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EDITORIAL

I would like to start by expressing my appreciation to *the quint*, this global, interdisciplinary journal, for offering its platform to international scholars, writers and artists to showcase their scholarship and creative writing on Chinese and Chinese-Canadian culture and literature. As a scholar of both Chinese Studies and Canadian Literature with a special interest in Indigenous Literature, I see how culture and literature are complementary. As a member of the Chinese diaspora in Canada, each time I go back to my home country, I see China integrating more and more with the world, economically and culturally, as expressed in the slogan from China Central Television (CCTV): “The World Needs China and China Needs the World.” By the same token, Chinese culture and literature also crave for the attention of the world. This attention will make for a better understanding of China, her people, and her culture.

This special issue of *quint* contains themes and topics of Chinese culture and literature from different genres: research essays, literary translations, and creative writing. The issue starts with Qianting Ke’s “The Rewriting and Adapting of *The Vagina Monologues* in China,” a case study of using theatre as a platform for feminist advocacy. Ke demonstrates that monologue, dialogue, and “double monologue” are needed to tell women’s stories on the stage from different perspectives. Following Ke’s piece is a literary essay on Zijian Chi’s novel, *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, which depicts the life of the Chinese Evenki, the last Chinese nomadic hunting minority in Northeast China. This literary essay, “Evenki’s Harmonious Co-Existence with Nature,” analyses Chi’s novel from eco-critical perspective, showing the Evenki’s physical and spiritual syncretism with nature in different aspects, including life and death, belief in animism, spirits totem and worship, psychological and artistic dependence on nature, oral tradition, rituals and shamanistic culture. The next piece, Wendy Xie’s “From Feminine Tears to the Male Gaze: The Demise of the *Huangmei Diao* Opera Film in Late-1960s Hong Kong” explores the feminized tradition in the local opera and analyses why it conflicts with mainland China’s Cultural Revolution, and social upheavals in Hong Kong, especially with the rise of the “new style” martial arts film in Hong Kong. Following Xie’s essay, Gladys Mac’s “*Golden Chicken* as

Historicomedie: Sex Work in Hong Kong and Local Popular Culture” examines how history is re-presented through the local sex industry and popular culture, and how recreation and entertainment shape the local culture. A linguistic research team led by Yansheng Mao conducts a quantitative survey on different ways of expressing gratitude in online and offline linguistic data in the next piece, titled “Gratitude Is the Sign of Noble Souls: Acknowledging Acts in Chinese Online Medical Consultation.” This research paper offers an insightful study of Chinese courtesy in the new media environments. In the next piece, “Fantasy of Freedom: Narrating Sex and Love in Yu Dafu and Eileen Chang,” Alice Fengyuan Yu reads two modern Chinese writers’ works to reveal the complicated and dynamic relationship between sex and love underlying the literary discourse in modern China. Allan Cho’s “The Changing Role of a Cultural Magazine in the 21st Century” offers a history of *Ricepaper* magazine, a Vancouver-based Asian Canadian literary publication. *Ricepaper* came into being as a result of the Vancouver local politicians’ reaction to the Great Cultural Revolution in China in 1967. *Ricepaper*’s popularity has grown since then among Asian Canadian writers.

The next few works in this issue are translations of original literary works by seasoned translators. The art of translation makes the Chinese culture one that is truly appreciated by non-Chinese, especially English readers. “Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool” (trans. Dongwei Chu) was written by Zhang Wei, a winner of almost every major literary award in China. Zhang’s outlook on mankind is rather pessimistic. Kaile Chu’s critiques of the short story, “Mankind’s Fall from Grace” offers an insightful reading of the story. San San’s “The Song of the Dandelion” (trans. Sun Cheng Ping) tells the sad story of an adopted girl.

In addition to research papers and translated works, this issue also includes creative writing about China and the Chinese people and culture by Canadian, diasporic Chinese, and Chinese-Canadian writers. Donna Besel’s “The Red Dragon” tells the story of an isolated Chinese Canadian family in a small town in Manitoba who came from Hong Kong. Sally Ito’s “Notes from China, A Writer’s Baedeker” is a travelogue about the places she visited during a writer’s residency at Sun Yat Sen University in October 2018. Two pieces of nonfiction arose out of the residency program written by Qian Wu and Jiamei Li, postgraduate students from Sun Yat-

Sen University. Their personal stories about contemporary China are a result of the interaction between the international writers at the residency and the students at the university. Qian Wu's "Away from the Root" talks about her own experience of staying away from her roots which usually meant that she was considered 'poor' and 'backward,' especially because she came from a rural area. How about tradition? Jiamei Li's "Little Brother" is a true life story about the Chinese "tradition" of the boy being the primary heir to the family line and name. Following these two pieces about Chinese roots and tradition, is Qianting Ke's conversational essay about mothers, titled, "Joining a tour with mother: Generational differences." This piece is part of a collaborative writing project about mothers by writers and artists, conducted as a dialogue on WeChat, a popular Chinese social media app, and then printed out as an article by Qianting.

Finally, this issue ends with a section of my novella, "I am Lao Yang," which is about a Chinese immigrant in Canada. The photos that intersperse the entire issue are by Mr. Jiang Tang who gives an impressive array of images of contemporary China that serve as a visual backdrop to all the writings.

Ying Kong
Guest Editor



Woman's Theater as a platform for Advocacy: a Case from China

(The Rewriting and Adapting of *The Vagina Monologues* in China)

Qianting Ke

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Abstract

What makes the Chinese way of rewriting and adapting Eve Ensler's TVM unique is that adaptors rewrote scenes to present the needs of women and LGBT in China. Organizations fighting against domestic violence retold Chinese women's stories rather than merely following the general patterns of worldwide V-day campaigns. In the Chinese adaptations of TVM, major priority was given to politically mobilize people and incite collaborations among different communities, rather than making the shows into entertainments. For this purpose, staging TVM in China incorporates localized stories and Chinese traditional art forms to attract local audiences. In order to expand the scope of gender consciousness raising and gender rights advocacy, they performed in public spaces, rural areas, and factory communities.

Keywords: *The Vagina Monologues*, Rewriting and Adapting, Monologues and Dialogue, community collaborating

In 1996, Eve Ensler produced her Obie award-winning *The Vagina Monologues* (TVM), an episodic play centered on issues of female sexuality. Two years later she launched the V-Day Worldwide Campaign in 1998 and launched the One Billion Rising Worldwide Campaign in 2012, two global activist movements that promote ending violence against women. TVM has been translated into 48 languages and performed thousands of times around the world. From a play to two global campaigns, from America to 200 countries, TVM has formed a kind of vagina culture and vagina discourse worldwide.

TVM was introduced to China in a 2001 article written by Ai Xiaoming that emphasizes its emancipatory potential and its aim of combating domestic violence.¹ Since then, TVM has stimulated hundreds of texts, united different communities, and mobilized a younger generation to join the feminist movement. The Zhi-he Society based at Fudan University, Sex-Gender Education Forum of Sun Yat-sen University, BCome Group, the Spring Feminist Society, LesGo, and the Beaver Club, among others, are the most active feminist groups working with TVM and they are based in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Suzhou, respectively. Their work consists of organizing their team, interviewing women, writing new plays, performing, and holding workshops for communities.

