and uses Heini as bait to draw Cheng to his side. But soon a work team comes to the village to assist the struggle. The work team tries to persuade the villagers to arouse their anger against the landlords; however, despite the success in confiscating Landlord Li's fruit orchard and land, the villagers still tend to be passive and reluctant to touch Qian for fear of his revenge. Not until the propaganda director of the County Party Committee, Zhang Pin, comes to the village is the decision made to bring down Qian; now, at last, Zhang Yumin and Cheng Ren jump out from the struggle and commit to their mission. The villagers are initially taken aback in the struggle meeting against Qian; however, thanks to the efforts of the work team members and the village's party members, they are able to conquer their fear and generate the anger that enables the transformation of their class consciousness. They eventually unify themselves against Qian and have Qian purged. The result is satisfactory. The land and goods confiscated from the landlords are redistributed to the villagers. Cheng Ren and Heini are able to make up, and Zhou Yueying, the vice-chair of the Women's Association, who among the women is the first one to attack Qian in the struggle meeting, is able to rebuild a better relationship with her husband. The Communist Revolution embodied in the land reform movement has brought positive changes and a promising future for the people.

In contrast to Ding Ling's celebration of land reform, Zhang Ailing's *The Rice-Sprout Song* questions it. It tells a story about a village near the city of Shanghai. The female protagonist Yuexiang quits her job as a maid after three years in Shanghai and returns to her village, where her husband Jingen and her daughter live. The village has just undergone land redistribution under the Communist Party's rule, and the villagers have obtained their own lands and shared goods from the redistribution. As the village's "Model Laborer," Yuexiang's husband Jingen has obtained a gorgeous mirror from the redistribution, and, without consulting Yuexiang, has given it to his sister Jinhua, who has just married into a peasant family in nearby Zhou village. The villagers appear to Yuexiang to be grateful to the Party, and all tell how times have changed and life is getting much better under the new regime. But Yuexiang wonders why, if life is getting better, many people still come for a loan, including her own mother and newly-wed sister-in-law Jinhua, and why there is never anything but watery rice gruel for their meals, and why their daughter constantly feels hungry. When they are in their own house, Jingen appears to be cautious of the possibility that someone may lurk outside and listen to them; when they on a very rare occasion have thick rice gruel for their meal, Jingen becomes tense when Comrade Wang happens upon the scene. When Jinhua comes for a visit, and Jingen wants to give her a "real rice meal," Yuexiang breaks his wish and has to be "calculating." Yuexiang regrets having come back to the countryside, for she could have earned some money to help the family. She thinks of going to the city again, believing that they could have a better chance in the city. But such hope is destroyed by the strict restrictions on rural-urban mobility. So she befriends the intellectual Gu Gang, who is a Communist film scriptwriter and director come to the village with the mission of collecting materials for a story about the brightness of the village under the rule of the Party, hoping for the possibility of returning to Shanghai through Gu's help. Gu senses her attempt, and becomes indifferent to her. Gu cannot endure the torture of hunger, constantly craving for goods; he purchases food in town and eats behind people's backs. Despite that, he does not compromise in creating an imaginary presentation of the flourishing and progressive countryside after the land reform. The lunar New Year is coming, and the Peasant's Association decides that each household should contribute to the Soldiers' Families for the New Year. With almost nothing left for themselves, Jingen

explodes and confronts Comrade Wang. To smooth the conflict, Yuexiang gives away the last money she has. It makes Jingen furious; he turns his anger to his wife and beats her. On the day to submit the contribution, the villagers riot, demanding food. In the chaos, Jingen is injured and their daughter dies. They are denounced as counter-revolutionaries. Yuexiang brings Jingen to his sister for help, but even his sister dares not keep them. Jingen does not want to endanger Yuexiang; he leaves to die alone. Yuexiang sneaks back to the village, burns the barn, and dies in the fire.

2. Propaganda Literature?

Unlike their early works, which are more concerned with women's conditions and struggle in a given period of Chinese history that was undergoing rapid social, cultural and political transition, Ding Ling's *Sanggan River* and Zhang Ailing's *Rice-Sprout Song* densely integrate political aims into narrative practice. They both situate land reform in their novels with a central theme either to celebrate the CCP regime for its achievement in the movement for land reform that brings a promising future, or to question it by portraying the worsening living conditions that cause the individual's destructive future under the CCP regime. While *Sanggan River* belongs to part of the official land reform discourse, Zhang Ailing's *Rice-Sprout Song* critically rewrites that discourse.¹²⁷ Accordingly, both works are considered as propaganda literature by some scholars. C. T. Hsia comments on Ding Ling's *Sanggan River* as being mostly dull communist fiction (1971); Nicole Huang refers to Zhang Ailing's *Rice-Sprout Song* as an anti-Communist novel commissioned by the USIA (United States Information Agency) (2005); and Wang Der-wei shares similar opinions on the former as a Communist literary piece and on the latter as anti-Communist (Foreword to *Rice-Sprout Song*, 1998).¹²⁸ Some critics from China strongly criticize Zhang Ailing's *Rice-Sprout Song* as being a fabrication aiming to discredit the CCP regime without an empirical basis or solid evidence.¹²⁹ As to Ding

¹²⁷ David Der-wei Wang, "Foreword," *The Rice-Sprout Song*, xvi.

¹²⁸ David Der-wei Wang shares the similar opinions on the former as with "clear anti-Communist themes," and on the latter, together with Zhou Libo's *The Hurricane*, as the Communist literary piece stressing on the achievement of the land reform movement. Also see Wang's *The Monster That is History*. Both Huang and Wang indicate *Rice-Sprout Song* were commissioned by the USIA. See Huang's *Women, War, Domesticity*, p. 213-4; and Wang's *The Monster That is History*, p. 131.

¹²⁹ For example, see Ding Egang 丁爾綱 張愛玲的秧歌及其評論的寫作策略透析 in 學術中國 2008

Ling, her experience of participating in the land reform movement provided the basis for the creation of *Sanggan River*, which was written under Mao's guidelines for artistic and literary creation, as detailed in his "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art." These demanded the promotion of the bright side of real-life incidents in order to serve revolutionary needs.¹³⁰ Therefore, it can be said that Ding Ling adopted a more positive perception in her depiction of the novel while Zhang Ailing held a relatively negative attitude towards her narrative of the Communist regime.

VI. Critiques on Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing

Both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing's works have been well explored in both Chinese and English in the academic/literary fields. Upon the publication of Ding Ling's "The Diary of Miss Sophie" as early as the late 1920s, Mao Dun commented that Sophie was "representative of the contradictory psychology regarding sexual love found in young women liberated since May Fourth."¹³¹ Mao Dun points out the characteristics of Ding Ling's early works in exploring the female psyche. In *Ding Ling's Fiction*, Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker explores the relation between ideology and narrative in Ding Ling's literary development. However, Feuerwerker clarified the term 'ideology' by drawing on Geertz's definition of ideology as "a body of maxims and prejudices which constitute both a vision of the world and a system of values." So, it is a "perspective."¹³² Tani Barlow utilizes a feminist approach towards Ding Ling's works (1989, 2004). Charles Alber gives a detailed biographical account of Ding Ling (2001, 2004). And based on the argument of Liu Zaifu, David Der-wei Wang further develops the discourse of violence and justice in his discussion of *Sanggan River* (2004).

Zhang Ailing's works have received much attention, too. The celebrated translator Fu Lei (傅雷) first commented on Zhang's writing skill, pointing out Zhang Ailing's incorporation of psychoanalytic skill into her writings (1944). C. T. Hsia points out the characteristics of Zhang Ailing's narrative in her use of detailed description and nature imagery, and in her application of metaphors and psychological sophistication for which

¹³⁰ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 10-11.

¹³¹ Quoted from Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 43.

¹³² Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 16.

she was indebted to Freud and Western novelists (1961). Shui Jing (水晶) in 張愛玲的小說藝術 (*The Artistry of Zhang Ailing's Novels*, 1973) discusses Zhang Ailing's use of symbols and metaphors, psychological writings, and her high language skills in her narrative. Edward Gunn argues that Zhang Ailing's literary narrative incorporates Freudian psychology with elements of Chinese traditional fiction, and that the significance of Zhang Ailing's writings lies in her sense of irony (1980). Lin Xingqian (林幸謙) utilizes feminist criticism to discuss Zhang Ailing's anti-patriarchy themes and representation of female repression (2000, 2003).

The criticisms mentioned above of Zhang Ailing's work mostly center on her early writings. By early writings, I refer to the works written around the mid-1940s, particularly 1943 and 1944, in the case of Zhang Ailing; and the works written before the early 1930s before she shifted her literary attention and creation to political issues, in the case of Ding Ling. On the particular novel *Rice-Sprout Song*, Hu Shi pointed out "hunger" as its theme.¹³³ Following Hu Shi's comments on the theme of hunger of *Rice-Sprout Song*, David Der-wei Wang shares this insight and further demonstrates it (1998, 2004). In his discussion of *Rice-Sprout Song*, C. T. Hsia argues for its anti-communist theme while its narrative still retains "the essential metaphorical strength" and "striking imagery and symbolism" (1971) that mark Zhang's work.¹³⁴

In recent years, some scholars in China have attempted a comparative reading of the works of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, or along with the works of other female writers. These articles tend to focus on the theme of "female consciousness" (Ping Yuan and Sui Qinge 平原、隋清娥 1997, Yao Daimei 姚玳玫 1997, Ma Zhongli 馬忠莉 2003, Ye Sungqing 葉松青 2005, Liu Chuanxia 劉傳霞 2007). Feminist reading of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing's works is not new; however, little is done in comparative reading of these two particular novels, which are worthy of such study. Therefore, this study will provide a new perspective in reading so-called propaganda literature.

¹³³ See Wang's "Foreword" to *The Rice-Sprout Song*, xviii.

¹³⁴ C.T. Hsia, *History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 417.

Chapter 2: Violence and Gender Relationships

In chapter one, I gave a brief account of the family background and personal experience of both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, and a brief analysis of their earlier works. This chapter will now bring us to the discussion of the two main novels, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* and *The Rice-Sprout Song*, focusing on the aspect of violence. This chapter deals with physical violence against women and will explore representations of physical violence in the novels as an expression of political frustration on the part of men against landlordism or the state apparatus. I will argue that the appropriation of the use of violence functions as a means for men to demonstrate and reassure themselves of their authority over women in the discussed novels.

In addition, since traditional gender ideology based on Confucian doctrines values maleness and celebrates its authority over women, the emphasis on women's virtues and chastity constitutes a full-scale control of women, extending over both body and will. Therefore, institutional regulations, the social conventions, and even the women's internalized consent formed a net of violence against women. Therefore, Chinese modern enlightenment and the revolutionary movement from May 4th onwards to the Communist revolution, in terms of gender issues, mainly aimed to release women from such oppression. This chapter demonstrates how, paradoxically, despite its claim of liberation, the Communist socialist revolution re-subordinates people to a system which supports and reinforces a class/gender hierarchy, and which the Party ostensibly aims to change.

An important difference will emerge in my analysis of violence in the work of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing. The distinction lies in their narrative of violence. Toward peasant violence, Ding Ling presents a positive narrative. That is, she suggests this is a method peasants use to seek justice for their political, economic, and legal concerns. Zhang Ailing, on the other hand, presents a critique of how the CCP appropriates the use of violence as a means for social and political control. However, as will become clear throughout this chapter, both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing share a profound criticism of the CCP and its ideology toward violence against women. Both authors present focused critiques of the CCP's continuation of Confucian attitudes toward women, and point out

the apparent contradictions between the claim of the CCP's revolutionary goals and its outcome in regards to the emancipation of women.

I. Male Power Castration and Reassurance of Male Authority

According to Chinese yin-yang theory, the relationship between wife and husband, mirroring the yin-yang principle, is a hierarchy with the latter over the former regardless of their social status. In addition to the traditional cultural system that values maleness and sustains male authority, financial support is expected and is considered as the proper responsibility of a husband. Therefore, one of the methods in the Chinese traditional family economy to judge men to be qualified as husbands is their ability to support their families financially. The power and authority of men are greatly embodied in their ownership of lands on which they rely to establish social-economic power and sustain the family in that traditional agricultural society. In the novels of both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, peasant males are “de-masculinized,” that is, they are power “castrated”¹³⁵ because of the deprivation of their ownership of lands that causes their inability to support their family. The presentation of the novels shows how these peasants, power “castrated” either by landlordism in the past economic-political structural community or by party-political force or state apparatus in the masculine political hierarchy, reassure their male authority or re-submit their wives to their authority by the use of violence.

In *Sanggan River*, Ding Ling's peasants are like those in her earlier writing “The East Village Affair,” socially power “castrated” by feudal landlordism. The insufficiency or lack of lands results in their poverty in a society based on agricultural economy. The fact that the vice-village-head, Zhao Delu, cannot even afford to clothe his wife, whose body is involuntarily exposed to others, severely damages his “face” and pride not only as a husband but as a “man.” In traditional Chinese society, the most important power the husband claims over the wife is embodied in his possession of her body, particularly her virginity and chastity. The nakedness of Zhao's wife allows the villagers visually to share her body, which indicates the loss of Zhao's absolute power over it. It manifests itself in the eclipse of Zhao's power as a husband. Alber argues that nakedness indicates the

¹³⁵ For my discussion of the notion of “male power castration,” see the “Early Works” section in Chapter One.

weakness of women.¹³⁶ However, if the exposure of the female body symbolizes her weakness, then the cause of such exposure indicates the symbolic “castration” of the power of the husband, conventionally believed to claim the supposed right to and possession of this “nakedness.” In addition, the nakedness of Zhao’s wife also indicates Zhao’s inability to fulfill the responsibility of the role of husband. The nakedness causes Zhao’s wife to be involuntarily cloistered and the clothes from landlord Jiang’s wife allow her release from such a condition. As the vice-village head and a member of the Communist Party, which at the moment claims authority over the village, Zhao is among the village leaders involved in the struggle against landlords. Understanding this, landlord Jiang attempts to bribe Zhao by sending her wife to give out the clothes as gifts to Zhao’s wife. However, since the poverty of the villagers largely results from its exploitation at the hands of the landlords, and the village, with the guidance and assistance of the Communist work team, is in the process of struggling against them, receipt of the bribery from the ones whose oppression initially causes his power “castration” not only reveals Zhao’s political inadequacy but reminds him of his failure and reinforces his humiliation. Since the connotation of the Party’s revolutionary rhetoric of “progress” suggests a “political consciousness” that dichotomizes the mass and the landlords; and since, as a Party member and the vice-village head, he is being watched and judged, his denial of such inadequate behaviour and refusal of material temptation from the landlord class signify a political declaration. Therefore, Zhao expels Jiang’s wife from his house, and curses and beats his own wife for receiving the bribe, tearing up the clothing from Jaing’s wife in public. The physical violence against his wife, therefore, is not only a political manifestation that allows the establishment of his revolutionary, progressive image, but is also his reassurance of his absolute command in the household. Conversely, this political gesture legitimizes the use of violence.

Zhang Ailing utilizes “role displacement” as the symbol of male power castration in the depiction of the character Jingen in *Rice-Sprout Song* as well. She reverses the responsibility carried out by the characters to subvert the conventional assumption of gender roles in the traditional family economy. As mentioned before, patriarchal authority manifests itself partly in the males’/husbands’ roles of economic controllers and

¹³⁶ Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution*, 173.

supporters in the traditional Chinese family economy. Therefore, that Jingen's inability to feed the family involuntarily forced his wife, Yuexiang, to sojourn to the city to work as a maid to help out the family economy not only jeopardises his power but further results in his "role displacement."

The sojourn is not uncommon in Chinese history. While the civil exam system required officials to sojourn regularly following their posts, common people out of economical necessity would sojourn as merchants or apprentices. In addition, social convention limited the sojourn to males while women/wives were left behind to care for the family.¹³⁷ In other words, the role of the wife was to stay behind and care for the family. In this regard, Jingen is reduced to the role of the wife; hence the roles of Jingen and Yuexiang were displaced. Such power castration consequently results in Jingen's self-doubt:

Ever since she had gone away he had felt ashamed of himself. He had allowed such a small amount of money to stand between them. In sleepless nights he thought that she, too, must despise him in her heart, and it could never be the same again between them (Zhang, 22).

Therefore, it is not surprising that, as Dai Qing points out, Jingen's wish is simply to be able to support his family so that his wife does not have to go to Shanghai to work as a maid. And the standard of supporting the family is even simpler: feeding them a steamed rice meal, not gruel.¹³⁸ Jingen's wish, as Dai indicates, is exactly the responsibility and authority that lie in Chinese men as the master of the family in the traditional, ideal Confucian society. Failure to carry out their responsibility jeopardizes his "maleness" and authority in the household and results in his frustration and self-doubt. Jingen's self-doubt further reinforces the feeling of impotence that causes the repression of his sexual desire. He fears the laughter of his wife at his impotence:

¹³⁷ Yuen-fong Woon, "The Voluntary Sojourner among the Overseas Chinese: Myth or Reality?" *Pacific Affairs* 56, no 4 (Winter 1983-4): 688.

¹³⁸ See Dai Qing, "On Land Reform: Eileen Chang's *The Rice-Sprout Song* in China," in Dai's Blog. (http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/view_blog.asp?BlogName=jizhedaiqing) accessed on March 25, 2008, and April 24, 2008.

[h]e was deeply ashamed of himself. And in China the commonest joke is that about the poor man who, though starving, is still amorous, and is jeered at by his wife. Maybe she would jeer at him too (Zhang, 115).¹³⁹

Here Zhang Ailing subtly links power to sex. On the night Yuexiang returns, for the first and the only time in the story Jingen proves his competence by showing her the land certificate, and that very night they have sex after a long-term separation.¹⁴⁰ Once the ownership of land fails to improve their life and his economic power fails him again, his sexual desire is repressed.