Unlike the rich criticism from feminist and non-feminist scholars in the West, TVM has been welcomed by Chinese feminist scholars and Chinese women's organizations. Academic research into the phenomenon of TVM adaptations in China by feminist organizations has long been neglected due to the fact that it has not been

considered in conjunction with the women's movement and instead has been looked

1. Ai Xiaoming, "V-day Movement: Report on Gender Culture in the Campus of the States (艾晓明. V日风潮: 美国校园性别文化观察报告. 中国青年研究)," *China Youth Study* (2001)..

upon solely as a play.

However, this lack of research has begun to change. In her dissertation, Zhang Yuping explores how grassroots groups “appropriate, adapt, write and then remake a local version of TVM” with the intentions of presenting TVM to the Chinese a media as a means of advocating for women’s rights.² She concludes that “highly educated women are the main media actors during the transculturation of TVM; while during the transculturation of *Break the Chain*, female factory workers also became media actors [...] through rehearsing and performing, they have formed their sister group and build their confidence, particularly the confidence to defend their civil rights.”³ Zhang Yuping’s research is a first step towards greater appreciation of the use of TVM by feminist organizations in China.

This essay deals with various kinds of materials and the research methods are related to different disciplines. Based on interviews of participants and a critical analysis of the texts written in China, this essay analyses the texts according to their themes, styles, and rhetoric, while the performances are analysed according to their stage arrangements, forms, and audience interactions. This essay examines how Chinese women’s organizations integrate cultural resources and mobilize communities to push forward gendered cultural reform and social transformation, as well as demonstrating the importance of theatre as a vehicle for feminism in China to empower women.

2. Yuping Zhang, “Global Media Activism Made in China: An Extended Case Study on the Circuit of Cultures Based on The Vagina Monologues and Break the Chain” Dissertation from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2016, pp.138-139.

3. Ibid.

Localized TVM and the V-day Campaign

V-Day is a global activist movement initiated by Eve Ensler to end violence against women and girls. Ensler officially founded V-Day as a non-profit 501c3 corporation on February 14, 1998; the “V” in V-Day stands for “victory”, “valentine,” and “vagina”. Registered V-Day organizers receive yearly updated scripts to distribute among their casts, as well as access to an archival library through V-Day’s online activist portal, V-Spot. No theatre or producing experience is necessary and no royalty fees are charged. The Registered organizers, in return, should abide by certain guidelines, and report their fundraising proceeds. Her inspiring idea to combine TVM with the anti-violence movement shows that Eve Ensler is a visionary activist.

Some scholars, such as Roxanne Friedenfels and Shelly Scott, as well as other activists, have celebrated V-day for bringing sex back into the anti-violence movement.⁴ However, as Cooper points out, TVM performances “inscribe their own constraints and coexist uneasily with the broad sweep of V-Day’s current mission. Privileging one form of abuse, just as they privilege one form of female subjectivity, they perform their own subtle violence in the show. The risk is that viewers (or participants) will leave the theatre unable to imagine the abuse women endure if it, too, is not sexual or sexualized.”⁵ There is a risk of narrowing and distorting the campaign of anti-violence, if we do not explore the space for other kinds of gender violence.

4. Roxanne Friedenfels, “The Vagina Monologues: Not So Radical after All?” *off our backs* Vol. 32, 5-6 (2002), pp. 42–46; Shelly Scott, “Been There, Done That: Paving the Way for The Vagina Monologues,” *Modern Drama* Vol. 43 No. 3 (2003), pp. 404–423.

5. Christine M. Cooper, “Worrying about Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* Vol. 32 No. 3 (2007), pp. 727-758.

In China, the issue of anti-violence has been taken seriously by the organizations that make use of and rewrite TVM. In 2003, when Ai Xiaoming directed the Sun Yat-sen Version of TVM, a production initiated and sponsored by the “Anti-Domestic Violence Network of China Law Society(反家暴网络),” the mission of raising awareness of anti-violence and joining the global campaign was very clear. Ai held activities for the team to widen their visions of domestic violence, especially in terms of how Chinese culture and institutions work to make the all-pervasive violence against women invisible. A story about child trafficking and some lines about how Chinese women deal with violence were added to the show, even though the performance was supposed to use the original script of TVM by Ensler. Over the past twenty years, advocating for the legislation of the Anti-domestic Violence Law has been the common goal of most Chinese women’s organizations. This goal has resulted in great energy being put into the adaptation of TVM in China.

Corresponding to Cooper’s critiques, the new stories written by Chinese feminists have broadened the understanding of violence against women. A scene written by Sophia Cai called “You Owe Me an Apology” was added about sexual violence during the Japanese invasion of China, giving a representation and voice to the “comfort women” of the Japanese military. She wrote this piece based on her research, subsequently adapting it for the TVM performance by her group at Southeast Normal University in Shanghai. Another scene titled “Silence” was added that includes three stories about the trafficking of women and domestic violence. Written by Xiaoguo, “Silence” is a part of the *Words of Vagina* (《阴道欲言》, 2015)

adaptation organized by LesGo. The playwrights from different teams told me that when they choose topics for the show, the first concern is providing a voice for marginalized or violated women.

“Anti-violence” is one of the most important issues of *For Vagina’s Sake* (《将阴道进行到底》), a play inspired by TVM and directed by Song Sufeng. Six of the ten pieces are related to gender-based violence. This performance is the output of a project called *Zero Tolerance of Gender Violence on Campus*, sponsored by Oxfam. One of the goals of this play is to represent the various kinds of gender violence that can be enacted, including sexual harassment, acquaintance rape, domestic violence, birth control, and forced pregnancy. These topics show that *For Vagina’s Sake* is very different from TVM. Inevitably, the play is much less entertaining than TVM. Audiences may find it disappointing if they expect to enjoy a show about sexual pleasure.

Women’s organizations in China are concerned about anti-violence issues when they adapt TVM, however, they are not engaged in the V-Day worldwide Campaign. Rather than register and then wait for the newly released script, following the rules of fundraising and performing, Chinese activists create new stories based on the experiences of Chinese women. According to the rules of V-Day, the free copyright is for the V-Day period, initially from February to the 8th of March, but at present has been narrowed to February only. It would appear that the Chinese organizers do not know much about these rules; although some of them have used some pieces of TVM, they seem unconcerned about copyright. In fact, the Theatre du Reve Experimental (

薪传实验剧团) is the only organization to purchase the copyrights in China. The director, Chong Wang wrote an article to introduce how to join the V-Day Campaign, but most grassroots organizations are not ready to follow it.

Practically speaking, it is hard for Chinese grassroots and woman's organizations to follow the rules of the V-day Campaign which involve timing, online registration, using the official script, raising funds, and uploading video performances. Firstly, most Chinese grassroots or women's organizations cannot raise money from the public legally through a performance. Secondly, it is not easy to access certain websites and information. Although the website of V-Day is not banned in China, the tools they use for uploading and sharing videos, such as YouTube, are not accessible. Thirdly, the official script of TVM does not target the issues of greatest concern in China. The organizers want to respond to local issues and mobilize audiences to join the anti-violence movement with the limited resources at their disposal. Moreover, there are many recent news stories and emergency events related to the rights of women and children in China with which women's organizations could better put to use towards mobilizing the play's content toward meeting their advocacy goals. Because of these challenges in accessing the women's movement globally, Chinese women's organizations would rather focus on their local efforts.