Such linking of power to sex is also seen in Ding Ling. Discontent with her husband's weak economic power, Zhou Yueying would consistently complain and quarrel with her husband, the shepherd. Shamed into anger, the shepherd would beat her into submission. But each time, after being beaten, she would prepare food for him, and "after one night they would seem like a newly-married couple, grown quite inseparable" (Ding, 73). It can be said that sex signifies his power manifested by violence. It also suggests that "she is rewarding him [with sex] for his violence towards her."¹⁴¹ In this regard, sex signifies her submission to his violence.

The radical subversion of traditional social status and re-distribution of social wealth by the Communist revolution, therefore, allow these power "castrated" men to reclaim their lost authority and "maleness." Jingen is proud to show Yuexiang the land certificate obtained during land reform on the night she just returns. This is the first and only time in the story that Jingen presents the responsibility and pride which the head of a family should hold. The ownership of land symbolizes this male power and an identity of "maleness." In this regard, the CCP released him from the oppression of feudal landlordism and allowed him the reassurance of his male authority. We see something similar in the work of Ding Ling. Participation in the CCP's revolutionary works enables Ding Ling's peasants to reassert their "maleness" and authority through, economically, the redistribution of lands, or, politically, holding a political position. Men like Zhang Pin (propaganda director of the county party committee), Zhang Yumin (secretary of the

¹³⁹ I add my own translation. See page 123 in the Chinese text.

¹⁴⁰ Zhang Ailing does not directly describe that they have sex, but implicitly imply it. See p. 40-1.

¹⁴¹ My supervisor's note.

Nuanshui Party Branch) and Cheng Ren (chairman of the peasants' association), either minimally educated or illiterate, standing at the bottom strata of social class, had almost no chance to access political power and social mobility in the traditional society. This traditional society was governed and dominated by the gentry class, who established their social and political power through the civil examination. However, voluntarily or involuntarily, these characters are obliged to submit their personal wills to the party ideology to retain their newly-obtained power and status. Cheng Ren has to suppress his affection towards and keep his distance from Heini, whose family background designates her as a class enemy.

Compared to Ding Ling, whose subtle criticism of state apparatus is hindered by her persistent praise of its future promise of class/gender liberation, Zhang Ailing further critiques the oppression of the state apparatus, which she sees as replacing the role of the old feudal oppressive power from which the CCP attempted to emancipate the people. Despite land redistribution, heavy taxation and contributions reduced the newly emancipated peasant, Jingen, to the status of a tenant again, if not to out-and-out serfdom. Economically impaired and deprived of the ability to feed his family, Jingen is deficient in controlling his own life and power "castrated" by the state apparatus for a second time.

In addition to Jingen, Zhang Ailing's male characters are all intellectually or politically confined within a condition of state ideological violence. Comrade Wang, a senior party member marginalized by central politics when "exiled" to the countryside, after witnessing the physical violence against those demanding food supplements, has to suppress his doubt about the CCP's promises to the people and deny the substantial failure of the CCP that causes the misery of the peasants. Similarly, as an intellectual and writer, whose power and influence lie in his words and on which he relies to establish his social value and responsibility, the party film scriptwriter and director Gu has to twist the truth and deliberately write a story subscribing to the state ideology. Accordingly, Jingen as a peasant is deprived of land power; Comrade Wang as a party member and a local cadre is deprived of revolutionary purity (revolution for the sake of the people); and Gu as a party film scriptwriter is deprived of creativity. In other words, these men are deprived of the means on which they rely to build their authority, and are subjected to the economical and political control of the state apparatus.

Both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing present the use of domestic violence against women as a way for men to reassure themselves of their authority, frustrated and jeopardized by the oppression of either landlordism or the state apparatus, and to reclaim their castrated power and re-submit women to that authority. Their presentation of violence thus argues a persistence of the old social norms ascribed to gender relationships in the supposedly “emancipated” social mentality. As mentioned previously, the vice-village head Zhao beats his wife for receiving clothes from landlord Jiang’s wife, and tears up her clothes, exposing her, naked, in public. He curses her, shouting “Look at the shameless whore! She’s spoilt my good name. After all I’m still vice-village head!” (Ding, 170) and “...When people are poor they lack will power. My silly wife is so damn backward, if you don’t beat her she won’t behave! And this is the only way to stop that witch from coming any more” (Ding, 171). So, Zhao’s inability even to clothe his wife turns in his mind into something which is the fault of her “backwardness” that jeopardizes his revolutionary efforts. They are poor, but it is his wife who lacks will power when it comes to the issue of the quality of personality; she can discipline herself only after being beaten. Similarly, when the Shepherd’s wife, Zhou Yueying, complains about his incompetence, which causes their separation and poverty, the ashamed Shepherd, turning furious, beats her while cursing that “Devil take you, what good are you anyway? By working hard all my life I managed to get together twenty sheep, and sold them all to buy you—how dare you resent my poverty or my age! You bitch, who knows how you carry on when I’m away from home...” (Ding, 72)

As the vice-chair of the Woman’s Association, Zhou is one of the most capable women in the village. Through her, Ding Ling portrays a “progressive” and untraditional image of women:

Of all the village women she was least afraid of trouble. She had quarrelled and even fought with people, and during the campaigns to liquidate the landlord class the previous year and that spring, had been the most outspoken of the women. Once her temper was up she feared neither man nor devil, and at such times people would gather round her and unite under her passionate leadership (Ding, 73).

However, even such an untraditional woman “can be beaten into submission.”¹⁴² Callahan points out that “The (female) body as a commodity of exchange is a sign of [men’s] power in the feudal patriarchy.”¹⁴³ This better explains the Shepherd’s behavior. The Shepherd’s words indicate the common belief in the traditional conventions of the status and role of wife as property and possession of the husband. This relationship is fundamentally one of violence within which the wife is subject to the power and control of the husband through the appropriation of the use of violence, which becomes an expression of frustration and a means to regain at least some measure of masculine power. Violence functions to manifest the “master” in this relationship and of the household, and thereby both exposes and reaffirms a gender hierarchy. Therefore, violence is exercised not only to ensure that women obey but simultaneously to discipline them to subject themselves to their husband’s authority. It is not surprising to find such sexism in the mentality of these men, judging from the traditional conventions which empower maleness.

However, such sexism in a member of the party attempting to alter this very gender prejudice against women indicates the false claim of women’s emancipation. Barlow points out that *Sanggan River* “does not champion individual women against the family system,” and “presents female protagonists in a conventional village world and acknowledges the rural habit of subsuming gender into dyadic social or *lun* relationships.”¹⁴⁴ However, the contrast of Ding Ling’s construction of Zhou’s dual images exposes women’s inferiority in the *lun* relationships. It also exposes the persistence of males’ concepts and attitudes towards women, which refuse to evolve along with the political revolution. Therefore, the contrast between Ding Ling’s portraits of such progressive women and their roles and status in gender-biased marital relationships ironically and embarrassingly critiques the claim of women’s emancipation. If land reform is “mind reform” as some scholars argue, Ding Ling subtly points out the

¹⁴² Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution*, 172.

¹⁴³ W. A. Callahan, “Gender, Ideology, Nation: Ju Dou in the Cultural Politics of China,” *East-West Film Journal* 7, no 1 (1993): 54.

¹⁴⁴ Tani Barlow and Gary J. Bjorge, ed., *I Myself Am a Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 40-1.

neglect of the reform of the gendered consciousness in the process of such “mind reform.”

Like Ding Ling, Zhang Ailing utilizes physical violence as the channel through which to present men’s accommodation to the frustration of their inability to fulfill both their own desires and that of the women in their lives. Furthermore, she demonstrates how the use of violence is legitimized to reassure their authority, jeopardized by their impotence in the face of higher power. As stated above, Jingen’s simple wish is to be competent to support his family; the standard is even simpler: all he wants is a steamed rice meal. Such a wish is depicted twice in the story: one is revealed when Yuexiang returns from the city; the other when his newly-wed sister Jinhua visits them.¹⁴⁵ However, Yuexiang fails him by offering gruel on both occasions and both occasions cause considerable consequences. The first time it is discovered by Comrade Wang while the second time it reminds Jingen of his inadequacy as a big brother for not even being able to provide a proper meal for his sister. Both occasions jeopardize Jingen’s pride and authority as the head of the family. Later, when Comrade Wang forcibly demands their contribution to the Party, and Yuexiang gives out the rest of her savings to resolve the problem, Jingen explodes and turns his anger into violence upon Yuexiang. For Jingen, this relationship is one within which he bears a traditional responsibility to support the family. This is evident when Jingen conflicts with Comrade Wang, who directly demands and deals with Jingen, and both ignore Yuexiang attempting to calm them down during the conflict. The conflict manifests itself as masculine politics and a family relationship.

It is notable that women’s response to violence against them reveals a self-internalization of such power of the husband over them. According to the Chinese yin-yang dichotomy embedded in the traditional view of the husband-wife relationship, heaven corresponds to the husband and earth to the wife. Hence the husband is the heaven of the wife. Through Confucian teachings, this notion not only pervades common belief but becomes orthodoxy. The words which the chair of the Women’s Association,

¹⁴⁵ See Dai Qing, “On Land Reform: Eileen Chang’s *The Rice-Sprout Song* in China,” in Dai’s Blog.

戴晴. “從小說看土改: 張愛玲的《秧歌》在大陸.” 天涯博客 記者戴晴

(http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/view_blog.asp?BlogName=jizhedaiqing) accessed on March 25, 2008, and April 24, 2008.

Dong Guihua, uses to respond to the complaints of her husband about her participation in village affairs can better illustrate such an internalized consciousness. “I’m only a woman after all, marrying the rooster and then following the rooster (I follow my husband)” (Ding, 85).¹⁴⁶ Here the Chinese saying “marrying the rooster and then following the rooster; marrying the dog and then following the dog” (嫁雞隨雞, 嫁狗隨狗) underlines a subordinate marital relationship in which the wife follows her husband. It constructs women’s self-identity: once married, she belongs to the marital family and identifies herself with it. Thus, such internalized female self-imagery and self-awareness corresponding to the roles imposed on them causes them to identify themselves with socially constructed roles. Therefore, it is not surprising that after being beaten, Yuexiang “said nothing... threw herself face downward on the bed and abandoned herself to stifling sobs” (Zhang, 121). The grief comes not because of being beaten but because of Jingen’s misunderstanding of her (Zhang, 122). What is in question, therefore, is not violence itself, but his misunderstanding.

Ding Ling’s capable woman character, Zhou, responds to domestic violence in a similar fashion. When beaten, Zhou would cry, and then “would gradually calm down, and go meekly to knead the buckwheat flour and prepare food for him” (Ding, 72). They would have a silent night and then would behave like a newly-wed couple. An untraditional woman, she “...[has] no cause for fear except her husband’s fist, and no source of comfort” (Ding, 73). It is such an internalized notion of traditional Confucian views of the relationship between husband and wife that submits these women voluntarily to men’s authority, and legitimizes the use of violence and the acceptance of it. Borrowing Yuan’s words, women’s submission to violence symbolizes the acceptance of “historical male control of [women]... and rationalize[s] this male control rather than challenging the existing social acceptance of it.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, the appropriation of physical violence functions as the channel of men’s means to reassurance of authority over women, and the internalized traditional gender view allows the legitimization and acceptance of it.

¹⁴⁶ In the English text, it is translated as “I follow my husband.” Here I add my own translation. See page 86 in the Chinese text.

¹⁴⁷ Lijun Yuan, “Ethics of Care and Concept of Jen: A Reply to Chenyang Li,” 119.

II. Institutional Violence

The process of the CCP's revolutionary "mind reform" unfortunately lacked a corresponding, evolutionarily-advanced conception of gender equality. Ironically, while it was the stated aim of the CCP and its policies to change the existing Chinese social and political system, institutional violence under CCP rule re-subjugated the people to a system supporting and reinforcing a class/gender hierarchy, ensuring the social, political and ideological control of the Chinese citizenry. Confucian ideology saw the family as the basic social unit, and women were subject to the authority of men in the household. To mobilize women into social production and revolutionary work, the CCP first had to emancipate women from the restraints of the family system. In the formative years of the CCP, therefore, Communists and other left-wing intellectuals attacked the family system. However, as Stacey argues, the CCP's ability to obtain the peasants' support for its policies lay in its accommodation of the peasants' firm belief in the family system.¹⁴⁸ In addition, in the operation of the CCP's (state) policy, political control and economic development had to come prior to women's emancipation.¹⁴⁹ In other words, the issue of women's emancipation was subject to changes in the revolutionary needs of the party/state and to political and ideological control. Furthermore, the CCP's class division artificially categorized people into different social groups, such as workers, peasants, counterrevolutionaries and rightists, and recreated a social hierarchy based on class background that determined a person's political status.

These conditions offer a persuasive explanation for the experience of Heini in *Sanggan River*, and that of women in *Rice-Sprout Song*. According to the CCP's notions, "women had two different class characteristics: as women they were slaves, and as members of families, they shared the class status of their husbands and fathers."¹⁵⁰ Heini fits in such a profile. The overthrow of feudal oppression is supposed to emancipate women, like Heini, who are subjected to the control of men in power. In Heini's case, she

¹⁴⁸ Judith Stacey, "Toward a Theory of Family and Revolution: Reflections on the Chinese Case," *Social Problem* 26, no 5 (Jun., 1979): 499-508.

¹⁴⁹ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," *World Politics* 26.1 (Oct., 1973): 55-79

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

was subjugated to Qian Wengui representing not only Confucian patriarchy but feudal oppressive power, as well. Qian first forbids Heini to be romantically involved with Cheng Ren, and then uses her as bait to lure Cheng Ren to his side. Since Qian is a “class enemy,” Heini, as Qian’s niece, by nature is a “class enemy” as well. Cheng Ren deliberately keeps his distance from Heini because as Chair of the peasants’ association, he “ought to identify himself with the masses... He feared this connection might damage his position and set tongues wagging...” (Ding, 18) Despite these efforts, Heini attempts to identify herself with the People and show her “progress,” but by contributing her knowledge to the women’s literacy classes, her class background fails her. Ding Ling’s depiction illustrates how Qian, representing traditional patriarchal authority, oppresses women, and how the Communist Party in the end liberates Heini from such oppression. In Ding Ling’s words: “By liberating the village the Eighth Route Army also liberated Heini” (Ding, 18). However, while liberating women like Heini, the Party through its ideology simultaneously creates numbers of oppressed “Heinis” due to their class background. That is, though Heini is “liberated,” the political taboo regarding class differentiation still remains. In this regard, to borrow Barlow’s words, “the Party itself held the most radical alternative to the patrilineal family structure... as the major source of women’s oppression.”¹⁵¹

Barlow’s statement indicates the paradox of the replacement of the traditional, oppressive feudal power by the Party that controlled and interfered with the people’s private lives. This new patriarchal order, embedded in masculine politics, allowed the appropriation of senior powerful cadres of political power to grant personal desire, and forced women into submission. Therefore, unlike Ding Ling, who expresses relative optimism, Zhang Ailing sharply criticizes this in the depiction of Comrade Wang’s marriage. The Party overthrew the old class power but created a new class power in its own hierarchical order. Class division as a means of social control reincarnates many aspects of Confucian patriarchy, and the Party or state not only replaces the role of the feudal patriarchal authority but becomes the sole landlord.¹⁵² In the case of comrade

¹⁵¹ Tani Barlow and Gary J. Bjorge, ed., *I Myself Am a Woman*, 36.

¹⁵² David Der-wei Wang also indicates that the CCP has become “the single new landlord.” See “Foreword,” *The Rice-Sprout Song*, xix.

Wang's marriage, Wang proposed to the girl Sha Ming the very next day after he saw her at a meeting—prior to his proposal, they had never talked to each other. Comrade Yu, a potential rival for the girl, was not a severe threat because he “was low in rank and not qualified to marry” (Zhang, 66). Wang directly informed the girl of his one-sided decision, but Sha Ming refused it with the excuse of needing time to consider the proposal. Wang pushed forward: “As far as I am concerned, there is no need to reconsider. My mind is made up.” Two weeks later, Wang pressed further to force her into agreement: “Let's send in the petition... If either of us is unfit to marry, you can depend on it that the organization will tell us so. We can safely leave that to the organization” (Zhang, 68). Sha Ming refused again. Wang pressed further again, and finally the girl “gave in and said reluctantly, ‘All right’” (Zhang, 68). Not only is personal feeling being denied here, but the party replaces the role of patriarchal authority and feudal parental power in the name of revolutionary work. Zhang presents a critique of two things: 1) Marriage has to be approved by the Party, at least for Party members, if not for everyone; and 2) “Self-choice of marital partner” becomes an opportunity for powerful male cadres to take advantage of powerless female members. In other words, the Party penetrates into and controls personal lives; personal will is subject to party regulation. In this regard, considering the May Fourth appeal to individual freedom of choice of partner, the call of the CCP for women's emancipation was reduced to something appropriated by the powerful senior male cadres for personal gain through institutional regulation.