As Zhang explains, "the rules of V-Day do not have legal effect in those countries outside the US and V-Day doesn't have effective binding to the grassroots and could not control them."⁶ Comparing V-Day with McDonaldization, Zhang argues that the "pirate" or "copycat" of TVM in China "is neither the case of localization of cultural

6. Zhang, *Global Media Activism Made in China*, 2016.

globalization, nor the business logic of capitalism. It is common sense in post-socialist China that culture products should be shared, so that it's acceptable to adopt or use the available script."⁷ Furthermore, according to theories of intertextuality, we can understand the texts made in China as acting in "dialogue"⁸ with TVM through their use of allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche, and parody.⁹ The rewritten texts do not exploit TVM but rather apply added meanings to it and make a wider and richer map of the work. These practices do not affect perceptions of these groups, even though they may break the rules of V-Day.

Interestingly, Ensler supports the practices of these Chinese groups. In fact, she met some representatives of these groups when she visited Taiwan to join some events fighting violence against women. During "Women Status Promotion Asian Conference" (妇女地位提升亚洲会议) hosted by The Garden of Hope Foundation, Song Sufeng, Li Chen from Feminist Spring Society, and Ai Ke from BCome Group talked about how they rewrote TVM and what kind of issues they were dealing with in the Chinese context.¹⁰ Ensler has made contact with some of them and has shown support for their performance, advocating for their activities ever since.

The journey of TVM from the United States to China has been a transformative process, during which the seed of the play has been sowed into Chinese soil and has grown up as something very different. The legislation of the Anti-domestic Violence

7. Ibid.

8. Julia Kristeva. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 67-68..

9. Gérard Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press. 1997.

10. Ai Ke, "Meet Up with Eve Ensler in Tapei [艾可. 与伊芙·恩斯勒相遇在台北. 女权之声]," *Women-Voice*, May 29 2015. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_67c528700102vtp7.htm (accessed March 28 2018)..

Law, the development of gender and sexual education, and the identification of the LGBT community, among others, have been emerging and on-going issues during the past twenty years in China. Dealing with these issues requires a lot of resources and TVM is one of the best resources for the movement, since the text is flexible and full of potential to be localized.

People mobilizing and community collaborating

The organizations in China insisted on adapting TVM because they appreciated its power and saw in it the potential to combine it effectively with their own goals of mobilizing people and collaborating with different advocacy groups. TVM is the most often selected text because it is not easy to find alternative texts within Chinese contemporary art or literature. Most Chinese elite women in the fields of literature, art, theatre, and film are reluctant to identify as feminist even though they are concerned with women's issues because the figure of the "feminist" has been demonized and they think this would have a negative effect on their reputation. In addition, artists who do recognize themselves as feminists seldom create works aimed at gender education or the women's movement. Although some novels, popular in the 1990s, explore women's erotic and sexual experiences, the feminist ideas in those novels were not publicly discussed. In contrast, TVM provides the appropriate perspective, standpoint, and narrative forms for further exploration and action.

TVM has a clear standpoint and sheds light on feminism and activism, which is important to mobilize people to join the movement. Generally, some people join

production teams because they are interested in women's issues or theatre, while others are seeking self-identification. Most of them end up being passionate activists or volunteers, since the intensive and creative activities involved in a production are not only in preparation for a show, but also result in cooperation among various communities and organizations. Through understanding more about these issues and seeing them through a feminist lens, the members are given the tools to work more effectively for the marginalized communities. Xiao Hang, one of the members of BCome says, "BCome Group has gone beyond a team for a show and become a group functioning as awareness raising, emotional mutual-help and social movement."¹¹

The organizers of TVM in China have developed a work model about how to organize an effective team that includes recruiting members, choosing topics, interviewing women, writing, reading, discussing, rehearsing, script-polishing, and performing. Participants bring their own experiences to these acts thereby negotiating meaning through an interdependent network of rhetorical exchanges. It encourages discussion, communication, and self-reflection, all of which are very important for the recognition of their sex and gender identities and unification of the group. A member from Feminist Spring Society says, "I spent days and nights with team members, sharing experiences, arguing and laughing. We did things that we never had before and became very close friends."¹² There is invaluable significance in this form of on-going self-reflection, as well as in the commitment it inspires to critiquing the oppressed system.

11. Xiao Hang, "On 1.0 Version of Our Vaginas Ourselves by Bcome Group (小航. 写在Bcome小组1.0版本《阴道之道》演出之后. 酷拉时报) <https://site.douban.com/211878/widget/notes/13727777/note/287081931/> (accessed March 28 2018).

12. 'Shi'er', member of the Feminist Spring Society. Personal interview. Date conducted October 25 2016.

Collaboration is the basic method used to organize a production team for theatrical productions of TVM in China. The identities of the members of a newly organized team are always varied, including lesbian, transgender, bisexual, disabled and so on. The “radical” and “sexy” name of TVM is a flag for the assembly of minorities. Some people join the team in the process of discovering themselves as sexual minorities, and others for their interests in any forms of fringe theatre. This variety of team members makes it impossible to have a single perspective for the play; everyone carries their own slate of experiences and concerns, so that they have to negotiate with each other to decide which topics should be included in the play.

In order to mobilize and collaborate, an organization has to keep working with different members or groups. Ensler’s TVM is a relatively fixed text and she does not generally add new stories. In the HBO production, Ensler made an exception by introducing “Because He Liked to Look at It” as her answer to audience complaints that there were not enough sketches about vagina-loving heterosexual men. In 2001, however, Ensler said that she could not write transgender or menopause monologues to suit further audience requests, stating, “whenever I have tried to write a monologue to serve a politically correct agenda [...] it always fails.”¹³ Ensler defends her choices by arguing that TVM “is about attraction, not promotion”, which might address a particular organization or even medical companies and emphasizes that promotion is not her responsibility.¹⁴ On the contrary, Chinese organizations would not say no to including the transgender community, taking it instead as a unique opportunity to promote the movement.

13. *The Vagina Monologues*. Dir. Eve Ensler. HBO Films. 2002. Film.

14. Eve Ensler. *The Vagina Monologues: V-Day Edition*. New York: Villard, 2001, xxvi-xxvii.

The transgender community in China is emerging and activists are slowly coming out of the closet and fighting for their rights. There were seldom transgender people coming out and speaking publicly before 2010, making it significant to have a transgendered person join the team. Some groups, such as BCome, Beaver Club, LesGo and Feminist Spring Society, have members who identify as transwomen and they have contributed stories, such as “Menstruation,” “The Perverse, Ourselves,” “The Trans-person,” and “I want to have a vagina.” There has been some tension between trans and non-trans members in groups since trans members have specific agendas they wish to voice, such as surgery and medical care. However, their communications with other members are meaningful. Q, one of the playwrights in the team, said that the most compelling experiences in the team were the discussions with trans members.¹⁵ To work through such tensions, the trans members have sometimes had to give up their specific agendas and fit the main purpose of the team.

Due to limited resources, the leaders of women’s organizations want to make their activities more efficient. Generally speaking, participation in TVM activities has a deep and lasting influence on team members. Participation has a strong impact on their values and thinking by introducing ideas about gender equality, anti-discrimination, and women’s liberation. Further, they are taught the power of speaking out and of performance. Through this they built up mutual understanding and trust when sharing their feelings and secrets. The achievement of these three goals is unsurprising when a team perform or adapt TVM, since this play has the power to get participants involved, similar to the feminist “Consciousness Rising Group” in 1970s.

15. ‘Q’. Personal interview. Date conducted March 11 2017.

However, what is the significance for the women's movement in taking on the adaptation and performance of this play? When these self-conscious and liberated individuals graduate from universities, they might just as well join the middle class and never contribute to the social movement again. The leaders of the women's movement always feel frustrated with respect to this prospect, since many young activists often disappear despite being expected to lead the movement. To counter this problem, it is important to expand activities that would attract young leaders. BCome Group in Beijing, the Beaver Club in Shanghai and the Spring Feminist Society in Guangzhou have successfully held a number of advocacy activities. For example, they have performed beside trains in the subway, cooperated with other groups, and provided workshops for marginalized communities, all of which are effective ways to engage in leadership training.

Furthermore, most Chinese feminist organizations are based in cities and they understand that the situations in rural areas or factories are very different and that women in those communities face much greater difficulties. The Feminist Spring Society wanted to experiment with presenting the play to a rural audience in order to provide feedback to those women who had been interviewed by members of the Feminist Spring Society and on whose stories several pieces of "For Vagina's Sake" are based. In 2014, a team they organized came to Xia village in southern China and went to other villages every summer and winter holidays from 2014 to 2015. Young students and volunteers of the team learned a lot from the communities and they gained a better understanding of how to work within a rural community, such

as not having a fixed agenda beforehand, but instead listening to the villagers to try to meet their needs. They also learned that entertainment activities such as dance and song are useful means to attract women. In summary, the Spring Feminist Society is providing gender education through theatre.

The Spring Feminist Society also applied these methods to immigrant communities in Shenzhen city and Dongguan city in 2014, 2015, and 2016. Compared to the women who stay in their villages, women who have immigrated to cities enjoy attending these outreach activities and are more willing to accept new ideas because they have benefited from professional training for jobs or other opportunities. Many of them are open-minded or concerned about the rights of their communities. However, according to a Spring Feminist Society survey, the top three needs of activities by immigrant communities are job skills, children's education, and family entertainment. Despite the interest of such women, there are still many challenges to organizing advocate activities or set up feminist theatre. Immigrant women tend not to see theatre as a priority, since these activities are not directly related to their main concerns of families, children and employment. As Zhang explains, theatre requires professional skills and equipment; "it's time consuming to write a play, recite the lines, rehearse and perform [...] they would like to relax when they go to "Worker's Centre", but rehearsal is boring for them."¹⁶ Not only is theatre not a priority for the women from such marginalized communities, the topics of feminist theatre in particular, such as sexuality, sexual orientation, and, gender equality, lack resonance with their experience in their everyday lives.

16. Zhang, *Global Media Activism Made in China*, 2016, p. 92.

The practice of Feminist Spring Society suggests that it is worthy and meaningful to unite these different groups, even though there are great difficulties in attracting participation from women in these marginalized communities. All groups garner benefits from such activities. City women gather stories by interviewing women from marginalized groups who have very different experiences, which is good for their writing or research. Also, city women learn from them how to deal with complicated situations with wit. For women's organizations in the cities, going to the marginalized communities is a good way to provide volunteer training and foster leadership. In the case of women in marginalized communities, feminist theatre is a good space for them to share experiences, speak out and empower themselves as women.

Compared to rehearsing a classical play such as TVM, the process of rewriting it is a more effective way to mobilize and unite people. Creating a new play means that members go through the processes of decision making, experience sharing, writing and cooperating, during which they get to understand women's issues more deeply and they learn some tools to organize a team, advocate, and promote their ideas. So far, TVM has helped to open up a relatively new political avenue in China of using theatre for feminist purposes—something it has not ever been used for in the past. All the organizations mentioned above owe a debt to TVM to different degrees. BCome Group, the Spring Feminist Society, and the Beaver Club were formed for the purpose of adapting TVM and they have explored their own strategies of localizing TVM and forming feminist theatre. Other organizations have also gained reputations and momentum from their performances of TVM, making it an important element to

the ongoing development of Chinese feminist theatre.

From Monologues to Dialogues

The monologue as a form has brought both great praise and criticism to the Enslers the actresses in TVM. Enslers makes this performance simple and easy for amateur actors by adapting monologues, which is one of the fundamental skills in drama performance. For the organizations in China, these methods are flexible and portable enough for the amateur teams. Basing a theatre production around monologues also makes the rehearsal much easier, since the director does not need to coordinate the entire cast for each session. Sophia, the scriptwriter and director of the team at Southeast Normal University, said, “it is easy to copy the model after we run the theatre and then we share it with other teams. It is a good way to get people involved.”¹⁷

However, the form of the monologue can conflict with the polyphonic contents of the play. The script and performance of each scene of Enslers’s TVM represents a single perspective, which is by and for the playwright/actress, even though its title emphasizes the plural “monologues.” The meanings attributed to women’s stories and experiences are based on or related to the vision and opinions of the playwright/actress. As a result, the only position for audiences to identify with is that of the single actress on stage at any given time. Erin Striff, co-director of TVM at the University of Hartford, adds a further critique of this singular perspective, saying that “this intimate

17. Sophia Cai, the scriptwriter and director of TVM at Southeast Normal University. Personal interview. Date conducted March 12 2017.

relationship [between actress and audience] is furthered by the structure of the play: all monologues are delivered directly to the audience, never to any of the women on stage.”¹⁸ In practicing feminist theatre, Striff and her team made an adjustment that slightly betrayed the rules of V-Day: “we had almost all the performers remain onstage throughout the production, so that we could see their responses to each other, creating a dialogue of laughter, tears and shared glances between performers that does not exist in the individual monologues.”¹⁹ Chinese feminist organizations encountered a similar dilemma. In their case, the form of the play must be changed in order to match the content, because Ensler’s original approach with one centre and one perspective, and her “vagina-self” framework are not compatible with the widely varied stories from different communities in China.

While the monologue form does not work for some stories, “double monologues”—in which two actors tell the same story from different perspectives—can provide an appropriate format. Sophia Cai changed her script in this way from monologue to double monologues. She wrote one piece on the issue of “Tongqi” (Gay men’s wives), in which an old lady recounts her sorrow over a depressed marriage with a gay man for more than thirty years. Sophia was not satisfied with this script since she thought that the monologue was too sad and could not inspire further thinking or action. She decided that one more monologue of the “gay husband” should be added to it. These double monologues open up space for different perspectives and create a more complicated and nuanced story. Another scene, “Rape”, a piece from “Our Vaginas

18. Erin Striff, “Staging Communities of Women: Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues and V-Day Benefit Performances”, Handout Document, 2004.

19. Ibid.

Ourselves” (《阴道之道》), written and performed by BCome Group, uses a “triple monologues” for effect. “Rape” has three roles on stage: the rapist, the victim and a justice representative. This form shows vividly how the woman speaks and reacts to her rapist, and how the rapist misunderstands her and tries to justify his own criminal behaviour. Meanwhile the justice representative alternates between a critical and objective tone, which demonstrates the complicated nature of the institution’s role in managing violence against women.