The establishment of the Women's Association was supposed to empower women; however, the authors tell us a different story. Its operations exposed the politically inferior status of women. Ding Ling's depiction of the Women's Association agrees with Alber's characterization of it, that it “is more of a social club than a social action group.”¹⁵³ Since the members of the Women's Association are women, as its title implies, it deals with affairs relating to women. However, despite the assignment of officers for work division, none of them is aware of how to conduct the work. It has no regular attendance. And some women only came to the association to collect news for their family, rather than for any instruction in political consciousness. Moreover, women

¹⁵³ Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution*, 172.

tended to be timid and silent for fear that they would be criticized by the cadres at the village meetings (Ding, 59).¹⁵⁴ Above all, as Alber also argues, “[i]n Ding Ling’s conception, power and sexuality are closely connected.”¹⁵⁵ This is not only embedded in kinship relations but re-inscribed in the process of revolutionary work. The leading characters in the party and land reform are men, except for Dong Guihua and Zhou Yueying, the chair and the vice-chair of the Women’s Association. However, when the propaganda director of the county Party Committee, Zhang Pin, arrives at Zhou’s house to join a meeting which only men attend, Dong greets him and then “went and stood at the courtyard gate” (Ding, 240). Neither the party officers, those male villagers, nor she herself concludes the importance of and necessity for her attendance as the chair of the Women’s Association. This exclusion of someone who holds an apparently ‘important’ position exposes a subconscious attitude of not only the party officers and those male villagers but women themselves about the roles of women in the formation of the new political order. Alber’s simile of the Women’s Association and the officers’ attitudes themselves, therefore, indicate the substance of the political function of the Women’s Association. Hence, despite the allowance and even encouragement of women to participate in politics, the existence of the Women’s Association functions more as a superficial representation of gender equality than an actual political empowerment of women. In fact, it does nothing other than submit women to the political order and defines women’s role, position, and function in such an order. Its function and operation exclude women from crucial political affairs.

If the Women’s Association functions more like a social club responsible for nothing politically substantial in Ding Ling, its role and function become part of the oppressive state apparatus in Zhang Ailing’s depiction of it.¹⁵⁶ According to Leader, between 1950-1953, to accommodate its economic plan requiring the induction of women into the labour force, the CCP initiated a national campaign through the implementation

¹⁵⁴ Alber also points out these points.

¹⁵⁵ Alber, 172.

¹⁵⁶ Chen Jingyi (陳靜宜) also made similar points. Chen argues that the establishment of the Women’s Association does not change the substance of the oppressive patriarchal structure. Women’s participation in politics (such as the establishment of the Women’s Association) only forces women to shift from a “small family” (小家庭) based on traditional patriarchy to a “big family” (大家庭) based on Nationalism (國族主義) See 張愛玲長篇小說的女性書寫 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2005), 44-5.

of the Marriage Law attacking “feudal marriage.” However, it soon failed and was abandoned in 1953.

[T]he campaign was severely handicapped by two factors: the party had done no preparation of an organizational or educational kind to facilitate the implementation of the law, and the cadres and judicial personnel who were responsible for carrying out the law did not understand its provisions and were uniformly hostile to its intent. Cadres tended to view women as property and they saw attempts to free women as efforts to rob newly *fanshened* peasants of their goods.¹⁵⁷

Leader’s argument indicates the substance of women’s role and position in the mind of people governing local politics and executing the mission of women’s emancipation. Women are nothing more than men’s property. Such post-revolutionary mentality pervasive in the officers manifests itself as an institutional reinforcement of traditional patriarchy. This offers an explanation for women’s experience in the story. In *Rice Sprout-Song*, after Jinhua’s wedding ceremony, on the way back to their village, Aunt Tan mentioned Jinhua’s mother-in-law, who seems quite capable, implying that Jinhua may have a tough life in dealing with her. Jingen thinks it will be fine because of the implementation of the New Marriage Law and the establishment of the Women’s Association protecting women from and encouraging women to resist oppression at the hands of their husbands’ families. But then they recall that a woman from Taoxi village, who had complained about abuse by her in-laws and had asked for a divorce, was ultimately “tied up to a tree and beaten” by the cadre, and then sent back to her husband’s house, where she was strung up and beaten by her husband and in-laws in turn. Jingen concludes that “it all depends on the *kan pu* (cadre) in charge of the village” (Zhang, 20). In this regard, that beaten woman in Taoxi (Pearl Creek village) was apparently considered as goods belonging to the peasants, and divorce was seen as not only deprivation of their property but a challenge to their ownership of it. The only function of the Women’s Association seen in the story is when its chair, wife of the chairman of the Peasants’ Association, works along with her husband to call for meetings and to ask people to contribute to soldiers’ families. Therefore, in Zhang’s suggestion, the Women’s

¹⁵⁷ Shelah Gilbert Leader, “The Emancipation of Chinese Women,” 60.

Association is less an organization to defend women's rights than a co-oppressor of their own autonomy. It functions little in shaping women's political roles, nor is it even able to defend and protect women's rights.

Above all, the means of the party's social control, as a result, not only reinforces the family system but solidifies the existing gender patterns in the family system. These are embedded in Confucian ideology, valuing family as a basic social/economic unit in which the male/husband as the head of the family enjoys power and authority over women. The Party's class division segregated people into categories such as workers, peasants, soldiers and others like rightists or counter-revolutionaries. As a peasant, Yuexiang is encouraged to go back to her village and participate in rural production to build the new socialist country. Despite Yuexiang's belief in and longing for a better future in the city, as a peasant, her defined class status fails her because of the strict restraint on rural-urban mobility. As a result, such a policy ties peasant men to the land while it ties peasant women, without other means to survive in rural villages, to the family. In some way, both men and women are all "imprisoned" in the countryside, and men too are "degraded and powerless." Borrowing Barry's words, the "power over their own destiny"¹⁵⁸ is taken away. Therefore, the policy restricting mobility, which for the Party/State is a means of social control, in the end not only confounds and contradicts its initial goal and ruins the efforts of activists from May 4th onwards to liberate women from family oppression. Conversely, it reinforces and solidifies the existing gender relationships and power structure in the family system embedded in traditional Confucian ideology. In some way, we see here the fundamental difference between Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing in their belief in women's emancipation: while Ding Ling leaned on political transformation, Zhang Ailing believed in economic power in giving women's independence, which furthers women's emancipation.

Despite the subtle criticism of the Party, Ding Ling stressed the positive nature of state power while Zhang Ailing treated it as the source of destruction. In *Sanggan River*, state power functioned in a positive way, to emancipate women from feudal patriarchal oppression, as in the case of Heini's freedom from Qian's patriarchal oppression. On the contrary, in *Rice-Sprout Song* state control enhances the repression of

¹⁵⁸ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 135.

desire that ties peasant men to land, and women to the family. It solidifies the existing gender patterns in the family system and eventually reinforces male authority over women, a direct hold-over from Confucian ideology. In other words, the appropriation of state power subordinates women into a hierarchal gender order that reinforces the traditional gender pattern valuing and emphasizing maleness. As a result, one of the initial goals of the CCP's revolution, to emancipate women from the restraints of the patriarchal family system, turns out to reincarnate traditional Confucian ideology, solidifying the family system and its gender relationships.

III. Violence: Oppression, Resistance and Justice

The presentation of violence in Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing both indicates an agreement on male's appropriation of physical violence to reassure and to compensate themselves for their "castrated power," and exposes the persistence of a traditional gender prejudice against women. They differentiate themselves, however, in their narratives of state force due to their divergent political ideology. Despite her subtle criticism, Ding Ling's work, as part of the state ideological apparatus, overlooks the paradox of the Communist Party replacing the role of the patriarchal authority, instead stressing its positivism in overthrowing the oppression of the landlord class. For the CCP, evil lies in the oppression of landlords. Therefore, individual violence against women results as a side-effect of such oppression. Collective violence against landlords represents justice for the oppressed class. For Zhang Ailing, however, state power/apparatus stands as the source of destruction. Violence, on the one hand, functions as a mechanism of peasants' resistance and revenge against state apparatus, but in a destructive way. On the other hand, it functions for the state as a means of social and political control. Therefore, Ding Ling presents a relatively positive narrative of violence while Zhang Ailing presents a negative narrative of it.

Both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing present peasants' collective violence as resistance to the oppression of either landlords or state force, and as a means for justice. The villagers in *Sanggan River* initially are so frightened by Qian Wengui's power that they are reluctant to "rebel" for fear of revenge under the changeable political conditions. Through the efforts of the work team, who, in David Der-wei Wang's words, "carefully

plan to arouse anger among the peasants and channel that anger into action,”¹⁵⁹ the villagers are finally able to express their grief and suffering. The reformers are hence able to generate their class consciousness and mobilize them to rise against the oppressing class enemy. The process of rising against local authorities is then the process of the transformation of class consciousness. Therefore, other than agricultural re-structuring, the land reform movement held a “superstructural dimension” that “contributed to changes in traditional Chinese ethical, cultural and legal systems.”¹⁶⁰ As such, “land reform is the outward form of mind reform.”¹⁶¹ Violence, then, is means to execute the demand for long-absent justice for the peasants. David Der-wei Wang points out “the dialectic of violence and justice” in *Sanggan River*.¹⁶² He argues that, on top of Liu Zaifu’s argument about the Chinese Communist revolution as “a hybrid... inspired by both the ‘bloody ritual’ of the French Revolution and the teleological imperative of the Stalinist Revolution” in *Sanggan River*, Ding Ling’s depiction of violence, “from public trial to communal ostracism, from the theater of blood to the invention of penal technology,”¹⁶³ can be traced back to “the premodern discourse of crime and punishment” seen in the works of Liu E and Li Boyuan. However, its treatment of violence as the ultimate means for justice reflects a judicially backward system which Liu and Li would oppose.¹⁶⁴

While Wang’s argument provides precious insights, Ding Ling’s depiction of violence does not suggest simply a “collective violence” in the absence of a “judicial and penal system”¹⁶⁵ or simply a return to a premodern discourse of crime and punishment. Rather, it has something to do with the political environment and ideology Ding Ling was situated in and conditioned by, that determine her narrative of violence fuelling the land reform movement. The function of literature and art was defined and restricted upon the release of Mao Tse-Tung’s “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art” in 1942,

¹⁵⁹ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 73.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 71

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

which required authors to align with the party's socialist line and subordinated literature and art to Communist revolutionary purposes.¹⁶⁶ In sum, it required a positive narration of the party's socialist revolution. Therefore, Ding Ling's treatment of violence should be seen as a political gesture that signifies, as Wang points out, "the transfer of the control of justice from the ruling class to the ruled..."¹⁶⁷ The presentation of the struggle meeting against Qian Wengui as a "public trial" underlines the transfer of power and justice to the "people," namely the oppressed class. Therefore, rather than a mere celebration of "the rites of torture" and "cannibalism,"¹⁶⁸ the violent scenes in the struggle meeting not only reflect the conventional belief in the "cause and effect," but re-construct a new form of social justice that the Communists grant to the people. Above all, it symbolizes the "rites" of emancipation of people from "feudal oppression." It is the embodiment of the transformation of class consciousness. Finally, Wang offers a different perspective in reading the experience of Cheng and Heini, indicating the creation of a new "form of suffering and punishment... as a result of the new Communist discourse of justice."¹⁶⁹ Under the party's class division that determines people's political status and rights, Cheng Ren has to reconsider such relations to align with the Communist's revolutionary line. As a result, the peasants' search for justice recreates suffering and punishment for them, and the claim of the Communist revolution to seek justice for the oppressed recreates in turn a new group of oppressed.

The discrepancy between what the Communist revolution attempted to achieve and what it really achieved creates the new form of oppression on people as seen in *Rice-Sprout Song*. Borrowing Wang's words, "the peasants' liberation inaugurates a new, advanced form of serfdom."¹⁷⁰ That is, with the purging of the landlords, the state becomes the source of oppression with a new form of landlordism through which heavy tax revenues and political contributions are pressed upon the people. The newly-liberated peasants, then, are engulfed in a new form of serfdom. The demand of Jingen and other

¹⁶⁶ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 71.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

villagers for food from the local government signifies a resistance to state exploitation. However, rather than a subversion or overthrow of the existing authority, such resistance is more like what is called “remedial protest,” aiming for attention from the power above. According to Rey Chow, who cites Perry Link, a remedial protest “often signifies not the attempt to overthrow the Confucian values system itself, but a criticism from below of the abuses of power, who should be treating the abused with fairness within what is basically ‘the same value system.’”¹⁷¹ In other words, following this logic, a remedial protest aims not at changing a value system, which in turn would sustain ideologically a certain political system. Therefore, despite their demand for justice, yet different from the attempt by the peasants in Ding Ling’s work, the resistance of Jingen and the villagers is not seeking a “structural change” that is demanded by a “radical protest.”¹⁷²

The use of armed force to repress the resistance of Jingen and other villagers exposes how the Party state appropriates the use of the state apparatus to legitimize its social and political control. State apparatus consists of “repressive structures” and “ideological structures.”¹⁷³ The former includes institutions such as the government, the army, the police, the courts, and the prisons, etc., while the latter contains “the religious, educational, political, communicational, and the cultural” institutions, and so on. They function in different ways: the former by “violence” and the latter by “ideology.”¹⁷⁴ The two combine to ensure social and political control, through both “external force” and the “internal consent” of the people.¹⁷⁵ In the story, the villagers demand their share of rice for the coming New Year. Comrade Wang gives his order to fire on the villagers, in an attempt to stop them from crashing into the barn which stores the grain of the village. Jingen is shot and later dies. Even Wang himself initially is shocked by such violence. He responds by saying that “We have failed. We have had to shoot at our people” (Zhang, 146). But as the party scriptwriter Gu would realize, such “admission of failure in a

¹⁷¹ Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 49.

¹⁷² W. A. Callahan, “Gender, Ideology, Nation: Ju Dou in the Cultural Politics of China,” 60.

¹⁷³ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 164.

¹⁷⁴ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), 136-8.

¹⁷⁵ Barry, 164.

moment of weakness and lack of faith amounted to a virtual betrayal of the Party and could be brought against him in any purge” (Zhang, 146). Comrade Wang, however, immediately finds this an acceptable reason to claim the existence of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy responsible for what has happened. “There must be spies behind this... Otherwise the people would never rise up like this. We’ll have to get to the bottom of this” (Zhang, 147). Prior to such a “rebellion,” the people did rise against the oppression of landlords only a few years previously, under the mobilization of the very Party that is now ruling the country. Wang himself was involved in that movement as well. Admitting failure means the denial of the Party to which he has devoted and committed his whole life. In other words, denial of the party means denial of the meaning of his life and the efforts he himself has made. Therefore, rather than a simple denial of the truth, Wang’s words signify more a political consciousness reflected in Gu’s realization. Consequently, Wang’s denial of such a mistake and formulation of the counterrevolutionary conspiracy theory serve to legitimize the use of lethal violence on civilians to maintain social and political order, and to re-submit people to state control, both physically and ideologically.¹⁷⁶ Zhang thus criticizes the state for utilizing “repressive structures” to enhance ideological control. Zhang Ailing’s depiction of violence (state violence), therefore, negatively portrays the Communist Revolution and the roles of the Communist regime in the formation of people’s lives. Finally, by contrast, the discrepancy between the creation of the Communist scriptwriter Gu and what happened in the village, and between what the narrator tells in the story and what Gu narrates in his creation, demonstrate criticism of the Communist regime. Zhang Ailing

¹⁷⁶ Some critics have made comments on Wang’s reactions. For example, C. T. Hsia indicates that Wang’s “humanity has withered in him since the disappearance of his wife...what remains is the ghost of a man blindly loyal to the party because he has no other loyalties to fall back on...[therefore,] it is the only conclusion possible for a man who hugs an illusion in order to maintain a semblance of life.” In this regard, the CCP’s liberation of people has turned out even to be destructive to humanity. See *History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 422. A Chinese version also by Hsia see “評秧歌” in *愛情、社會、小說* (Taipei: Chun wenxue chubanshe, 1970), 63-77. Huang Kequan 黃克全 argues that Wang’s denial reveals another theme (in addition to “hunger”) of the novel: “disillusion.” (幻滅) It is the denial of the truth that can comfort his “twisted” consciousness. Wang has nothing left but can only grab the “last straw” with which he can live. See “張愛玲「秧歌」裏虛實互見的筆法” in *Daidi wenxue* 2 (1982): 257-266. Su Weizhen offers a vivid simile to Wang’s loyalty to the CCP as “the faith in the Communist opium” (共黨信仰鴉片). In this regard, Wang is “addicted;” his belief in the CCP becomes compulsory as if he were addicted to drugs. See 孤島張愛玲 (Taipei, Sanmin shuju, 2002), 100.

utilized the contrast between her story and the story-in-the-story to ridicule the absurdity of the writing of “socialist realism” and of the Communist’s socialist utopia.

The difference in Ding Ling’s and Zhang Ailing’s narratives of (state) violence relates not only to political ideology, but also to their vision of women’s emancipation in the Communist revolution. It reveals the future perspective of women in the vision of the writers. Since women’s emancipation is subordinated to the general emancipation of the people in the Communist revolutionary mission, changes in politics would change the society by which women were conditioned. The belief is evident in *Sanggan River* in political means to liberate women from traditional oppression. Heini is liberated from feudal patriarchy upon the purge of Qian. And through the re-distribution of the purged landlords’ properties, the vice-village-head Zhao’s wife is able to re-construct her social image. Moreover, the participation of women in political activities offers an alternative for women. Therefore, it is not surprising when the vice-chair of the Women’s Association, Zhou Yueying, shows herself to be as competent as the male cadres when she submits the villagers, both men and women, to her leadership. Zhou also demonstrates women’s capability of carrying out violence, which symbolizes a political transformation from “backwardness” to “progress.” This re-writes and re-constructs the image of traditional peasant women.

Such optimism is not seen in Zhang Ailing, however. Borrowing Yan Haiping’s words, and as proved by history, the CCP “is all about the promise of a future temporal,”¹⁷⁷ and it always looks toward a “future” that somehow is always just around the corner. In terms of women’s emancipation, the promise of women’s liberation has turned out to be conditional upon the arrival of “the full Communist stage of Chinese history.”¹⁷⁸ In Mao’s words, “Only when a class society no longer exists, and cumbersome labor and agriculture have been made automatic and mechanized, will it be possible to realize equality between the sexes.”¹⁷⁹ In addition, as demonstrated in my previous chapter, Zhang Ailing had revealed her skepticism in the CCP and her relative belief in the necessity of economic independence for women’s emancipation in her earlier

¹⁷⁷ Haiping Yan, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948*, 197.