The playwrights and directors in China tend to use acting forms that are familiar for audiences. “Cross Talk” and “Comedy Skit” are traditional Chinese art forms and practices, and feminist theatre has adopted them in order to highlight their power of humour and irony. For instance, “Moaning” has been adapted into a comedy skit by Ai Xiaoming. This performance features three women from different provinces of China who speak different dialects. While the characters initially feel shame, they gradually encourage each other and end up moaning together. Ai’s version of the “Moaning” skit is set in a specific context that allows the audience to understand that the actresses/students are playing roles and not themselves. In such theatre adaptations, it is important to keep the actor at a distance from his or her role, as there is a risk that the audiences might misinterpret the performance as autobiographical, and this puts a great deal of pressure on the students. For example, when in one performance a student, in her onstage role, spoke the lines, “I was raped when I was 12”, a rumour was started that she had actually been raped.

It is challenging for a playwright and director to accommodate so many issues

and styles on one stage, and they risk losing the sense of art in the performance, instead allowing the play to become a lecture or a hodgepodge of ideas. They use different strategies to solve these problems. I would like to illustrate this point by analysing “For Vagina’s Sake” directed by Song Sufeng of Sun Yat-sen University. After a series of discussions, workshops and interviews, the team created a play consisting of ten pieces with an additional opening scene and an encore. For the director Song, presenting these stories as both poetic and political was more significant than what these stories were about.

Firstly, all the stories are presented in a particular way by adding news, interviews or music, which provides information about how these stories came about. During the scene about menstruation, alongside the monologue delivered by a young student, there is an interview video presenting the experiences of the older generation. By the intersection of different generations on-stage and off-stage, this play tried to cope with the gaps between generations. Furthermore, the stories about sexual harassment and domestic violence are based on events happening in China, so related news and statistics follow the performance and are presented in audio or video between the acts. Such supplemental media prevents the play from being disconnected to the world outside the theatre. Feminist theatre should not pay the price of reducing woman’s experiences to simply a sign or a single body image, as Cooper suggests in her critique of “My Vagina Was My Village”:

While many of the Bosnian women Ensler interviewed were refugees (in Croatia and Pakistan), their experience of displacement by (un)civil war is conflated with

sexual violence, both situations *reduced* to the image of the disfigured body. The monologue *removes the speaker—spatially and temporally—from the scene of repeated rape* but suspends her nonetheless in its tragedy, a survivor irrecoverably lost.²⁰

Song realized that this play was performed by students and volunteers from the city for audiences of city, obliging the director to remind audiences that the play is not simply a set of sexy, erotic, and consumable stories. Although the theatre is an enclosed space, the performances should not be experienced in isolation; they should connect to or stimulate a connection with reality.

Secondly, in switching between different roles, situation, topics, and characters, Song's play risks being atomized. There should be a thread running through it in order to prevent audience members from feeling disconnected from the characters and their stories. To unite the scenes and foster actor/audience interaction, this play is designed to include an episode that brings all the actresses back onto the stage again. At the end, right before the encore, all the actresses walk from the audience seats to the stage, each holding a candle and reading one by one. One of the three paragraphs the actresses read is as follows:

A: My body is neither taboo, nor shame. I wish women did not have to care about the judgement of others.

B: I wish women were powerful. They are strong enough to protect themselves. They can fight for justice and recover from the trauma of

20. Cooper, *Worrying about Vaginas*, 2007, p. 746.

violence.

C: I wish I could be myself, no matter whether that be a lady or a man.

D: I wish I had a home for my children, without quarrel, violence and broken furniture.

E: I wish my spouse would be happy to take the responsibilities of contraception.

F: I wish I were not only a mother, but also a woman enjoying a free life and self-realization.

(all actresses on stage)

A: WE.

All actresses: We are women. Women are speaking out.²¹

“We are women” is the main theme of Song’s adaptation and this final line echoes the first line—“I am a woman”—of this play. Different from Ensler’s “Vagina-Self” theme, this play recognizes that some women, such as trans women and intersex women, face the obstacle of not physically possessing a vagina. In response to this, the “vagina” image is not emphasized in “For Vagina’s Sake.” Audiences are not called upon to identify with the vagina or female sexuality, but with women who are from different situations or communities.

The Chinese feminist organizations have developed different working strategies

21. “For Vagina’s Sake.” Dir. Song Sufeng. Sun Yat-sen University, December 2003.

and art forms when adapting TVM based on the needs and the goals of the Chinese women's and LGBT's movements and specific to the circumstances of China.

Conclusion

This study is an examination of how Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* was introduced into China and then localized through rewriting and adaptation. As there are some excellent leaders in different cities and they work together, TVM in China has broadened beyond being just a play, but is now part of a larger scheme of advocacy associated with the women's movement in China. These events cultivate young leadership and encourage some to keep contributing to the women's movement. What makes the Chinese way of rewriting and adapting Eve Ensler's TVM unique is that adaptors rewrote scenes to present the needs of women and LGBT in China. Organizations fighting against domestic violence retold Chinese women's stories rather than merely following the general patterns of worldwide V-day campaigns. In the Chinese adaptations of TVM, major priority was given to politically mobilize people and incite collaborations among different communities, rather than making the shows into entertainments. For this purpose, staging TVM in China incorporates new and localized scenes and stories which attracted local audiences because the stories touched them through representing their concerns. In order to expand the scope of gender consciousness raising and gender rights advocacy, they performed in public spaces, rural areas, and factory communities. The journey of TVM in China shows that building a feminist theatre is possible and also very significant for gender

education and related social movements.

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Evenki's Harmonious Co-Existence with Nature

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Abstract

Zijian Chi's *The Last Quarter of the Moon* is the first Chinese novel depicting the Evenki's vicissitudes of the 20th Century and their current living state. This paper aims to analyze the novel from eco-critical perspective, showing the Evenki's physical and spiritual syncretism with nature in different aspects, including life and death, belief in animism, spirits totem and worship, psychological and artistic dependence on nature, oral tradition, rituals and shamanistic culture. The detailed analyses illustrate that the Evenki ethnic has achieved a harmonious coexistence with nature, while the intrusion of modern civilization not only leaves negative effect on the natural environment but also breaks the balance between the Evenki and nature, forcing the Evenki to leave their familiar natural world and plunging them into losses of freedom, of tradition and culture, and of ethnic identity. Chi uses this novel to warn mankind to take environmental problems seriously and to ponder on the reasonable measures for both social development and environmental protection.

Key Words: Evenki, nature, environment, coexistence

The Chinese writer Zijian Chi's *The Right Bank of the Argun River* (2005), translated into English by American writer Bruce Humes as *The Last Quarter of the Moon* (2013), is a precious masterpiece depicting Evenki culture and representing Evenki literature (Argun is written as "Erguna" or "Ergun" in different articles). Since its publication in the literary journal *Harvest* in 2005, it has been paid close attention to by readers and critics, being called one of "the most worthy to be expected" (<https://baike.so.com/doc/801785-848140.html>). As the first Chinese novel depicting the Evenki's great vicissitudes of the last century and their current living state, it was even made a film by the same name in 2009. Evenki is called the last Chinese hunting nomadic minority, living in the Greater Khing'an Mountains area in Northeast China and herding reindeer. The novel, a first person narrative, reads like an encyclopedia recording and telling a family-style story. In the novel, Evenki people's lifestyle, traditional wisdom, ethnic beliefs, and religious customs are tenderly and poetically narrated by a ninety-year-old lady, the last clan chieftain's wife, recalled from her life-long memory. The narrator's name is not given in the novel, because she says at the end of the novel "I didn't tell you my name, because I don't want to leave my name behind" (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 310). The dazzling epic about the extraordinary woman bears "witness not just to the stories of her tribe but also to the transformation of China" (<https://www.bookdepository.com/Last-Quarter-Moon-Chi-Zijian/9780099555650>). Contemplating on these aspects of ethnic minority's cultural traditions, the author displays how Evenki people's life is integrated with nature both physically and spiritually, meanwhile indicating how environmental changes affect and threaten the survival of the Evenki people and the Evenki culture. These changes,

unfortunately, are the result of irresponsible and destructive exploitation of nature in the process of modern civilization (Chi, “From Mountains to Oceans” 33).