¹⁷⁸ Shelah Gilbert Leader, “The Emancipation of Chinese Women,” 57.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

works. This attitude continues in *Rice-Sprout Song*. For Zhang Ailing, women's relative independence can be pursued through economic independence, which is a means to sustain their living and further ensure that independence. It is evident in Yuexiang's belief in and longing for a promising future by means of the exchange of labour in the city. However, the possibility of sustaining herself through economic means in the pre-revolutionary society is destroyed by the restriction of rural-urban mobility by the post-revolutionary regime. State policies solidifying social and political control ultimately reinforce the family system from which it attempted to liberate women. Consequently, women are re-situated in a political system that sustains a gender hierarchy reinscribing traditional gender patterns.

Though the works of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing share insights into men's appropriation of violence to reassure themselves of their own authority, jeopardized by higher state power, they differentiate themselves in their narrative of violence due to their differing political ideologies and their vision of women's emancipation in the Communist revolution. While Ding Ling leaned toward a faith in political means for women's emancipation, Zhang Ailing was skeptical of such political transformation. Despite this, both authors, implicitly or explicitly, exposed the continued oppression of women trapped in masculine politics, and the appropriation of violence to legitimize male authority and control over women.

Chapter 3: Desire Repression and Gender Relationships

Chapter two demonstrated the authors' representations and critiques of the persistent oppression of women through the appropriation of violence; this chapter continues this demonstration, but here focuses on the realm of women's desire. Before I embark on my discussion, I will first give a brief definition of "desire."

In the Chinese context, the concept equivalent to the English term "desire" may be expressed by the term *yu* (欲).¹⁸⁰ In *Shuowen jiezi* (說文解字), Xun Shen (許慎) defined *yu* as "being covetous." However, in pre-Han texts such as *Lunyu* (論語), the referent of *yu* indicates either "a tendency to be overcome" or "morally appropriate desires."¹⁸¹ It is notable that, rather than the nominal usage indicating "a general state of mind of wanting or desiring," the usage of *yu* as a transitive verb meaning "to want" is more frequent in *Lunyu*.¹⁸² It is also notable that the debate on the concept of "desire" in the late Ming focused on its ethical aspect while the application of the concept to "desire" in literature went beyond the ethical frame.¹⁸³ Wang Guowei (王國維) commented on the novel *Hong Lou Meng* (紅樓夢 Dream of the Red Chamber) that the so-called jade (pronounced as "yu," the same as "desire" pronounced as "yu" in Chinese; it implies the male protagonist Jia Bao Yu, but also the "stone" itself) is nothing but the representation of desire (*yu*) of existence (所謂玉者，不過生活之欲之代表而已矣).¹⁸⁴ Through his analysis of the novel, he expressed his attitude toward human life and the relation of *yu* with human life. For him, *yu* (desire) originates from "insufficiency." (欲…原生於不足)¹⁸⁵ Desire (*yu*) for existence exists prior to human life; human life is nothing but the

¹⁸⁰ Another term also conceptually similar to "desire" is *qing* (情). *Qing* and *yu* are conceptually related and possibly interchangeable. For example, Xunzi referred to *yu* as something arising from *qing*; and in *Liji*, *yu* is one of seven emotions consisting of *qing* in the broad sense. For a detailed discuss of the interrelated relationships of *yu* and *qing*, please see Martin W. Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: the Harvard university Asia Center, 2001), 23-56.

¹⁸¹ Martin W. Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 24.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁴ See 王國維、蔡元培、魯迅點評紅樓夢。(Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2004,) 11.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

process of discovering such desire (*yu*). (生活之欲之先人生而存在，而人生不過此欲之發現也)¹⁸⁶ Therefore, the genuine nature of the universe and human life is nothing but *yu* (desire). (生活之本質何？欲而已矣)¹⁸⁷ As *yu* is referred to as “physical aspects of desire” and *qing* often to “romantic sentiments,” if defined narrowly,¹⁸⁸ for the discussion in this Chapter, I draw on the concept of *yu* as denoting “a general state of mind of wanting” for the application of the notion of “desire.”

This chapter looks at desire and its relation to women’s emancipation through the depiction of land reform in the novels discussed, to see what is promised or anticipated in the future for women and what actually occurs in its practice; that is, the discrepancy between the Communists’ claim of women’s liberation and its practices. As the major mechanism of the Communist rural liberation, one of the claims of the land reform discourse aimed at the liberation of women from the oppressive patriarchal family system. In the history of Chinese women, under Confucian teachings, women were not seen as individuals independent of their defined roles, such as daughters, wives or mothers. Women’s lives were restricted to the subordinated position attached to the defined roles within which their desires were confined, and they were expected to behave or act according to the regulations that were imposed on them. Women not only were deprived of their own identities but were only allowed to experience and express ‘proper’ desire according to their defined roles and positions. In other words, women’s desire was socially constructed and the position of a woman in the net of social relationships defined her desire and its object. Therefore, the emancipation of women from all these restraints became one of the major goals of the May Fourth Movement and later of the Communist revolution as well. To break the uneven power relationships inscribed in gender roles, sexual equality was promoted. Despite this aim, however, the subordination of women’s emancipation to class emancipation inevitably submitted women and the plans for their emancipation to the Party’s revolutionary needs. This reduced them to political means for the achievement of the Party’s struggle for overall political power. This change situates women in the political realm, within which the Party determines what women want or

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 4.

need, and how women are portrayed or interpreted. Consequently, the Party came to reconstruct women's roles and redefine women's desire within the confines of politics.

The illustration of such a paradox in the discussed novels then suggests that the claim of *fanshen* (翻身) for women from the traditional gendered prejudice in the Communist revolutionary discourse is questionable. The term *fanshen* denotes a "turning over, a literal revolution in one's being and self-perception."¹⁸⁹ In terms of gender, it suggests "to cease considering women as chattels and establish equality between the sexes..."¹⁹⁰ The prior concern of the Party about its political legitimacy, however, inevitably appropriates such a claim for its political purpose. On the one hand, the operation aiming to emancipate women tends to be appropriated as part of the mechanism for solidifying the political control that contributes to desire repression. On the other hand, such mechanism allows a reinforcement of the value and superiority of maleness which the mechanism claims to change. As a result, the operation of women's emancipation serves as part of the mechanism creating a social body of docility for social and political control. Both novels suggest that the subordinated state of women's emancipation, rather than empowering women, contributes either to the repression of women's desire or to the reinforcement of male superiority. As I will show in this chapter, rather than empowering women, it redefines women's desire within the realm of politics.

I. Desire: Repression and Control

1. The "Faceless Gaze"¹⁹¹

In this section, I demonstrate my argument in the light of the concept of "panopticism" from Foucault. Foucault utilizes Bentham's Panopticon to demonstrate the relation between the power operation and surveillance mechanism in modern society. However, for the discussion in this chapter, I draw on only one small extract from Foucault's work, and use this only in a particular aspect focusing on the specific idea of

¹⁸⁹ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 127.

¹⁹⁰ Quoted from Feuerwerker in *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 127; and also see William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), p. vii.

¹⁹¹ Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 195-228.

the “faceless gaze”¹⁹² of the mechanism of modern surveillance to demonstrate the ideological control and political surveillance of the CCP and its extension to the repression of women’s desire in the depiction of the two discussed novels.

The Panopticon was an architectural design for a prison by Bentham. It is designed with a central tower surrounded by an annular building with grouped yet separated cells in which each inmate is confined. Each cell can be watched from the central tower, yet the observation of the central tower from the cells is restricted and communication between the cells is blocked. According to Bentham, the principle of power should be “visible and unverifiable.”¹⁹³ For this power to be operated, “[i]t had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere...”¹⁹⁴ In other words, the inmate is aware of constantly being watched, constantly in the state of consciousness of being under surveillance by the “faceless gaze” at any time, but not of when and whether he is actually being watched. Consequently, he transforms this “faceless gaze” into a “self-gaze,” a form of surveillance that is internalized.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.¹⁹⁵

Foucault also pointed out that the gaze is not in a single direction, and neither is it fixed. The gazer can simultaneously be the one being gazed at. That is, while he is watching, he is being watched. Therefore, the operation of this mechanism of the “faceless gaze” enables mutual surveillance and self-surveillance. Foucault tried to demonstrate in this way the pervasiveness of the idea of an internalized gaze as a mechanism of power. The Panopticon facilitates the formation of self-surveillance and is part of the mechanism of disciplinary power, which makes people disciplined and aims to

¹⁹² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 214.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 202-3.

produce a person who is docile. As I will show, this idea will help to explain the criticism in the two discussed novels, in respect to the restriction of women's desire.

2. Political Surveillance and Realm of Women's Desire

The major effect of the mechanism of the "faceless gaze" lies in its usefulness in the formation of mutual surveillance and the internalization of self-surveillance of the subject. Aware of being constantly under the "invisible gaze," yet deprived of the knowledge of when and whether they are being actually watched, and of the possibility of mutual and private communication, people turn this invisible gaze into an internalized force. This can become the state of being self-disciplined, and hence a population can produce in and of themselves a 'docile body' compliant to "whatever use one [in power] may wish to put it to."¹⁹⁶ The mechanism of the "faceless gaze" is then efficient for the operation of political compliance or ideological control. It enables the formation of mutual surveillance and self-internalization of such surveillance, and hence accelerates the elimination of any dissident voices.

In the novels of both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing discussed in this thesis, the "faceless gaze" enables a network of surveillance engulfing everyone and ensuring the solidification of political control. In *Rice-Sprout Song*, on the night when Yuexiang returns home, the couple talk about the pervasive shortage of food supplements in the households of the village and nearby. Yuexiang is puzzled.

'But why? With the harvest so good we do not even have rice to eat?' He (Jingen) jerked his head sharply toward the window. Without lifting his arm he motioned to her to be silent. But she went straight to the window before he could stop her and pushed it open. At the same instant the bamboo poles made a fearful clatter in the courtyard and all the dogs started barking, far and near... She leaned out and scanned the ground closely. There was nobody. 'Who was it?' she whispered after she shut the window. He tried to sound casual. 'There are always those loafers who have nothing to do and like to listen under other people's windows' (Zhang, 35-36).

"Motioned to her to be silent," "whisper," and "tried to sound casual"—all these descriptions suggest an awareness on the part of the characters of the "invisible gaze."

¹⁹⁶ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 202.

The trail of evidence that Yuexiang obtains implies a hidden eavesdropper, faceless and anonymous, and Jingen is cautious and alert even during an intimate talk with his wife in their bedroom. Constantly in the state of consciousness of being watched, but not of when and whether they are actually being watched and even of who is watching, Jingen cautiously avoids any dissident opinions exchanged with his wife that would compromise his alignment with the authorities.

Such self-examination and self-surveillance are also seen in the depiction of Ding Ling's peasant Cheng Ren in *Sanggan River*. Cheng Ren was indecisive about his relation with Heini. On the one hand, he cannot turn his back on Heini; on the other hand, he feels he has wronged the villagers. Feuerwerker points out that "the severity of his self-criticism does not stem from any external offense... but from his falling short of the relentlessly high standards of revolutionary morality..."¹⁹⁷ That is, Cheng Ren's dilemma results from an internal struggle for "revolutionary morality" rather than external force. Feuerwerker's stress on the highly moral standard as the cause of Cheng Ren's inner battle resembles that of the traditional, Confucian requirement for the cultivation of the *Junzi* (the morally cultivated person). However, such a statement neglects the effect of the political constraint attached to the status Cheng Ren had newly obtained. Therefore, while his feeling is still attached to Heini, he is simultaneously afraid that, with the realization of the resentment the villagers have towards the village security officer, Zhang Zhengdian, after his marriage to Qian's daughter, such attachment would compromise his status in the Party in the process of the revolutionary work in the village.

He knew that all the villagers hated Chien [Qian]... Now as chairman of the Peasants' Association Young Cheng ought to identify himself with the masses and not go marrying Chien's niece, while an affair with her would be even worse. He feared this connection might damage his position and set tongues wagging, the more so since the marriage of Chien's daughter Tani to the village security officer [Zhang Zhengdian] had caused general displeasure (Ding, 18).

The description of "the villagers," "the masses," "tongues," and "general" implies an indefinite, ambiguous, or obscure state, and suggests a collective but anonymous

¹⁹⁷ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction*, 129.

group or attitude. There is no concrete indication of the speaker but a “collection of anonymous voices” to borrow Feuerwerker’s words.¹⁹⁸ People (the villagers) are watching and commenting on people’s behaviour. The gaze is indefinite, and hence is “faceless.” The collective anonymous opinions then in turn become “faceless eyes” when later Qian’s wife tries to bribe him. “He felt there were countless eyes in the ceiling and in the cracks of the wall smiling sarcastically at him” (Ding, 263). Therefore, such “anonymity” allows the formation of a network of surveillance to which the gazed must submit. In Cheng Ren’s case, it would be to identify with the mass line.

3. Realm of Desire: Progressive or Backward?

In 1947, Mao’s secretary and chief intellectual interpreter, Chen Boda, wrote a policy statement regarding women’s liberation. It says that “the so-called combat view of life... implies that women must eliminate all such slavery traditions as compliance, cringing, and to bow and submit in order to please a few persons, and that they must be independent, self-respect [sic] and self-confident, unyielding, highly spirited, and opposed to every injustice—national oppression, social oppression, and family oppression.”¹⁹⁹ He continue to say,

Previously, the endurance of oppression was the virtue of women... Now, the reverse is true: to resist oppression is the virtue of women. Previously, women’s duty was to live a dependent life. Now the reverse is true: their duty is to lead an independent life... women ought to stand straight up, secure their individuality, manage an independent living, not to be the slaves of their parents-in-law and husbands, and to oppose every system...²⁰⁰

While this statement aimed to mobilize women into social and political production, it made clear that women’s liberation lay primarily in the emancipation of women from the oppression of the feudal patriarchal system. If considering the Party’s ideology and revolutionary claims, which argued against capitalist exploitation and feudal oppression,

¹⁹⁸ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 126.

¹⁹⁹ Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 198.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

a progressive attitude suggests a rejection of feudal and bourgeois material obsession and its related forms of practice, and an alignment with the political ideology of the Party/state. Any longing beyond these boundaries also suggests a feudal and capitalist rebellion against the masses. Since women's emancipation is subordinated to the CCP's political needs, with its highly political stance, the emancipation of women's (as well as men's) desire is defined within the confines of the political realm.

The experience of women in *Rice-Sprout Song* embodies such a redefinition of women's desire. On the night when Yuexiang comes back from Shanghai, the family of her neighbour and relative, Aunt Tan, comes to visit. While chatting, Yuexiang learns about the big mirror her husband Jingen had obtained from the distribution of the landlord's properties, and that it was given away to Jingen's newly-wed sister, Jinhua, as a dowry. When Aunt Tan praises the mirror, her daughter-in-law, Jinyou's wife, usually timid, cannot wait to cut in, interrupting her mother-in-law.

[A]t the mention of that mirror, the usually timid Sister-in-Law Gold Have Got [Jinyou's wife] was so beyond herself with enthusiasm that she would not even let her mother-in-law finish a sentence. 'Ah, it was really elegant, Sister-in-Law Gold Root [Sister-in-Law Jingen],' she exclaimed. 'Blackwood borders an inch wide, carved with a swastika design. It was easily two feet high—' (Zhang, 33-4).

Later, when Jinyou's wife comes to borrow money, Yuxiang is combing her hair facing her own, cracked mirror, which reminds Jinyou's wife of the other one; she again expresses her admiration for that fine article.

Her faded eyes sparkled as she bent forward and whispered, 'Ai, you must go to Chou Village someday and see your mirror. Really beautiful.' Looking around cautiously, she dropped her voice further. 'The fact is, if you ask me, you people could have kept it for yourselves. Nowadays who bothers about dowries when we cannot even fill our stomachs? Brides do not even ride in sedan chairs any more. They all walk to the wedding...' She laughed. She had not been very fortunate in her life but at least on this point she could feel smug—she had been borne here in a flowered sedan chair. 'Your Gold Flower [Jinhua] also walked. That is why I say the times have changed. Why bother about dowries?' (Zhang, 46)

While Aunt Tan simply describes the mirror vaguely as “fine” and of “high quality,” Jinyou’s wife pays attention even to the details of the material, the size and design of the mirror’s borders. Such “enthusiasm” even suppresses her “usual timidity” to interrupt her mother-in-law. Her gestures and her body language all betray the ostensible “political correctness” embedded in the political rhetoric, and expose the forced submission beneath that rhetoric. Moreover, the eagerness of Jinyou’s wife also indicates a “loss” that generates her “indignant” feelings on Yuexiang’s behalf, and she even hypothesizes herself in Yuexiang’s position. Above all, such passion suggests the discrepancy and conflict between what the women desire and long for and what is given by Communist revolution.

The “enthusiasm” of Jinyou’s wife, however, should not be treated simply as material longing. Dowries and riding in sedan chairs were considered as part of a proper wedding ceremony. They are parts of the “ritual” that symbolizes the formal connection of the two families, and above all signifies the transformation of a woman’s self and social identity, and the change of her relationship with her natal family. Physically, this ritual transforms her from a virgin to a married woman; socially, it transforms her from her natal family to the marital one; and psychologically, it transfers her from a youth to an adult. In other words, it does not signify only a change in relationship, but one in identity, as well. In this regard, it can be regarded as a reconstruction of her identity, her role, and her position in social status and relationships.