Dissimilar to the modern urban life of clamor, in this novel an idyll of Evenki people is set out. They inhabit a tract of uncontaminated land of pastoral beauty, a self-contained ecosystem (Xiaoyu Wang 10), and through generations of interaction with and adaption to the environment, they have developed a comprehensive ecological view towards nature, a real harmony with the environment absolutely different from the modern one under human intervention. With reverence for nature, they understand and follow the law of nature to live or to migrate in forests and mountains, making minor disturbance in nature while confronting hostile climates or natural disasters and struggling to survive. Their culture is their survival memory, a sediment and accumulation of their ethnic wisdom. The Evenki people and nature together form a real unity, interdependent on each other to maintain a sustainable coexistence.

Zijian Chi, one of China’s most prominent female writers, was born in 1964 in the Arctic Village in Mohe, Heilongjiang province. She is the only writer to this day who has won the Lu Xun Literature Prize three times. Although a Han, she grew up in the same mountains and forests as the Evenki people and witnessed numerous signs of the Evenki culture in her hometown. She was inspired to write about the Evenki history when she read about an Evenki painter Liu Ba, who went out of the mountains and forests with a brilliant artistic talent but came back to the forests after a tiresome and confusing life outside and died accidentally in a river. She then went to live for a short time with the Evenki people in a Settlement in Genhe City,

Heilongjiang Province, heard their stories and experienced their culture. After that, she studied and accumulated numerous documents and composed *The Right Bank of the Argun River*. When the novel was awarded the 7th Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2008, Zijian Chi was praised in the Award Ceremony Speech as a writer with a heart of sincerity and purity telling an ethnic group's cultural changes in a lyrical style and showing her respect for life and her reverence for nature; also, the novel was praised as an excellent work with “fresh style” and profound significance; and a conversation between the writer and Evenki people, distinguished both in ideological connotation and artistic value (<https://baike.so.com/doc/801785-848140.html>).

Abundant studies in China on *The Right Bank of the Argun River* have analyzed the work in different aspects, involving its narrative strategies, figurative features, and aesthetic appreciation, Evenki history and religion, the ethnic traditions and customs, and Evenki people's loss of identity under the impact of modern civilization, etc. Among all these perspectives, ecocriticism is the most popular because of the unique and plentiful ecological concerns in the novel. These articles analytically expound the relationships between human beings and the natural world, the causes and the significance of Chi's writing on nature.

In all these articles, Chi is described as the one who sees “the Unity of Man and Nature” as the real state of civilization. In her more than 20 years of writing career, she keeps writing on the themes related to countryside and nature. She once commented, “Nature is the only thing eternal in the world. It can breathe and has intelligence, always evoking echo in you” (qtd. in Zhou 107). Nature written by Chi

embodies the placation and purification of human spirit, like an inseparable part of human body (Hong, “Eco-critical Interpretation” 55). She longs for the real unity and harmony between human and nature, not only conveying human being’s respect and affection towards nature, but also creating a conversation between man and nature in her works, to treat nature as man’s spiritual homeland. Her emotional resonance with nature is presented in her works in an affectionate ecologist’s view (Zhou 107).

In China, scholars are so fascinated by Chi’s works, not only because of her poetic language with graceful tranquility but also for the sake of her sincere and pure heart concerning life, especially Evenki’s life in *The Right Bank of the Argun River*, an example of the last evidence and symbol of the harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. With an epic presentation of the ups and downs of the Evenki minority, Chi offers an opportunity for scholars to study ethnic minorities in literature and to probe into the survival problems of ethnic minorities, so as to reflect on the process of social development and human civilization around the globe (Dai 51).

In 2013, the publication of the English version aroused a sensation in newspapers, According to Kate Saunders in *The Times*, “Zijian has an extraordinary gift for storytelling and her steely narrator is a true heroine, surviving war and encroaching modernity. Simply magnificent” (<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/books/fiction/article3661417.ece>). In “Independent spirits” in *Financial Times*, Kelly Falconer describes Chi’s story-telling as “an atmospheric modern folk-tale, the saga of the Evenki clan of Inner Mongolia – nomadic reindeer herders whose traditional life alongside the Argun River endured unchanged for centuries, only to be driven almost

to extinction... This is a fitting tribute to the Evenki by a writer of rare talent ... The story is full of allegory. There is the fire that is passed from one generation to the next; the cycles of life and death; and the ‘coexistence of mankind and the Spirits’” (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/bb835fdc-5f0a-11e2-8250-00144feab49a.html>). Lucy Popoescu also shows her love for the novel in commenting that “Zijian Chi’s beautifully realised novel offers a detailed portrait of a way of life hard to imagine today. The narrator comes from a long lineage of clan chieftains and, through her recollections, we follow the decline of the Evenki” (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-last-quarter-of-the-moon-by-chi-zijian-trans-bruce-humes-8475333.html>). In spite of the high praise from newspapers, international academic studies are still insufficient.

Therefore, this paper aims to offer international scholars of the Evenki culture and traditions an insightful look into the Evenki people’s way of life, particularly on their harmonious outlook on nature and their life integrated with the natural environment.

I. Physical Integration with the Environment

Throughout the world, wherever ethnic minorities live, they tend to show strong dependence on the geographic environment, the Evenki being a typical example. According to Evenki’s traditional values, nature is an inseparable element composing their existence. They believe that man has two visions of nature. One is physical; the other is imaginative.

Ethnic peoples’ experience of the natural world includes their dependence on

physical nature, geographic environment, and climatic environment. They inherit the survival memories from their ancestors, pick up their own survival knowledge with the changes of the environment, accumulate the adapted survival memories and pass them down to the next generation. In the same manner, Evenki people's dependence on mountains and forests also reflects their generations of survival memories. Their physical integration with nature enables them to confront the harsh or sometimes even hostile environment and to ensure the nation's existence. As is written in the novel, in the forests on the Right Bank of the Argun seventy years ago, one could frequently encounter two things hanging between trees: wind-burial coffins and *kolbo*, a cache hanging high above the forest floor for storing goods (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 85). Nature provides ethnic people with physical substances to live on and places to die in; in turn, the minorities respectfully take advantage of natural resources and treat entities in nature equal to or higher than themselves, so as to maintain a harmonious and sustainable coexistence.

A. Living on Nature

As the original name of Evenki refers to people living in mountains and forests, the Evenki ethnic live in the Greater Khingan Mountains in the northeast of China, depending on forests and mountains for their survival with a nature-centered worldview. They fish and hunt for food and meanwhile show great love and respect for wild creatures. They live in *shirangju* (teepee) in the forests, whose constructing materials are from nature: poles of larch tree trunks and a covering of birch bark and animal hides. They eat meat-strips, drink reindeer milk and birch sap, use birch-bark baskets

or canoes, and wear roe-deerskin moccasins and gloves (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 10). Tamara, the narrator's mother, even gets a bird-feather skirt as a present from Nidu the Shaman. Nidu the Shaman is the elder brother of the narrator's father, the Shaman in the clan, who also loves the narrator's mother. They estimate the snowfall in the coming winter by observing how high the squirrels hang mushrooms. The higher the mushrooms, the more the snow (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 33). They use *mafenbao* (puffball), a kind of fungus growing in the forest, as medicine for a swollen throat or a bleeding wound. Children even love to step on it for fun.