The behaviour of Jiayou’s wife suggests an awareness of “the faceless gaze” and the consciousness of that gaze. The phrases “bent forward,” “whispered,” “looking around cautiously,” and “dropped her voice further” all indicate a body language of carefulness and caution. Since in the new, revolutionary state, being “progressive” as defined by the state suggests the discarding of the old forms of social practices, material obsession suggests nostalgia for the feudal past and the failure of the “transformation.” “The times have changed,” therefore, dowries and riding in sedan chairs have become the symbols of an evil feudal past and of “backwardness.” The action for brides, like the grooms, to walk to the wedding symbolizes the progress of women, becoming the equal of men, and suggests the sense of gender equality defined by the Party/state. Because the times have changed, such material desire has to be carefully addressed. Since women are

to be “liberated” from the oppressive feudal past, and since things or customs relating to the feudal past are referred to as symbols of the conditions that oppressed women, women should resist any form of oppression in the new, progressive society. Under this logic, a dowry or sedan chair symbolizes patriarchal oppression and the practice of exchange of women as commodities from the feudal past that are supposed to be dismissed. Obsession with the materials relating to the old society is then politically backward as it may symbolize nostalgia for the old feudal past and even the surrender to bourgeois pollution. Therefore, despite her desire, Jinyou’s wife instead has to express something “correct” or “proper” against her own wish.

Like women in *Rice-Sprout Song*, the desire of Ding Ling’s peasant women is also beyond the confines of the individuals, and the Party ideology predominates over the realm of women’s desire. The utilization of the “progressiveness versus backwardness” formula, usually between a couple, to demonstrate the revolutionary realization of the characters has already been seen in Ding Ling’s early pieces such as “Shanghai, Spring 1930.” Such conflict continues in *Sanggan River* with the demonstration of the relationship between the vice-village head, Zhao Delu, and his wife, with the former being presented as “politically progressive” and the latter “backward.” As mentioned in my previous chapter, Zhao beats his wife for receiving a bribe from Landlord Jiang’s wife and makes a public scene. He condemns her “backwardness” that ruins his good name as vice-village-head (Ding, 169-171). As stated earlier, Feuerwerker argues in Cheng Ren’s case that the self-criticism and dilemma of the characters are due to their moral struggle for the revolutionary work. Therefore, “Characters frequently ask themselves, Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing it for the right reasons?”²⁰¹ However, like Cheng Ren, Zhao Delu is conditioned by the political constraint attached to his position. “Backwardness” is the cause of Zhao’s accusation of his wife’s inability to repress her own desire. Being “progressive” suggests the qualities of refusing the feudal flaws and capitalist temptations, actively participating in revolutionary work under the Party’s guidance, and serving the needs of the Party and the country ahead of the personal. And as the vice village head, he has to be a political model of progress and awareness of the insidiousness of material allurements. Therefore, the inability of Zhao’s

²⁰¹ Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction*, 129.

wife to repress personal desire for the need of revolutionary work not only demonstrates her failure at being progressive, but damages Zhao's reputation as the vice-village head.

However, the indication of the title, "vice-village head," functions in a psychologically important way for Zhao's self-evaluation and self-examination. It is not only a position title, but has an attached "political status" of which the assumed and expected behaviours constantly expose him to judgement and examination by the "faceless gaze" of the villagers. Therefore, the political term "progress" here is not only a rhetorical strategy to submit people to the Party ideology but a political reality that is able to jeopardize one's political position, as Cheng Ren would fear, in the new establishment of political order.

'Old Yumin, I won't deceive you... He [landlord Jiang] invited me to a meal, but I didn't go—does he imagine I can be bought with two piculs of grain? As a matter of fact, if I could be bought so easily my wife needn't be jealous of other people's fancy clothes. I think I've sacrificed quite a bit so far. When we were fighting the Japanese I became village head, but my family never gained anything apart from these few brats. I've got nothing to lose. I say we haven't put in enough effort this time. The people may not say anything, but they feel dissatisfied. Don't you agree?' (Ding, 171).

Hence, by publicly punishing his wife, he denies his wife's improper desire that compromises his commitment to the revolutionary work; and such denial manifests itself as political consciousness and purification. Further, and paradoxically, it legitimizes the repression of women's desire and reinforces the authority of the head of the family that solidifies the existing gender hierarchal structure in the family system.

The response of Zhao's wife to the violent repression from her husband has much less political consideration or complication than Zhao may experience. Her question is, what honour would it be to hold a title if the title holder cannot even afford a piece of clothing to cover his wife's body and save his face. Therefore, she complains tearfully, "Oh... all summer I've had nothing to wear. He wouldn't let me make a dress, just kept saying he was vice village head. What if he is vice head? His wife hasn't even a gown to wear. Isn't it a shame!" (Ding, 170). However, under the circumstance, personal desire even expressed in a subtle way as seen in the complaints of Jinyou's wife and Zhao's wife becomes a taboo that jeopardizes the construction of the new social order. And to

qualify for the new social roles, women have then to accommodate their personal identities to the identity of “progressive” women as defined and promoted by the Party. As a result, the revolutionary need to transform from “backward” to “progressive” that is supposed to empower women in fact displaces the old social norms for the reconstructed behaviour codes. Accordingly, it enhances the existing gender patterns allowing male authority in the traditional family system, as in the cases of Jingen’s giving the mirror as a dowry to his sister without consulting his wife, and Zhao Delu’s accusation of his wife’s backwardness.

It should be noted that such complaint does not simply suggest dissatisfaction of material desire and longing, as it cannot be referred to as simply material dissatisfaction in the case of Jinyou’s wife in the work of Zhang Ailing. For Zhao’s wife, the forced exposure causes her forced cloistering comparable to that of the foot-binding of women confined in the inner compounds of feudal homes in the past. Without clothes to cover herself, Zhao’s wife is forced to expose herself naked in front of the public. This jeopardizes her self-identity as the wife of the vice-village head, and her identity as a proper woman among other village women. Above all, it generates a sense of her isolation and difference. A piece of clothing suggests the release from such a cloister. Material desire is then transformed to a symbol of freedom, and of liberation from forced confinement.

As argued by Barlow, “Ding Ling was both advocate and critic of state policies on women.”²⁰² For Zhang Ailing, the question was that if, in the past, the repression was caused by the old social norms, why does the pursuit of desire continue to be restrained in the new society which is said to liberate women from the evil past? Ding Ling, in contrast, looks into women’s future potentiality. Before *The Sanggan River*, Ding Ling already thought of the question of “what to narrate about the standing of women characters in the new society.”²⁰³ For Ding Ling, endurance is the part of “progress” that comes out of women’s “self-awareness,” transforming them from backwardness to a promising future in which they will have been granted what they have been promised. Therefore, at the end of the novel, the once-oppressed villagers are relocated in the new social order,

²⁰² Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 202.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 200.

which allows a redistribution of social properties. The problem of such future potentiality for granting women's material desire is that women's state of being in the present remains unchanged: they must continue to endure the repression of personal desire that confronts or compromises the "progressive attitude." Moreover, as Qian's wife feels that "the world ha[s] turned topsy-turvy," the reconstruction of the political structure relocates people in the new social and class order. The contention of Qian's wife for the sense of "change" suggests then a new division among women. If, in the past, class was socially and economically constructed, now it is politically constructed. Women are defined within the political realm, and so is their desire.

II. Women's Liberation and Liberation of Women's Desire

As mentioned earlier, influenced by western thoughts and eager for evolutionary development, many intellectuals, including both Communists and non-Communists, had aimed to liberate women from traditional oppression during the May Fourth period. They either attacked the marriage system or called for a reform of the family system. After the establishment of its political regime, the CCP launched some policies regarding women's issues such as the Marriage Law to promote gender equality for women's emancipation.²⁰⁴ However, as demonstrated by Leader, since women's emancipation was subordinated to a broader picture of the CCP's political need, either to general emancipation in the early revolutionary period or to economic development and public control in later periods, policies regarding women changed accordingly. For example, the launch of the Marriage Law aiming to "smash feudal marriage" banned arranged-marriages, allowed women-initiated divorce, and conditioned marriage to free-willed adults.²⁰⁵ However, the 1950 Marriage Law was abandoned in 1953 because "it lowered morale and harmed production," and for the need of economic development, the launch of the first Five-Year Plan from 1953-1957 created a new agenda for family reform to obtain the support of male peasants in the vast countryside. "Family harmony and

²⁰⁴ According to Leader, from 1950 to early 1970s the CCP had launched policies regarding women. The policy goals positively include: "(1) the transformation of marriage and family customs and the creation of a new democratic marriage; (2) the induction of women into the paid labour force; (3) the creation of a new role and image for women." Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," 56.

²⁰⁵ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," 60.

reconciliation” were emphasized and divorce was made difficult.²⁰⁶ Policies on women retreated conservatively during this period. During the Great Leap Forward, however, economic policy dramatically turned away from the previous phase, and so did the policies regarding woman. Women were again mobilized into the field to boost production, and “nearly every able-bodied woman engaged in commerce, agriculture, or industry.”²⁰⁷ However, the elimination of sexual difference in work performance to raise women’s status and to prove that women were as capable as men turned out to reinforce the value of maleness because of the biased standard of evaluation based on physical strength.²⁰⁸ Such change of policy toward women, accommodating the needs of the authority, mainly served the political concerns of the Party.

Even before the establishment of the nation-wide political regime, the political operation in revolutionary bases, such as southeastern Shansi, tells a similar story. According to Johnson, the participation of women in politics was circumscribed to land reform and class struggle, and issues about feminist concerns were discouraged. Even women’s organizations, which were subordinated to peasant associations commanded by men, focused less on the promotion of women’s rights than on production. Moreover, despite the claims of the emancipation of women, fear that women would go beyond control also contributed to the circumscription of women’s rights. To obtain support from the masses, mainly the peasants, the operation of women’s emancipation was acceptable only when it was accommodated to the task of class struggle.²⁰⁹ As a result,

the Party deprived women’s groups of needed autonomy from conservative local interests rather than helping them attain the local independence necessary to act on behalf of women’s special interests. Always preferring caution and delay to the risk of conflict, the Party missed many opportunities during the revolutionary period to promote family reform and women’s rights...²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Shelah Gilbert Leader, “The Emancipation of Chinese Women,” 62.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-8.

²⁰⁹ Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 81-3.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

The prior concern of the CCP about the legitimacy of its power and political control constantly impaired the efforts toward women's emancipation. Consequently, rather than empowering women, political interference turned either to repress women's desire or to allow a re-emphasis of the value of maleness in the traditional gender view. Aware of the still persistent prejudice embedded in the traditional gender view against women even in the liberated base, Ding Ling transformed her frustration into criticism in her earlier works, such as "When I was in Xia Village," and the essay "Thoughts on March Eighth," pointing out the inadequacy of the CCP's treatment of feminist concerns.

Sanggan River continues to include subtle criticism in the portrayal of women. As a strategy to promote sexual equality and to mobilize women into production, the Party attacked the entrenched prejudice against women because of their assumed inferiority, claiming that "The time is different... What man comrades can do, the women comrades can also do."²¹¹ This is faithfully illustrated in the conversation exchanged between Hou Zhongquan and Li Zhixiang, Hou's nephew, who complains about his wife, Dong Guihua, and of her engagement with the Women's Association:

[m]y wife acts like a queen, as if she could really manage affairs. I can't make up my mind whether to let her go or not..." The old man... started laughing: "...This is a new world with new ways... you'd better let your wife have her way, she's a capable woman. Nowadays hens can crow as well as cocks, men and women are equal (Ding, 97).

Such an assumption, however, fails to confront the "Confucianized received tradition,"²¹² to borrow Barlow's term, about women in the male perception of women and in women's self-perception. As a wife, Dong consciously defines herself in the traditional subordinate role in the relation of the marriage; she accommodates her relationship with her husband to the saying, "Marrying rooster, following rooster." This reflects her self-perception. Capable as she is, as Alber points out, her will is still subject to that of her husband.²¹³ Class consciousness is rising, and we see the transformation of

²¹¹ Slogan by Mao. *Union Research Service*. LV, No.2 (1969), 15. Quoted from Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," 72.

²¹² Tani E. Barlow, "Introduction," *I Myself Am a Woman*, 41.

²¹³ Charles J. Alber, *Enduring the Revolution*, 172.

it in the villagers. However, the still-persistent discrimination against women, as revealed by those cadres and peasants during the process of struggle against landlords, and the absence of the depiction in the novel of the transformation of gender consciousness and of any effective solution from the Party about gender discrimination reduces *fanshen* for women to a mere rhetoric. The focus of the novel is on class politics rather than gender politics. Also, there is ambiguity in the author's intention in the novel. Nonetheless, judging by Ding Ling's concerns on women's issues in her early period, and from her criticism of the Party's insufficient concerns about women's issues in the more recent essay "Thought on Thirty-Eighth" (1942), the absence of depictions of the transformation of gender consciousness in *Saanggan River* suggests Ding Ling's subtle criticism of the failure of Party's "mind-reform" in terms of gender issues.

The participation of women in revolutionary work judged on the basis of male value further assures the belief in the superiority of men. To align with the Party's attempt on the reconstruction of the image of new women, Ding Ling made efforts in her depiction of Zhou Yueying, of her leadership in particular. She is the vice-chair of the Women's Association; she is the most outspoken of the women, and the one who comes out and leads the others to beat Qian Wengui in the struggle meeting (Ding, 319); above all, she possesses the passion to draw the people to "gather round her and unite under her passionate leadership" (Ding, 73). Such a capable woman, however, suffers from male bias. The villagers' comments on her reveal such bias when she participates in the confiscation of the fruit in landlord Li's orchard.

Yang Liang saw a young woman had come to his side. She slowly lowered the heavy basket on her shoulder to the ground, calling out urgently: 'Uncle Chuan, hurry up and take it!'

'You make my head spin!' A young peasant had come over laughing: 'You're really special—like a donkey turd in a sheep-fold!'

The woman showed no sign of weakness...

'Who's that? She's quite something!' Yang felt he had seen her before, but could not remember her name, and asked Chuan (Guo Quan).

Chuan screwed up his eyes in a smile and said: 'That's Yueh the shepherd's wife, famed for her sharp tongue, prickly as a hedgehog, not afraid of heaven or earth. She shouts louder than the men at meetings. She can be counted as a vice chairman of women's association. All their members are here today.'

‘Carrying a basket of fruit, staggering and shrieking under the weight, she still thinks she’s cock of the walk!’
‘She cock of the walk? Not a chance! She’s minus the cock’s most important part!’ (Ding, 200-201).²¹⁴

The link of masculinity to the phallus in the comments is apparent as it suggests the signification of the sexual performance embedded in the dual connotation of the language “cock of the walk” (稱雄) in the embodiment of its masculinity. However, what matters more is the indication of the superiority of physical strength. The given social boundary in the division of labour is dismissed by the CCP through political means as women are mobilized into social production and women’s work is socialized. However, as it would suggest later during the Great Leap Forward, the then still relatively “primitive” agricultural economics and the absence of modern machines leave little room for women to compete with men in terms of labour performance on which the standard of value is based.²¹⁵ Consequently, this enhances the already entrenched belief in the superiority of maleness. It is notable that there is no way to identify the speaker of the last two comments. In other words, it is “anonymous.” The comments do not indicate any particular villager; that is, they could have been made by anyone in the village. Thus, the “anonymity” could function to suggest a “common” opinion. Moreover, as stated in the previous chapter, the Women’s Association is nothing more than a “social club” responsible for nothing substantial. The connotation of the comment of Guo Quan on Zhou Yueying’s title, “she can be counted as a vice-chair of the Women’s Association” (算個婦女會的副主任咧), then implies a kind of dismissive attitude toward this position, suggesting the insignificance of the Women’s Association in the view of even an ordinary villager. Such a depiction reflects the paralyzed function of the Women’s Association not only in the course of the revolution but in the promotion of women’s rights and consciousness. The establishment of the Women’s Association was supposed to promote and protect women’s rights; however, men’s perspective of, and women’s self-perspective of the Women’s Association, its function and its position in the political reality in the novel suggest the “retarded” status of the Women’s Association. Such a

²¹⁴ I add my own translation. See page 194 in the Chinese text.

²¹⁵ Shelah Gilbert Leader, “The Emancipation of Chinese Women,” 64-6.

presentation of this Association also suggests Ding Ling's critical attitude toward the masculine politics of the Party.

Sharing a similar approach towards the CCP's policy regarding women, *Rice-Sprout Song* illustrates the continuity of the repression of women's desire in the immediate post-liberation era. In a letter that appears in the preface to *Yuyun* (餘韻 *The Lingering Cadence*) published in 1987, Zhang Ailing talks of Little Ai, the female protagonist in the novella "Little Ai," who, like the new immigrants in American popular fiction, works hard to build a better future after she marries. However, her dream to pursue an affluent future dies upon the establishment of the Communist regime.²¹⁶ Like Little Ai, the desire of Yuexiang for a better future in *Rice-Sprout Song* leads to disillusionment in the Communist utopia. As argued previously, the CCP's restraint on rural-urban mobility recreates a class division, now based on location, and re-solidifies the family system, stressing male authority. And as history has proved, the CCP's restriction on rural-urban mobility eventually developed into the household registration system that recreates not only geographic but social barriers. The recreation of social barriers contributes to not only geographical but social division, as it eventually came to determine people's means of living and to define their social and political standing. It allows for little individual development. The experience of Yuexiang reflects such "backwardness" in social civilization.

In addition, what Yuexiang desires, and the "business" or "bourgeois" conscious embedded in capitalist economics in her desired future of a livelihood through business management or labour exchange, is what the Communist ideology opposes for its implication of class exploitation. In the imagination of Yuexiang about their future in the city, she could visualize herself

sit[ting] at a street corner mending nylon stockings. Perhaps she could borrow enough money from her former employer to purchase one of those kits containing the necessary tools... In summer, when nobody wore stockings, she and Jingen could set up an open-air ironing stand... If all other schemes should fail, they would have to resort to picking cigarette butts from off the street to be made into new cigarettes, searching the garbage cans for marketable rubbish, lingering by bridges to help to push

²¹⁶ Ailing Zhang, *Yuyun* (餘韻) (Taipei: Crown publishing company, 1995), 5.

carts up over the hump... They might persuade Jingen's cousin, who worked as watchman, to let them set up a mat tent in his alley. It was a bearable existence so long as it was regarded as a temporary state. Any moment their luck might change (Zhang, 43-4).

Exploited as she might be, what sustains Yuexiang's desired future is the "chance" and "possibility" in a "capitalist" society. Yuexiang's "business sense" and her visualization of her family future can be said to be full of the petty bourgeois sense of the capitalist social economical lifestyle unable to find its place in the post-liberated socialist economical society. Here I am not arguing that capital society would grant Yuexiang's desire, or that capitalism is what women long for. Rather, I am arguing that Yuexiang's visualization of her family future, Yuezxinag's "business" sense and the "chance" and "hope" in her belief in "fate-changing" as revealed in the phrase "Any moment their luck might change," suggest a sort of life style that did not happen in the feudal past and was not possible in the Communist "liberated" society. Such a life can only better survive in a capitalist society, Yuexiang believes. But since capitalism was what Communism opposes, and on top of this, the new regime fails to provide a better chance for women but re-submits them to family order, the encouragement to women to "stand straight" and to pursue and "manage an independent living" turns out to be something punishing and despairing as in the case of Yuexiang. Women are deprived of their own will and choice for a desired future.

Both novels touch on the issue of the repression of women's desire in the name of revolutionary work. The party/state defined what was "progressive" at the expense of women's desire and longing. In other words, the state's definition of what women need exists prior to what women considered themselves to need. In this way, women's desire is defined within the confine of the politics. Moreover, this conception of need has come to be internalized by the people in general and women in particular. As both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing criticize, the "faceless gaze" of the people continues the traditional restriction on both men's and women's desires. Women's docility is maintained, despite claims of the CCP that its policies aim for the emancipation of women. In fact, as Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing both criticize, the policies of the CCP require the internalization of "the faceless gaze" and the associated restriction of desire. As a result, the desire

which the policies of the CCP and the expectations of the people continue to define as 'proper' continues the repression of women's true or inherent or self-defined desire, as seen in the experience of women in the two novels. We must be clear here that we are not debating the 'merits' of capitalism or socialism in any real sense. Rather, we are exploring the attitudes which one character has as a critical position in this novel.

Chapter 4: Women's Sexual Expression and Gender Relationships

The theme of women's sexuality cannot be overlooked when talking of women's liberation. The construction of the Confucian ideal of womanhood, in particular its emphasis on women's chastity, has long prescribed accepted codes of behaviour for women. Women's sexual expression has been taboo or restricted in China's traditional patriarchal society. The conceptual and political revolution during the May Fourth Movement in the early twentieth century promised a new perspective on women's emancipation, drawing attention to the themes of women's sexuality.²¹⁷ Women's emancipation signified then not only physical release but conceptual freedom from traditional patriarchal restraints.

From the beginning, women's emancipation had been one of the CCP's revolutionary missions. The party mobilized women into public production, promoted women to be Party members and cadres, and even, after the establishment of its political regime, allowed them to perform such work as tractor drivers, train conductors and welders, that previously had been considered exclusively for men.²¹⁸ By the elimination of sexual differentiation in work and even to some extent in physical appearance (in terms of clothing for both men and women), the practice of "sexual sameness" aimed to prove the equivalence of women's ability to men's and manifested itself as a suggestion of gender equality. By constructing and informing women's image with a "masculine quality" conventionally prescribed to men, the Party attempted to break "gender boundaries" to achieve its goal of gender equality. That is, by allowing women into men's "fields" and attaching such "masculine qualities" and privilege, such as female leadership or performing male work, to recreate a new role and image for women, the Party aimed to break the norms that Confucian doctrines had inscribed on women. However, though the Communist revolution on its rhetorical level aimed at a whole scope of women's emancipation, in its practice, it continued the repression of women's sexuality. The CCP's recreation of the role and image of women prescribed in turn newly

²¹⁷ Christina Kelley Gilmartin, "Introduction: May Fourth and Women's Emancipation," in *Women in Republic China*, ed. Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), xiii-xiv.

²¹⁸ Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China," *Gender & History* 15, no 2 (Aug., 2003): 268-295.

established and accepted norms for women. Women, then, still fell within the confines of politically prescribed norms by which they were now defined.

This chapter deals with the theme of women's sexuality in the novels discussed. As I will show, both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing offer critiques of the CCP's newly-created norms and ideals for women. On the one hand, the creation of new roles and images for women re-prescribes accepted norms to women; on the other hand, women's sexual capacity, focused on sexual expression, is still defined in a traditional fashion assigning standard codes of behaviour for women in the mind of the Communist "revolutionaries." Through the examination of the issue of women's sexual expression, this chapter argues that the transformation of political consciousness in the land reform movement as part of the Communist revolution failed to bring a revolutionary mind reform to the theme of women's sexuality. Both novels present and critique a retreat of the CCP from the early Communist progressive ideals in the trajectory of the conceptual development of female sexuality.

I. Sexuality and Sexual Expression

In this chapter, I will use both the phrases "sexuality" and "sexual expression." As Lisa Duggan suggests, "many scholars in the social sciences and humanities see sexuality not as a purely biological 'drive' or 'instinct,' but as a socially constructed aspect of human relations, central to the organization of societies."²¹⁹ This idea grows out of the work of Michel Foucault.

Foucault's insight was to demonstrate that sexuality has a history: it is not a fixed psychobiological drive that is the same for all humans according to their sex, but rather it is a cultural construct inseparable from gender constructs. After unmooring sexuality from biology, he anchored it in history, arguing that this thing we now call sexuality came into existence in the eighteenth-century West and did not exist previously in this form. 'Sexuality' is an invention of the modern state, the industrial revolution, and capitalism.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Lisa Duggan, "From Instincts to Politics: Writing the History of Sexuality in the U.S.," *The Journal of Sex Research* 27, no 1 (Feb., 1990): 95.

²²⁰ Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, ed., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities* (California: University of California Press, 2002), 32.

However, while aware of the insights made by scholars after Michel Foucault that 'sexuality' is not something driven by anatomical features but rather is something constructed through social and cultural restrictions and expectations, it is not my aim here to debate these terms in theoretical ways. Instead, I want to suggest a loose definition to describe the ways in which these terms can operate in the writing of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing. In this, I accept in general terms what Stephen Goettsch suggests, that

The definition of sexuality proposed... is that sexuality is the individual capacity to respond to physical experiences which are capable of producing body-centered... excitation, that only subsequently becomes associated with cognitive constructs (either anticipatory for new experiences or reflective of past experiences) independent of ongoing physical experiences. Sexuality belongs to the class of phenomena sharing body-centered, rather than cognitive, responses to physical experiences but is differentiated from other members of this class by a required [physical] excitation focus.²²¹

In other words, 'sexuality' is a part of individual identity which connects that identity with its physical body, through the experience of physical (sexual) sensation. There is a social element here, because social ideology and values limit occasions and situations in which individuals are 'free' to experience those particular sensations, or with which partner. Here we see the issue of sexuality as a mechanism of control of women in traditional China, because women were only to experience the physical sensations of sexuality with their husbands, and at the demands of their husbands. Sexuality was therefore an indicator of women's subjugation. In this regard, social and cultural elements contribute to the shape of our sexuality. However, unlike Europe, where, during the first half of the nineteenth century, sex was gradually detached from its relation to religious condemnation and instead regarded as an "instinct" or "a natural impulse," sex had been connected to reproduction in Chinese society, at least prior to the May Fourth era. In Europe, during the first half of the nineteenth century, medical science had allowed the detachment of sex from "religious categories of debauchery, sin and excess, and the

²²¹ Stephen L. Goettsch, "Clarifying Basic Concepts: Conceptualizing Sexuality," *The Journal of Sex Research* 26, no 2 (May, 1989): 250.

conceptualization of sexual desire as “a biological essence.” More importantly, “a new theoretical construction called ‘sexuality’” enabled “the psychiatrization of ‘sex.’” In nineteenth-century Europe, medical discourse gradually turned its attentions from “descriptions of sexual acts towards sexual preferences,” and “the notion of ‘sexuality’, together with new categories like ‘homosexuality’ and ‘heterosexuality,’ closely connected the individual to the object of desire.” The gradual emergence of a notion of ‘sexuality’ in Europe resulted in at least three consequences. First, ‘sexuality’ became disconnected from reproduction. There were no longer strict distinctions between reproductive and non-reproductive sex, and sensual pleasure could be regarded as an end in sex itself. For example, if ‘homosexuality’ could be an alternative to ‘heterosexuality,’ reproduction was no longer the aim of sex. Secondly, “‘sexuality’ was seen as an individual business. Thirdly, “discourse of ‘sexuality’ contributed in promoting the individual as a site of desire which should be regulated as well as a bearer of rights to ‘self-expression.’” Therefore, supported by concepts of natural law and human rights, “the individual’s particular and unique preferences” became important as the concept of ‘sexuality’ became consolidated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²²²

In Chinese society, however, there was no similar conception of sexuality comparable to that in Europe, though a concept of sexual desire as a natural drive appeared. Family had been the basic social unit in Chinese society, and the primary purpose of marriage and sex was to produce offspring, male inheritors in particular, to carry on family lineage; therefore, sex had been attached to procreation. In early Republican China, medical discourse linked the personal identity of the woman to the future strength of the nation and sexuality was registered as not only an individual matter but a collective interest. “Women were given increased personal and social responsibilities, since the careful monitoring of their bodies and regulated procreative behaviour would contribute healthy offspring to the nation.”²²³ Therefore, it can be said that, in pre-modern Chinese society, “sexuality” was often connected to reproduction, and connected to physical bodies. It is notable that what I am comparing here is a conception

²²² To continue this brief description of sexuality in Europe, see Frank Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 62-4.

²²³ Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 62.

of sexuality which the state and local standards of propriety mandated in the Chinese context. The main features of this conception are that sexuality, at least as far as women were concerned, was a highly restricted enterprise which aimed at reproduction and the validation of male privilege and authority.

As to the term “sexual expression,” I will use to refer to any action a person may perform which is indicative of sexuality. These actions can be quite diverse. They can be very blatant, but also very subtle. A wave, a wink, a flirtatious walk, a caress and even a gesture can all be part of sexual expression.

This chapter focuses specifically on the conception of sexual repression. I will look specifically at instances in the two novels which critique CCP policies which effectively restrict the emancipation of female sexuality.

II. Sexuality: Recreation of Normative Women Image

1. Traditional Deprecation of Sexual Women

Throughout Chinese history, the emphasis of feminine ethics in particular on chastity in the official construction of ideals of womanhood restrained women’s sexuality in a general sense. Since the family was the basic unit in traditional Chinese society, the individual was situated and conditioned within its confines. Rather than for personal development and fulfillment, the pursuit of personal success and advancement was considered legitimate only for the continuity and welfare of the family, and the primary goal of marriage and sexuality served the continuity of the lineage rather than personal emotion and sensual pleasure.²²⁴ Despite the prescribed duties and regulations on men’s sexuality as well within the domestic compound, the practice of the concubine and brothel system enabled men to pursue sensual pleasure while women’s sexuality was only legitimated for the purposes of reproduction.²²⁵ Even though it may not be completely accurate to state that women were always secluded from sexual contact, since extramarital sexual contact was relatively commonly seen among poor peasants, nonetheless, this was primarily driven by the desire to produce male offspring for the

²²⁴ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestors*, 24-5.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-3. It is notable that in social reality, a poor man would not be able to afford keeping a concubine or frequenting a brothel. However, the practice of the system manifested itself the patriarchal power.

marital family, rather than by sensual pleasure. Moreover, this type of activity does not suggest that this sexual behaviour was in any way considered proper.²²⁶ Indulgence in sensual pleasure was considered as pernicious and depraved for women. Standards of behaviour for women were codified and ideal images of women were constructed through the compilation of the official literature. For example, the Han dynasty scholar Liu Xiang's (劉向) *Biographies of Women* (列女傳) serves as an example for the construction of the Confucian ideals of womanhood for later official dynastic histories, such as *The Old History of the Tang Dynasty* (舊唐書 *Jiu Tang Shu*) and *The New History of the Tang Dynasty* (新唐書 *Xin Tang Shu*).²²⁷ It includes sections on both “virtuous and vicious” women, aiming to construct the expected standards of womanhood for the “filial daughter, loyal wife, chaste widow, and sagacious mother.”²²⁸ Though it “was likely intended for the emperor, as a warning against employing vicious women, and for women, as a means to cultivate their virtues,”²²⁹ the intended addressees were most likely men, considering the exclusion of official histories from women’s education,²³⁰ and the pervasiveness of female illiteracy at that time. The Confucian ideal of womanhood, in particular the admonition to chastity, inscribed in the “biographies of women” sections attached to later official histories was then addressed to the literati scholars, who in turn imposed such ideals on their female family members²³¹ and the people they were governing in the scholar-gentry dominated political system. Ban Zhao, inspired by the insights of Liu Xiang’s writings and other classics, in particular the Han yin-yang theory, instructed a set of prescribed virtues for the ideal womanhood in *Nujie*

²²⁶ The true motives of women’s extramarital affairs are not sure. But according to Eastman, it has been suggested that those unfaithful wives were indeed driven by desire to produce male offspring for their marital family rather than by pure lust. See Lloyd E. Eastman, *Family, Field, and Ancestors*, 33.

²²⁷ Sherry J. Mou, “Writing Virtues with Their Bodies: Rereading the Two Tang Histories’ Biographies of Women,” in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, ed. Sherry J. Mou (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 109-110.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 109 & 116.

²²⁹ See Pauline C Lee’s introduction to “Biographies of Women” in *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, ed. Robin R. Wang (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 149.

²³⁰ Sherry J. Mou, “Introduction,” in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, xxiii.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

(Lessons for Women; Admonitions for Women).²³² It says “To guard carefully her chastity; to control circumspectly her behavior; in every motion to exhibit modesty; and to model each act on the best usage, this is womanly virtue.”²³³ Chastity and proper behaviours are emphasized. Through the insistence upon women’s chastity, women’s bodies and sexuality were confined within a strictly male moral judgement. Therefore, the contrast of virtuous and vicious women in Liu Xiang’s *Biographies of Women*, and the emphasis on women’s chastity in later official histories, clearly indicate the nature of the division between ideal and depraved women. Above all, the section on “pernicious and depraved” women in Liu Xiang’s *Biographies of Women* implies the identification of women’s sexual capacity as cause for men’s (the emperor’s) downfall and moral degradation. Women’s sexual quality was seen as vicious, dangerous, and contrary to the prescribed virtues for women.

2. The May Fourth Rebellion: Medical Science

In part because of the connection of women’s emancipation to national salvation, the May Fourth movement initiated a new perspective on the issue of women’s sexuality. Under the cover of “medical science,” the urban, “modernizing,” educated elites underwent a “sexual enlightenment” and issues about sexuality such as sexual activity, sexual practices, prostitution and contraception were discussed publicly. These urban elites of the May Fourth Movement called for sexual “self-discipline and restraint,” and for the regulation of sexual behaviour, linking sexual enlightenment to national empowerment and the achievement of modernity. Many of these elites were convinced that the revival of the nation lay in the revival of its race, and the revival of race lay in the regulation of procreation by eugenics and the departure of marriage practice from the imposition of Confucianism.²³⁴

Regarding women’s sexuality, there were both physical and conceptual revolutions challenging the Confucian norms. Physically, the ideals of the May Fourth Movement

²³² Sherry J. Mou, “Writing Virtues with Their Bodies: Rereading the Two Tang Histories’ Biographies of Women,” in *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition*, 122.

²³³ Robin R. Wang, ed., *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 184.