Mountains and forests not only nourish the Evenk by supplying foods and shelters but also foster their treasured possessions and companions, the reindeer. In return, their care and love for nature is too strong to be ignored in every line of the novel. For example, they only use the bark stripped from birch trees to make utensils because the stripped area can grow a fresh layer of tender bark just one or two years later, they make rituals to thank the natural spirits after having hunted a prey, they carefully prevent the possibility of an unextinguished cigarette, and they would rather live in the mountains and forests than live in the settlement.

Evenki people revere and love nature. The narrator, the last clan chieftain's wife, loves to gaze at "only a handful of stars" (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 8) visible at night, through the tiny opening at the top of the *shirangju*, and feels unable to sleep in a room where she cannot see the stars (4). She says, "If I see a pitch-dark ceiling when I awake from my dreams, my eyes will go blind" (8). She adores the reindeer "for without these creatures we would not be" (22). The reindeer, the symbol of

Evenki people, is depicted to “have always kissed the forests” (309).

B. Death in Nature

In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, “nearly every life ends by accident, and the direct killer is nature” (Hu 16). Linke, the narrator’s father, is struck to death by lightning. The narrator’s second sister and first husband, Lena and Lajide both freeze to death, one in the soft snow after falling from the reindeer because of sound sleep and the other on the horse while dreaming on the way to looking for the lost reindeer. Dashi, a member of the clan, is gobbled up by wolves after a fierce struggle. Valodya, the narrator’s second husband, dies with his skull ripped open by a she-bear.

“Almost all the deaths seem to be the results of conflicts between human beings and nature” (Hong, “On Death Imagery” 6), and sometimes a death is even destined by nature long before it happens. The case is Tibgur’s death in a river the instant Nihau falls off a cliff on her way back to the *urireng* (a clan living together, the basic self-supporting unit in the Evenki culture). Tibgur is the narrator’s second eldest nephew, her sole brother Luni’s son. Nihau is Luni’s wife) “Nihau said Tibgur died in order to save her” (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 224). She cries, ““When that black birch blocked my fall, I saw the tree extend a pair of hands, and those hands were Tibgur’s.’ Tibgur means black birch” (225).

In Evenki culture, a life is bestowed by Spirits of nature, then it should be returned to nature. Therefore, after Linke’s death, Nidu the Shaman, considering that the thunder comes from the Heavens, “constructed Linke’s wind-burial platform especially high

up” to make his grave a bit closer to the sky so that the thunder could return to the Heavens (69-70). When the fawn dies in place of Lena, Mother treats it as an Evenki infant by casting it “on a south-eastern slope” because “the grass there is the first to sprout in the spring, and wild flowers open the earliest” (21).

Actually, in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, not only the final destination, but also the form of death is associated with nature. After Tamara’s death, she is one of “the three piles of ashes: a bonfire’s, for it had burned itself out; a hound’s, for Ilan was deadly still; and a woman’s, for Mother had fallen to the ground”, face to the sky and eyes open fixed in place (117). After the death of his wife in childbirth, An’tsaur, Andaur’s second son, is convinced by the narrator that his wife has become a seed and will sprout, grow and bloom into one of the lotus flowers across Lake Lamu (285). Maybe An’tsaur believes the legend just because of his pure heart as a man who is thought to be somewhat retarded, but it also reflects Evenki’s outlook on death: death is not the end of a life — it is just an integration and transformation of a human’s life with nature, the start of another form of existence.

C. Equality with Nature

Evenki people believe that all creatures in nature live equally with human beings, and in their culture, nature cannot be taken as an entity to be controlled or conquered. They are convinced of animism, “a religious belief that objects, places and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism>).

They believe that mountains are “like human beings with their own temperaments

and physiques... the trees on the mountains are masses of flesh and blood” (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 213). When the narrator recalls the mountains belonging to Egdan, the Greater Khingan Mountain Range, she says, “If the right bank of the Argun where we live is a giant rooted in the earth and holding up the skies, then those water-ways of all sizes are blood vessels criss-crossing his body, and mountain ranges form his skeleton” (213).

The Evenk name rivers and mountains with their features: for example, the mountain covered in lush green pine trees is named the *Listvyanka* Mountain (pine woodland) to commemorate the marriage of Viktor and Lyusya , the narrator’s first son and his wife.

Under the animist belief, the Evenkis automatically integrate themselves with ambient environment: trees and grasses can sing, reindeer understand human nature, and forests are able to think. Therefore, these natural creatures resignedly witness the Evenki’s happiness and sadness, their life and death, reward and penalty from nature, even co-experiencing their bittersweet fate. For instance, when Vladimir, the narrator’s first husband Lajide’s younger brother, plays the *mukulen* (a small awl-shaped musical instrument, made of a flat iron ring with a steel reed, and played with both the mouth to blow and the fingers to pluck the reed) at the narrator’s second marriage ceremony, to welcome Linke’s cousin Ivan and his beautiful bay horse, the horse’s eyes “bewitched by the tune, also shone” (189). Clearly, the animal here is described to have the same emotion as a human being. Moreover, this religious connotation of souls or spirits not only exists in humans, animals, plants, trees,

rocks, mountains, caves, and rivers, but also extends to weather systems or natural phenomena such as thunder storms. At the beginning of the novel, when no one is around to listen to her story, the narrator says, “Then let the rain and the fire listen to my tale. For I know these foes, like human beings, have ears too” (6).

In Evenki’s eyes, everything is the blessing and gift from nature and every life has its own manners, values, and significance. “My body was bestowed by the Spirits, and I shall remain in the mountains to return it to the Spirits” (4). “Reindeer were bestowed upon us by the Spirits, for without these creatures, we would not be” (22).

Evenki people never value themselves superior to other natural existence. On the contrary, they take themselves as sharers, competitors, family members or partners in nature, and sometimes even worship other beings. Dashi had a hawk as his *omolie* (grandson); Tamara treats a fawn that dies in place of Lena as her own child; Evenki people believe that the ancestor of a bear is a human being and they themselves are part of nature, just as Valodya romantically says to the narrator “I am mountains, you are water. Mountains create water, and water nourishes mountains. Where mountains and water meet, earth and sky are eternal” (213).

These close relationships described in the novel between humans and other creatures further prove that Evenki people hold a marvelous insight into nature, firmly believing that man is just a component of the biological chain (Xuesheng Wang 220). Their attitude towards nature is not a blind faith. They change this faith into action, to peacefully and harmoniously coexist with other beings and make every effort in their daily life to preserve nature. They never chop living trees for firewood,

only using firewood from wind-felled trees such as “dry branches, tress struck by lightning, and those blown down by strong winds” (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 83). They only use the bark stripped from birch trees to make utensils like buckets, boxes, or baskets, to store daily necessities, or to make canoes, rather than chopping woods for these purposes, because the stripped area can grow a fresh layer of tender bark just one or two years later. Even at the moment before suicide, the kind-hearted Jindele, Linke’s sister Yyeline’s son, chooses a dead tree to hang himself, not wanting to hurt a vibrant, living one, because he knows that “according to their folk custom, whoever hangs himself will undergo a fire-burial along with the tree that hanged him” (155). Evenki’s care and protection of nature can be also reflected by their best companion and helpers — reindeer. Reindeer “forage very delicately. When they pass through a meadow, they nibble lightly so that hardly a blade of grass is harmed, and what should be green remains green. When they eat birch and willow leaves, they just take a few mouthfuls and move on, leaving the tree lush with branches and leaves” (22).