²³⁴ Frank Dikotter, “Introduction,” *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 1-3.

released women from body restrictions such as foot-binding; psychologically, they freed women from the entrenched ideology of chastity. According to Dikotter, during the Republican era, natural sciences replaced Confucian metaphysics and were believed to structure gender differences according to anatomical definitions. Rather than being monitored by the State, dominated by any interest group, or formulated as a unified voice, “modernizing discourses” based on medical science about sexuality were discursively constructed by different professional groups and social reformers, who appropriated new fields of knowledge for the advancement of their careers and the imposition of their own vision of social reality.²³⁵

Appeals to medical science were not fixed and could co-exist contradictorily. Among conservative circles, gender relationships were interpreted through anatomical structure, and gender difference was defined by natural biological structures by which female bodies were interpreted as complementary to the male’s, and as passive respondents to the male’s inherent sexual desire. Such claims of female sexual passivity allowed the appropriation of medical science for the legitimacy of the new construction of gender hierarchy and of the attachment of women to the household and procreation.²³⁶ As to relatively progressive views on women’s sexuality, Zhu Xi (朱洗 1900-62), a cytologist who obtained his Ph.D. in France and taught at Zhongshan University in the 1930s, discarded the symbolic power of the hymen as the proof of women’s virginity, and reduced it to “a mere hindrance.”²³⁷ Moreover, sex educators advocated the remarriage of widows, and made remarks on women’s sexuality such as, “an unsatisfied ‘sexual impulse’ would lead to ‘improper sexual relations;’”²³⁸ and “old age started at thirty-one for women, but sexual desire could surge violently between forty and forty-five and had to be ‘correctly satisfied.’”²³⁹ Though either disparagingly or out of educative purpose, these remarks indicated more or less recognition of women’s sexual desire and needs. In urban areas, where social, cultural and economic transformation overshadowed

²³⁵ Frank Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 1-13.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-8.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

traditional gender relations, consensual cohabitation was practiced among the modernizing educated entities.²⁴⁰

Socialist progressive views on women marked a revolutionarily conceptual change. Lu Xun questioned the male imposition of chastity on women in “My Views on Chastity,” declaring that chastity was “favoured by no one, of profit neither to others nor oneself, of no service to the state or society, and of no value at all to posterity. It has lost any vigor it had and all reason for existing.”²⁴¹ Lu Qiuxin attacked the still entrenched idea of the interference of parents on the freedom of marriage of the children, and compared marriage systems to political ones—“monarchy” becomes “completely arranged marriage,” “constitutional monarchy” becomes “consensual arranged marriage,” and a “democratic republic” becomes “free marriage.”²⁴² Chen Duxiu claimed in *New Youth* that “Emancipation means freeing oneself from the bondage of slavery, [and it should be clear that] loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness are a slavish morality.”²⁴³ In addition, the belief among the progressive intellectuals that the subordination of women had reduced women to marriage prostitution and resulted in the degradation of the Chinese race, urged the freedom of marriage for women.²⁴⁴ Arguing on the insights of eugenics, Gao Xian, a cultural critic and eugenic philosopher, advocated the rights of women to choose their partner. He furthered female subjectivity in nature in “Sexual Selection” by stating that “Life continues through females. The biological agent [shengwu zhuti] is the female, because change requiring the joining of heterogeneous elements [i.e., male and female] involves the splitting off of a part of her self [i.e., the ovum] which makes the male [sperm, contrary to popular belief] a sidebranch, dependent upon the female.”²⁴⁵

3. “Sexual Sameness:” the CCP’s Recreation of Women’s Image

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 18-9.

²⁴¹ Lu Xun, “My Views on Chastity,” In *Women in Republican China*, 17.

²⁴² Lu Qiuxin, “Freedom of Marriage and Democracy,” in *Women in Republican China*, 37-8.

²⁴³ R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past*, 164.

²⁴⁴ Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 81.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 78-9.

Women's emancipation, as advocated by May Fourth progressive views on women, was then projected as part of the Communists' revolutionary mission. The promotion of "gender equality" was considered as the embodiment of the emancipation of women. The legitimacy of "sexual equality" granted legal rights to women upon the establishment of the Communist regime; and the ideology that 'men and women are the same' pervaded the social and public domains. The new Communist tradition of "sexual sameness" came to be pervasive in social relationships at least till the late 1970s.²⁴⁶ However, as demonstrated by Leader, the stress on women's capability of conducting physical labour as a suggestion of "sexual equality" and as a proof of their equal competence with men paradoxically suggested the value and superiority of maleness.²⁴⁷ Even in the Communist bases before 1949, despite the policy of "gender equality" and the encouragement of the participation of women in social and political domains, the so-called gender equality required the transformation of women into a "worker-peasant type." That is, the elimination of sexual distinction implied the inscription of masculine qualities onto women.²⁴⁸ After 1949, women's political, economic and legal rights were legitimated. Even suffrage, however rhetorically, was also granted.²⁴⁹ In addition, a new formulation of "unisex modes" was addressed to men and women through the application of linguistics. The new term, "comrade," crossed gender, generational, geographic and politically hierarchical boundaries, and was inclusively addressed to every social entity.²⁵⁰ The construction of a new image of women was further embodied in the adoption of the unified and "unisex" blue dress, which with its minimalist design

²⁴⁶ Xiaojiang Li, "Resisting while Holding the Tradition—Claims for Right Raised in Literature by Chinese Women Writers in the New Period," in *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, 109.

²⁴⁷ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," 66-7. As Leader argues, it is notable that the construction of women's image in post-revolutionary China often aligned with the needs of economic development and political control. Li Ziyun also points out that "whenever the party in power has to sacrifice democracy, freedom, and individual rights for the sake of national war or class struggle, the appeal for women's rights and the demand for women's discourse are inevitably repressed and silenced," and that "women's movement in China has always been subordinate to social and political movements since the May Fourth." See "The Disappearance and Revival of Feminine Discourse" in *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, 117 & 119.

²⁴⁸ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," 119.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Elisabeth Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), 70.

proposed to eliminate sexual distinction.²⁵¹ However, such gender equality through the construction of “sexual sameness” cost women their feminine expression as “any expression of female impulses or feminine sensitivity was invariably wiped out.”²⁵² As a result, the progressive Communist rhetoric then re-inscribed the revolutionary norms onto women and imposed a gendered-neutral image on women to suggest “gender equality.”

In addition, official discourse predominated the articulation of sexuality. It inherited the views on the regulation of sexuality articulated in the Republican era (1911-1949).²⁵³ However, unlike the Republican era, the discourse of sexuality was unified and manipulated by the state. State control on the discourse of sexuality then enabled official interference in gender and family relationships. Sexual difference was defined by anatomic structure, and sexual practices other than legally marital ones were regarded as infamous.²⁵⁴ The view of women as dependent on men and as passive respondents to male sexual desire continued. Above all, sexual conduct was associated with reproduction, and women’s reproduction was only legitimated upon a legal marital relationship.²⁵⁵ The new Marriage Law of 1950 granted women legal rights of freedom of marriage and divorce. However, since it continued the submission of the wife to the interest and need of her husband in the monogamous marital relationship, gender hierarchy was reaffirmed.²⁵⁶ Moreover, “Under the programme of national reconstructions in the 1950s, individual energies were to be channelled into working for

²⁵¹ Ibid., 70-1.

²⁵² Ziyun Li, “The Disappearance and Revival of Feminine Discourse,” 119. During the 1950s, the regulation on sexuality was not as radical as it later would be during the Cultural Revolution. According Harriet Evans, “during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the slightest suggestion of sexual interest was considered so ideologically unsound that gendered tastes in hairstyle and dress were coerced into a monotonous uniformity of shape and colour. A kind of androgyny, a sexual sameness, based on the defeminization of female appearance and its approximation to male standards of dress, seemed to be the socialist ideal.” See *Women and Sexuality in China*, 2.

²⁵³ In this thesis, I define “the Republican era” as 1911-1949. That is, from the year Qing monarchy was overthrown to the year the Communist regime was established. However, according to Dikotter, “The Commercial Press...started to compile textbooks and to introduce new knowledge after 1902.” See *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, p. 4.

²⁵⁴ After 1949, and at least till the 1980s, the CCP applied strict regulation on sexuality. The discourse of sexuality was constructed and controlled by the State. Except for the conjugal sexual relationship, sexual practices, including premarital or extramarital sexual contacts, such as adultery, masturbation and homosexuality were regarded as “shameless” or “abnormal.” See Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*. p. 181.

²⁵⁵ Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, 181-5.

²⁵⁶ Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1997), 5-6.

the collective benefit. Expressions of individualistic interest in appearance or romance, for example, were to be contained by an ethic that stressed the superiority of selflessness and collective commitment.”²⁵⁷ In short, in the years from the 1950s to the 1970s, the discourse of sexuality was under official surveillance while sexual behaviour was under official monitor. The characteristics of the official discourse of sexuality were determined by and accommodated to the change of state policy.²⁵⁸

III. Good Women vs. Bad Women

In an essay “Shuang sheng” (Duet 雙聲) published in 1945 before the CCP seized power, Zhang Ailing confessed that she was worried about how to dress in her old age and expressed her negative opinions of those old ladies who clothed themselves in distasteful, gloomy costumes. Colours made her happy.²⁵⁹ In 1950, Zhang Ailing attended the first Literature and Art Conference in Shanghai, and presented herself in a *cheongsam* (*qipao*) among a group of men and women, who were all dressed in the then current, fashionable style: a blue or grey uniform (*Zhong shan zhuang*),²⁶⁰ which was later the basis in the west for referring to the Chinese as “blue ants.” Men and women dressed alike with the suggestion of “gender equality” without the least implication of sexual distinction. As some scholars have already argued, the CCP’s promotion of gender equality resulted in the predomination of a form of “sexual sameness.” Because of the fixed belief in the inferiority of women, to suggest gender equality then meant to adjust the role of women rather than that of men—that is, to make women resemble men, or to “become men of women” to borrow Croll’s term.²⁶¹ From dress, name, hair style, appearance to even sexual behaviour, women’s sexuality was regulated in the new “gender equality” rhetoric. While still haunted by the old social norms, women now were

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 11-3.

²⁵⁹ Zhang Ailing, *Works of Zhang Ailing*, vol. 4 (Anhui: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 219. Su Weizhen makes this point in *Gudao Zhang Ailing* (孤島張愛玲), 75.

²⁶⁰ *Zhong shan zhuang* is “Sun Yatsen suit,” later known as “the Mao suit.” See *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, ed. Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren (Clayton, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 3.

²⁶¹ According to Croll, “combining women with men” means a denial of the qualities of the female body, and of the unique experience women have over their daughterhood and marriage. See *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, 69-70.

inscribed by new revolutionary norms. Written in this particular era, the two discussed novels point out such absurdity: while the CCP's reconstruction of women's image inscribes new norms for women, it simultaneously reasserts traditional prejudiced views on women's sexuality.

1. "Men of Women:" Reconstruction of Women

As Li points out, the CCP's gender equality comes at the cost of women's femininity. New revolutionary norms marking sexual equality are applied at least to female party members, if not yet to all women. In *Rice-Sprout Song*, Shaming, wife of the cadre Wang Lin, was criticized for not having her hair cut short. She anticipated further criticism when Wang actually came to her with a marriage proposal: "she had felt sure he had come to speak to her about her braids, which had occasioned much criticism" (Zhang, 67). "Criticism" suggests the style was unacceptable; therefore, this line implies the accepted principle of the Party regarding women's appearance for female members. In addition, "short hair" also suggests a resemblance to a "mannish" quality. When Wang Lin first met Shaming in a party meeting, Zhang Ailing describes Shaming as:

Instead of cutting her hair short like the other women and letting it hang over her cheeks in greasy, stringy locks, she wore it in two braids tucked out of sight under her cap, so that, at first glance, one would have taken her for a boy... But now, with the cap off and the braids showing, she looked very schoolgirlish, fragile, and a bit droopy in the uniform that was too large for her (Zhang, 66).

When Shaming's braids are contained in the cap, it makes her resemble a boy. It should be noted that she has her cap off and looks just like a schoolgirl when Wang spots her. This suggests, then, the "boyish" look is imposed with the hair hidden as if cut short. That is, the "male" quality is imposed on women with the forced adoption of the new norms. Zhang Ailing does not appreciate such a "revolutionary" outlook, as becomes apparent through her description of the "greasy" short hair of other female party members, a description which gives a distinctly unpleasant impression.

However, the connotation of "hairstyle" is more complex. It is not just a mere suggestion of fashion. It is not only a manifesto of self-autonomy but a symbol of

“liberation from the past and patriarchy.”²⁶² It is also a symbol of modernization and progress, and of “challenge” and “confrontation” to the oppressive system.²⁶³ Ba Jin in *Family* refers to “short hair” as a challenge to the patriarchal system, and suggests its “equivalence” with maleness.²⁶⁴ And, in Ding Ling’s earlier story “Tianjiangchong,” (The Tian Village) the female protagonist, San Xiaojie (the daughter of the landlord), appears in a man’s gown, and “in wearing it, she could aspire to sibling status with the comrades.”²⁶⁵ Cutting their hair short and dressing in man’s style enable women’s “self-perception” as “equivalent” to men. Since the fixed characteristic of the Party is said to be “progressive,” Shaming’s preservation of her braids then signifies a “class gesture” that, as later she would be referred to as a “petty bourgeois” after her disappearance, clearly violates the revolutionarily progressive codes.

The capable woman matched a prescribed style, characterized by a “mannish” quality, though unified and unisex dress was not yet introduced to Ding Ling’s peasant women. The precedent in “Tianjiangchong” has revealed Ding Ling’s belief in the symbolic meaning applied to women dressing in male style. Therefore, it is not surprising that the presentation of the toughest woman, Zhou Yueying, associates her with a male image through her dress.

She was a thin woman with a dark ruddy complexion and fine arched eyebrows. Her hair was combed back neatly into a bun on the top of her head. She was wearing a man’s white vest, stretching out her long arms... (Ding, 200).

Dong Guihua also dresses in a vest, but Zhou is the only woman dressed in male style. Ding Ling’s contrast of these two women offers an interesting picture: both are cadres of the Women’s Association; both are said to be capable; however, Dong is passive, ideologically conservative, reluctant to participate in revolutionary work while Zhou is active, ideologically progressive, as passionate to be involved in the collective mission as men are. Whenever Zhou is carrying out “men’s” work, Ding Ling explicitly

²⁶² Finnane and McLaren, *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, 16.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-6.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

clothes her in a male vest: performing hard labour during the confiscation of landlord Li's fruits in his orchard; and directing the villagers to move around during the redistribution of the landlord's confiscated goods. The "male style dressing" then serves implicitly as a "footnote" for her "masculine" quality of progress, activity, leadership and capability.

However, Ding Ling progresses beyond the point of her earlier work. The aspiration of the sense of "equality" or "equivalence" with male comrades by wearing male style dress in "Tianjiangchong" has now retreated to a less idealistic point of view, that rhetoric or image alone is not enough for "gender equality" as evident in the male villagers' perception of Zhou Yueying, and in her relationship with her husband. She is first referred to as "the Shepherd's wife," without proper respect being shown to the official title she bears, when one work team member inquires something of her. And she is still subject to domestic violence. The elimination of sexual difference does not suggest gender equality as the traditional notions prescribed to "women" are still attached to the person who is a "woman" in the view of the male villagers. "Crossing gender boundaries" to promote women's progressive image then only confines women within a new normative role and image. Therefore, in the absence of a conceptual evolution, such image construction through the means of eliminating sexual distinction only functions to de-feminize women. The aim to remove the prescribed norms from women constitutes a new acceptable version of "woman," and legitimates the new imposition.

Much as image functioned as a symbolic indication of gender equality, language subverted the fixed sexual order and division in the CCP's construction of revolutionary women.²⁶⁶ In the past, women were identified through their attachment to men. Both Chang and Alber point out that the reference in Ding Ling of women's identity as based on which man's mother/wife/daughter the character may be indicates the state of their dependence.²⁶⁷ Zhang Ailing adopted the same fashion as well to identify most of the peasant women characters. Therefore, the introduction of the unisex term "comrade" suggests a transcendence of sexual barriers and social order, and, because it is applied uniformly to men and, if not to all women yet, at least to female party members, denounces the sense of dependency. But since "name" represents personal identity and

²⁶⁶ Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*, 71.

²⁶⁷ See Jun-mei Chang, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work*, 115-6, and Alber, *Enduring the Revolution*, 171.

individuality, a unisex, all-inclusive reference creates a new form of “collectivity.” In other words, from the role of someone’s mother/wife/daughter in the feudal past, to the collective entity of “comrade” in the Communist reality, women’s subjectivity has never been recognized. Therefore, women were merely transformed from a social category to a political category, defeminized and desexualized. This then explains why, in *Rice-Sprout Song*, “comrade” Shaming can reserve a sense of femininity only when she does not resemble the image of “comrade.” The authors had their own vision of social reality in mind. Though the creation of *Rice-Sprout Song* was beyond the control of the CCP, in the case of Ding Ling, however, the presentation of the novel subtly subverts, at least in terms of gender issues, the Party’s principle of literary creation that requires a positive contribution to “socialist objectives.” As Chang points out, socialist realism requires a positive reference in the literature of the socialist revolution, yet “[the authors’] realism is at odds with the Party’s principle of socialist realism.”²⁶⁸

2. Traditional Confucian View: Deconstruction of Men

If “sexual sameness” reconstructs a revolutionary image for women, the presentation of men in the two novels reveals the reassertion of a traditional prejudiced view on women’s sexuality in the vision of males under the revolutionary guise. In the past, as the section about depraved women recorded in Liu Xiang’s *Biographies of Women* reveals, women with sexual capacity through which they appropriated political or other forms of power were considered as depraved and threatening forces that caused male moral degradation, and could even erode the security of the state. The institutionalization and construction of gendered norms and behaviours then ensured women’s submission and the constraints of women’s sexuality. This traditional view of women’s bodies and sexual conduct allows them to be legitimated only as the agency of reproduction and men’s sexual desire. Tradition strongly discredits women who have a sexual appearance and behaviour. The May Fourth progressive precedents attacked such degradation of women, and the Communist revolution also attempted to erode such degradation of women. However, as seen in the contradiction between “socialist reality” and “the author’s reality,” the deconstruction of the revolutionary men in the two

²⁶⁸ Jun-mei Chang, *Ting Ling: Her Life and Her Work*, 117.

discussed novels suggests a conceptual retreat from the early Communist progressive views on women's sexuality. It also suggests the continued deprecation of sexual women who have the ability to appropriate their sexual capacity.

Zhang Ailing sarcastically ridiculed the male sexual fantasy embedded in the Communist political language, which re-stereotypes women in the image of the traditional "bad" woman.²⁶⁹ The Communist intellectual, Gu Gang, is working on a film script about the positiveness and progress under the new regime, and his description of the evil landlord does not go beyond the clichés of luxurious banquets and women.

And the potbellied old man still enjoyed the company of a beautiful girl, presumably his concubine... Her main function was to lean decoratively against the table by the light of the flickering lamp and lend atmosphere to the various treasonable dealings of the dispossessed landlord. She would look something like Moon Scent (Yuexiang)... it would be summer and the girl would be wearing a striped cotton summer shirt. It would have to be decorously sacklike, but stripes could do wonders (Zhang, 179).

Gu's literary appropriation of the female body reincarnates the way of the traditional literary creation of women, whose body mainly serves two functions for warning against "vicious" women: as a sexual object of fictional imagination; and a sexual object of male fantasy. Zhang Ailing's illustration of such absurdity through Gu's re-stereotyped construction of women in his fictional imagination then uncovers such absurdity in the Communist revolutionary ideology. As Wang argues: "Nowhere else has Chang [Zhang] shown more bitter sarcasm about Communist morality than in describing Gu Gang's final submission to the formulaic, feudal convention: a woman in reality recklessly seeking food has been demonized in light of the traditional stereotype of the femme fatale, a woman relentlessly hungry for sex, in Communist fiction."²⁷⁰

Moreover, the obsession of Gu Gang with Yuexiang's body further ridicules the moral claim of the revolutionary. Women's bodies are transformed to the site of male sexual desire in male's fantasy. "Ku [Gu] found himself wondering what she was like in summer without those wadded clothes that made every woman look pregnant" (Zhang,

²⁶⁹ David Der-wei Wang, "Reading Eileen Chang's *Yangge* and *Naked Earth*" in *Reading Zhang Ailing* 《閱讀張愛玲》楊澤編 (Taipei: Rye Field Publications, 1999), 142-3.

²⁷⁰ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 136.

87), and “She was beautiful in the lamplight, like the fairy mistress stepping out of a book for the scholar in an old story by P’u Sung-ling” (Zhang, 99).²⁷¹ Pu Songling’s (蒲松齡) stories are often about the spirits, such as fox-fairies living more than hundreds of years, in disguise as beautiful, alluring young women to seduce the scholars, who usually stay at nights in an abandoned temple or house on their way to civil service exams. Later during sleepless nights caused by hunger, Yuexiang again comes to his mind. “Hunger kept him awake and the thought of Moon Scent [Yuexiang] bothered him. What would she look like next summer when she could take off that ungainly padded uniform [pants]?” (Zhang, 100)²⁷² Apparently, Gu imagines himself as the scholar and Yuexiang the spirit seducing the scholar. Thus, Yuexiang becomes not only the sexual object of male fantasy but the representative of “the traditional stereotype of the femme fatale, a woman relentlessly hungry for sex”²⁷³ in Gu’s fictional narration. The image of Yuexiang in Gu’s sexual fantasy echoes the view of Zhang Yumin in Ding Ling on the “sexual loose” woman. In this sense, it indicates a conservative reappropriation of the traditional, predominant notion of women’s sexual function.

Ding Ling’s depiction of male cadres further exposes such a conservative reappropriation of traditional patriarchal views on women’s sexuality. As early as in “When I was in Xia Village,” Ding Ling already pointed out the absurdity of men’s appropriation of women’s body for their interests and political means while devaluing and depreciating that very body.²⁷⁴ Because women’s sexual behaviour has to be constrained and regulated, sexual conducts for women are only legitimated by proper reorganization. Therefore, sexual relationships beyond the confines of the legal regulation are seen as a threat to the conventional social order. In other words, the allowance for women’s sexual desire is conditional. When Zhang Yumin, the secretary of the Nuanshui Party Branch, runs into the vice-village head, Zhou, kicking Jiang’s wife out of his house, his views of Jiang’s wife indicate the long-standing view on women.

²⁷¹ Unlike the English version, Zhang Ailing did not put it clearly as “Pu” story in Chinese version.

²⁷² Zhang Ailing points it out as “pants” in the Chinese text, p. 106. This is important for it has more explicitly sexual implication.

²⁷³ Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 136.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 67-9.

Zhang Yumin recognized her as Landlord Chiang's [Jiang] wife, a slim little evil-like [alluring] woman, with dreamy eyes and long hair streaming down her back, who had been a ["broken shoe"], a loose woman in a neighbouring village and had moved over when Chiang was ward chief [without either using a go-between or a proper ritual or ceremony], and all day long she gossiped from house to house, acting as a go-between for illicit affairs, always up to no good (Ding, 169).²⁷⁵

In the Chinese edition of the novel, Ding Ling used the words meaning that Jiang's wife comes to live with Jiang without a proper ritual and wedding ceremony required by tradition, such as using a go-between, exchanging betrothal gifts, and riding a sedan chair or a horse to the groom's house (沒有三媒六聘，也沒有坐轎騎馬).²⁷⁶ Despite Ding Ling's effort to depict the evil nature in Jiang's wife, it reflects the disdain embedded in the view of the Communist cadre Yumin on Jiang's wife, who freely goes beyond the confine of legal regulation in terms of her sexual relationship. In contrast to Zhang Ailing's description that "brides do not even ride in sedan chairs anymore" (Zhang, 46), riding in sedan chairs is not so much about the emphasis on the old ritual as underlining the importance of a proper legal sense for the establishment of a sexual/marital relationship.

However, it should be noted that despite the emphasis of Confucian teachings on women's chastity that was strongly required in the gentry class, it was not uncommon for women of low social status to remarry due to practical reasons. For example, Dong Guihua has married three times, each time without proper ceremony. Therefore, while sexual promiscuity is condemned, this did not always suggest the moral degradation of remarriage. But though remarriage was tolerated, this did not suggest consent for women's sexual autonomy or free sexual relationships. Hence, it is women's potency enforced by their sexual power that is condemned. Jiang's wife's acting as go-between for illicit lovers stands for such degrading power. It not only erodes the social morality and male authority; it also allows a sense of "autonomy" beyond men's control. Hence, women who dare to practice or facilitate any form of sexual autonomy, threaten the

²⁷⁵ In English version, it is simply translated as "she was not married to him." I add my own translation. See the Chinese text, p. 165.

²⁷⁶ See the Chinese version of *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River*, 165.

defined social relation and order. Therefore, other than for political reasons, Jiang's wife, along with the village shaman, White Snake, are referred to as "bad" women (one as landlord class and one as wicked woman) because of their boldness in sexual expression. What is left unsaid here is the sort of logic that such sexual boldness, against traditional teachings in women's virtues and sexual repression, leads to moral degradation that would further lead to sexual promiscuity. This in turn threatens the traditional sexual relationship and social order, and hence would damage men's legitimacy in their control over women's bodies. Therefore, the reference of Jiang's wife as "a loose woman" ("broken shoe") is as much about chastity as the condemnation of her breaking the sexual norms.

In addition, the "dreamy eyes," "streaming-like long hair" and "evil-like allure" of Jiang's wife in the eyes of Zhang Yumin illustrate a picture of a seductive woman against the decorum required for women. Like White Snake, Landlord Jiang Shirung's wife is referred to as a "broken shoe" and "Hulijing," (fox-fairy 狐狸精) and is attacked because of her potentially destructive power. While the term "broken shoe" indicates a sexually loose woman, the term "Hulijing" (狐狸精) often refers to the kind of woman who, as suggested by her appearance or behaviour, is sexually appealing and seductive, using her sexual power to seduce men and erode their moral virtues, and hence is potentially dangerous and destructive. Such women usually receive bad reputations because of their unchained sexual expression.

To carry out "revolutionary work" properly, women's behaviour or expressions carrying sexual connotations are seen as improper. When chatting with his men, Zhang Pin, the propaganda director of the county Party committee, tells about his experience, saying that "once after the chairman of a women's association had held his hand, he had not slept well all night. The next day, he had given her a good talking-to, telling her to work hard in the future and be careful what impression she made" (Ding, 252). In a revolutionary era aimed to break "gender" and "sexual" boundaries, a "handshake," like "cutting hair" and "male style dressing," carries a symbolic meaning of "gender equality" propagandized by the Party. Therefore, in a revolutionary view of the era, Zhang Pin's "handshake" with the chair of the Women's Association symbolizes the sense of "gender equivalence" under the rhetoric of "comrade," to which Sanxiaojie aspired in

“Tianjiangchong.” The connotation of the “handshake” in Zhang Pin’s view, however, seems more complicated. It bears signs of sexual appeal, which then defines his handshake with that female comrade as a “physical touch.” And it is the “touch” that causes him sleeplessness. This interference comes from the woman’s physical body, and that physical body is “sexual,” containing a dimension of power that could potentially rewrite the Confucian power order and relationship. Therefore, his reactions to the handshake uncover the hidden Confucian view under the revolutionary guise of women’s sexuality.

Women’s potential sexual power is then considered threatening and potentially dangerous because of the ability it carries to erode men’s power and morality. However, it is notable that such threatening power does not suggest the mere exposure of a naked body. When the work team member Yang Liang first comes across the village’s vice-head, Zhao Delu’s, wife, he sees a woman “standing at the door of a house, the upper part of her body naked...” (Ding, 56) Her hair is dishevelled and matted, her arms covered with streaked dirt, and her breasts already pendulous. Therefore, even though he witnesses her naked breasts and body, Yang Liang only feels embarrassed to look at her, and feels sorry for her as if he had done something unfair to her. Here, though naked and exposed, Zhao’s wife is sexually discouraging, far from alluring or threatening, and hence powerless. Rather than feeling threatened, Yang feels more sympathy towards her.

Compared to his encounter with Zhao’s wife, Yang’s responses to White Snake whom he later encounters illustrate the traditional male’s views on sexually appealing women. After his visit to the Chair of Women’s Association, Dong Guihua, Yang accidentally steps in the shaman White Snake’s house. Upon his encounter with White Snake, “the court yard is very quiet... an odour of aromatic candle pervading the atmosphere...” and he then sees

a woman in white, lying on her side on the *kang*. Though with her face towards inward, she seemed to have heard the sound outside the window. She did not turn around; instead, she called out serenely in a seductive tone: ‘Aunty! Fetch me the sweet apple that was just brought.’ Yang hurried himself and retreated quietly, overly surprised and bewildered. At the

moment, an old woman walked out from the west room from which a strong and dense odour was emanating (Ding, 62).²⁷⁷

Here, Yang first sees White Snake's back, then he hears her seductive voice, and then he smells the odour in her house. Thus, from the vision to the hearing and then to the scent, all sensual feelings come to effect at the first encounter. Later, after the brief encounter with White Snake, Yang can barely respond but hurries out.

Yang hurried out, unable to describe his feelings, as if he had mysteriously wandered into the book of *Liaozhai* and had just encountered an evil spirit (Ding, 63).²⁷⁸

The book *Liaozhai*, the full title of which is *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (聊齋誌異 *Strange Tales of Liaozhai*), written by Pu Songling in the early Qing dynasty, contains short stories among which many are about young scholars' encounters with ghosts or vixen spirits ("Hulijing"), who possess magic powers to transform into human figures, usually young, beautiful and attractive women, to seduce men for their "yang qi" (陽氣 yang energy). If the young scholars could not restrain themselves from responding to such sexual seduction, the result for them could be fatal. Therefore, women referred to as "Hulijing" are considered as sexually seductive, threatening, destructive and morally degraded. These kinds of women are potentially dangerous since they possess the ability to fool and challenge men's power. Yang's association of the sexually appealing White Snake with *Liaozhai* indicates such traditional male views on sexual women. Moreover, compared to his reaction to his witnessing of the naked body of Zhao's wife, Yang's reaction to White Snake reveals his sense of being threatened and out of control. He hurried out to the street, perspiring and oblivious to everything. The only thing he does is mop away the perspiration. Yang's responses and feelings belie his belief in the liberation of women. While one of the goals of the rural revolution aims to terminate female oppression from landlordism and patriarchy, his views on women are still confined to that

²⁷⁷ I add my own translation here. See Chinese text, p. 62.

²⁷⁸ I add my own translation here. See Chinese text, p. 63.

very old patriarchal opinion of women. It suggests the absence of a substantial transcendence over the old social norms.

The connotation of the name “White Snake” also reinforces an association with some form of threat. In Chinese folklore, a thousand-year-old white female snake with magic power transforms into a beautiful and seductive woman to seduce a young male and marry him. She is exposed by a male Taoist exorcist. For revenge and to win back her husband, she fights against the Taoist exorcist, and even uses her power to cause a flood over the temple where he resides. Therefore, she is not only sexually seductive but powerful enough to challenge male’s power, or to be more precise, male’s authority.²⁷⁹ In other words, she is influential. Such power is also seen in Ding Ling’s shaman White Snake. White Snake is a widow, practicing as a medium between gods and people who seek the gods’ help. She claims she can cure illness by the magic power given by the god (Lord White—the god she has in her shrine) who will reside in her at that moment. People believe her and come to her house to see Lord White. When White Snake refuses the request of the villager Liu’s wife to cure her sick child, Liu’s wife is frantic, falling in despair. As it is revealed, White Snake in a way is capable of influencing people. Even Dong cannot help but be haunted by her words: “people were wicked; therefore, Lord White refused to answer the calls for help. And ‘the real Dragon Emperor was in Beijing...’” Therefore, as the potency of her name implies, White Snake is threatening and potentially destructive. In the presentation of the novel, Ding Ling made an interesting contrast between Zhou Delu’s wife and White Snake in the eyes of Yang Liang, vividly illustrating, and subtly criticizing, the “phobia” regarding sexually appealing women in the traditional “retarded” sexual culture.

In a feminist reading, the Communist revolution compromises itself in terms of women’s liberation with the absence of a conceptual revolution on women’s sexuality. As it is depicted, the most sexually appealing women are those who are considered as morally degraded, such as Landlord Jiang Shirung’s wife and the shaman White Snake.

Those male revolutionaries only feel “safe” and “comfortable” in front of women devoid of sexual attraction, even if naked, as is the case of Zhou’s wife, and “de-

²⁷⁹ There is a version of White Snake story in Feng Menglon’s *Jingshi Tongyan* (警世通言) from the Ming dynasty.

feminized” as in the case of Zhou Yueying, whose thin body, “dark ruddy” face, hair in a bun, and male-style white vest suggest little trace of femininity, much less sexual appeal. The “claim” of gender equality is at the expense of women’s femininity as behaviours and conducts suggesting a form of sexual expression are seen as threatening and potentially destructive in the eyes of the revolutionary male, whose thoughts of and belief in women do not go beyond the confines of traditional patriarchal views.

Conclusion

In the previous analysis, the examination of the works of Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, primarily *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* and *The Rice-Sprout Song*, suggests a remarkable agreement between the authors regarding their attitude towards the operation of the CCP on women's issues. Despite the diversity in their political inclinations, the textual qualities of both novels present themes developed from their early writings, substantially embodying the May Fourth feminist perspective on women. Therefore, though considered as political propaganda by some critics, from what is essentially a feminist perspective, the two novels manifest the persuasive argument that, despite its claim and ostensible attempts at social reform, the CCP fundamentally re-locates women at the bottom of the socio-political order, re-inscribing traditional male values and authority based on Confucian doctrines and supported by masculine politics. Rather than empowering women, the policies of the CCP ultimately reassert male superiority in what it overtly claims as redefined gender relationships.

I have pointed out that both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing utilize presentations of violence in their novels as critiques of the violence of the CCP's masculine politics against women, yet they differ in several aspects of their narratives of this issue. While both men and women are victims of the oppression at the hands of the state apparatus, which appropriates the use of violence for its political legitimacy, the power "castrated" men use violence against women to reassure themselves of their authority in at least one sphere. However, in addition to institutional regulations and social customs, women's own internalized consent also serves as an accomplice against themselves. Although to some extent, violence is treated as a means by which the people can struggle against oppression in both Ding Ling and Zhang Ailing, the collective violence of the peasants represents a claim to justice from landlordism in Ding Ling's textual demonstrations, thus giving a positive connotation. In contrast, in Zhang Ailing's narratives of the CCP's China, it represents the resistance of the peasants against the state apparatus itself, displaying her negative attitude toward it.

Women's desire continues to be repressed through the redefinition of what they need and to what they are given permission in the process of the CCP's social and

political control. Ding Ling's belief that women's emancipation may be won through the avenue of politics, and Zhang Ailing's that this will come through economic independence, change from their early writings. Their hopes for women's equality turn to despair in their vision of women under the new regime in the two novels. While ostensibly women are unchained from the constraints of evil social customs, the roles of women are reconstructed and the desire of women is redefined within the realm of politics. The concepts of the "faceless gaze" and of "panopticism" from Foucault are helpful here to demonstrate the CCP's ideological and political control and its extension to the repression of women's desire. As part of the mechanism of disciplinary power, the "faceless gaze" allows the formation of a net of mutual surveillance and self-surveillance that aims to create a social body of docility compliant to the authority in power, and hence enables the manipulation or elimination of public voices. Consequently, it allows the CCP to redefine what is proper or what is "correct" for women in expressing their desire.

Despite the ostensible changes in women's conditions, as presented in the two novels, the texts of the two authors demonstrate a conservative retrieval by the CCP of traditional Confucian-oriented gender values regarding women's sexuality in the process of its creating new images of women. The promotion of gender equality, which aims to break "gender boundaries" by eliminating sexual distinctions in physical appearance and work performance, to prove the equivalence of women's ability to that of men, results in the practice of "sexual sameness" that in essence places emphasis on masculine qualities. In addition, the persistence of Confucian-oriented views on women's sexuality in the minds of those who in the first place are responsible for the mission of women's emancipation exposes the 'pseudo mind-reform' of the Communist revolution. As a result, the Communist revolution yields to the traditional conventions in terms of women's liberation with its retreat from May Fourth progressive ideals in the trajectory of the conceptual development of female sexuality.

The subordination of women's tasks to class struggle from the beginning had already foreshadowed the dim fate of women's emancipation due to the priority of the CCP for political solidification that inevitably resulted in the silence of feminist appeals. Insightful to the problematic claim of women's emancipation, Ding Ling and Zhang

Ailing, through their fictionalized social realities, presented and commented on the failure of the CCP to undergo a conceptual revolution of gender relationships embedded in its mission of emancipating women.

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