Sharing the principle of mutual dependence and development between man and nature, and assimilating their ethnic values with simplicity and tranquility of the natural world, the Evenki cautiously take natural resources from mountains and forests. Their insignificant consumption of nature is as negligible “as a handful of dragonflies skimming the water’s surface” (309). Their attitudes towards nature and their minor effect left on nature is striking and instructive, worthwhile for modern people to give deep thought to and make good imitation of.

II. Spiritual Syncretism with the Environment

What is integrated is not only Evenki people's physical existence but also their mental system: how they perceive the environment, how they gain warning or spiritual support from nature, and how they react to the power of nature. Benefiting from nature becomes their outlook on life and their attitude towards problem solving (Sun 57). Living in mountains and forests, Evenki people are conditioned to a primitive life style and natural ideology. They could hardly distinguish the inner world of their perception, emotion, desire, and imagination from the external world of nature. Therefore, they totally resort to the power of nature to explain perplexing phenomena or to soothe their fear and grief (Du 131). Cultural traditions impose extraordinary influence on Evenki people's thoughts and behaviors, evidently proving the existence and the ideology of the ethnicity. In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, Chi patiently depicts Evenki people's emotions, cognition, modes of thinking, and fragments of experience passed down from generation to generation, which, from at least four angles, show Evenki's spiritual syncretism with the natural environment: worship to Spirits, mental dependence on the power of nature, oral tradition inheritance, and ethnic rituals and Shaman dance.

A. Totem and Worship of the Spirits in Nature

Primitive life and ignorance of scientific knowledge leave Evenki people unable to interpret some natural phenomena. Admitting and tolerating supernatural power becomes an easier way to resolve their perplexity. Therefore, conviction of "Animism" and "the Unity of Man and Nature" renders Evenki people an approach to harmonious

coexistence with nature: communicating with nature and worshiping Spirits.

Totem is one way Evenki use to communicate with nature. The Evenki bear totem signifies the relationship between humans and bears. The frequent threat from bears makes Evenki people live in great fear, and therefore the worship of the bear naturally sublimated (Li 33).

Evenkis call all their Clan Spirits *Malu* (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 9), the white buck transporting the *Malu* is called *Malu King*, which normally cannot be ridden or used for mundane tasks. When they move camp, *Malu King* goes at the very front (36). When a bear or a *kandahang*, an elk, the largest creature in the forest is killed, the Shaman makes offerings to the *Malu* (52).

The Evenki deeply revere the Fire Spirit. The reindeer transporting the live cinders for the fire ensures that the light and warmth always accompany them along the path they take when they move camps.

They also believe that mountains, like human beings, have souls. The Evenki hunters show their fear and reverence to *Bainacha*, the Mountain Spirit by making offerings to it and remaining silent when passing by the tall trees with *Binacha's* image carved on them, for they believe that the Mountain Spirit rule over all the wild animals (51).

They communicate with the Mountain Spirit and firmly believe that whoever offends the Mountain Spirit will be punished. A sixteen-year-old from outside the mountains is a tragic negative example. After eating the meat of a fawn “until his

belly was all round,” he “shot a stream of piss on a big tree”, “collapsed on to his bottom, sweat poured off his face, and then – *gduang* – he toppled over” (239). According to Evenki belief, “He must have offended the Mountain Spirit!”

Spirits worship is pervasive in *The Right Bank of the Argun River*, which is just an old Chinese doctrine of “pantheism” (Zhou 107), the belief “that reality is identical with divinity, or that all-things compose an all-encompassing, immanent god” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantheism>). Ready to worship God, pantheists believe that the universe and its phenomena are conceived as a whole and the universe is a manifestation of God or Spirits. Again, this ethnic belief reinforces the fact that Evenki people define themselves as only part of nature, equal to other creatures, closely integrated with nature. They believe that God and Spirits exist beyond them.

B. Psychological Support and Artistic Inspiration from Nature

For Evenki people, human beings are only part of nature, with no higher status than any other creature. Nature has the law to run and the power to control all creatures. Depending on nature, communicating with nature, following its law and calmly accepting what is arranged by nature can soothe their fear and grief when confronting threats and disasters.

In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, nature has the power to rid Evenki people of negative emotions. When other people have left shirangju, the narrator and An'tsaur chose to stay. They never feel lonely because they are integrated with nature.

Evenki people also get comfort from nature to recover from pain and sorrow.

Since they regard death as naturally arranged, after Linke is taken away by thunder and lightning, the narrator “liked to listen to the thunder’s rumble on dark, rainy days. It felt like that was Father speaking to us. His soul was surely hidden there, emitting earth-shaking thunder and blinding rays of light” (71). Nature deprives the narrator of her father, the narrator neither resents it nor curses it. Instead, she still respects it and longs for comfort from it.

Besides psychological dependence, nature is the source of inspiration to nourish Evenki people’s artistic talent and creativity. The first time Irina draws on the rock, she draws a playful reindeer. In her words, “This is a Spirit Reindeer. Only a rock can grow a reindeer that looks like this” (289). Each time she returns to the mountains from her school in Jiliu Township, she confides that painting on the riverside cliffs is much more fascinating than on paper.

Even Zijian Chi acknowledges that when writing *The Right Bank of the Argun River*, she regained her confidence and inspiration from the extending mountains and recovered from her feeling of loneliness to the creation of the novel (Chi, “From Mountains to Oceans” 36).

C. Oral Tradition

Similar to many other ethnics, the Evenki have no writing system. Then oral tradition composes a treasured part of Evenki culture. “Oral tradition is information, memories and knowledge held in common by a group of people, over many generations” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition#cite_note-Vansina-1). It

“constitutes a living, dynamic way of knowing” (Henderson qtd. in Zhu 24) and it weaves “an enormous and dynamic web of story that can be added to as well as drawn upon” (Henderson, qtd. in Zhu 24). The earlier generations, with oral tradition, pass down to the later generations their community beliefs, value standards, ethnic ideals, religious systems, aesthetic tendencies, production knowledge, survival wisdom, and the legends and history of their tribe. “The transmission is through speech or song and may include folktales, ballads, chants, prose or verses” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition#cite_note-Vansina-1).

In the process of Evenki’s adaptation to circumstances, abundant natural elements including geographical conditions of earth, topography, atmosphere, and vegetation take up an indispensable position on oral traditions. In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, many natural elements are intentionally adopted by Chi to show their unique influence on Evenki oral traditions, indicating how the ethnic group is closely related to and integrated with nature.

Through the legend of Lake Lamu, Lake Baikal nowadays in Russia, the narrator inherits the origin of her longhair ancestor, who once lives in mountains around Lake Lamu in the upper Lena River. Lake Lamu is pictured as a blue and broad river, and the place they dwell in on the left Bank of the Argun is depicted as beautiful and peaceful with blue water and verdurous waterweeds. Unfortunately, the natural environment remarkably changes after Russian army’s invasion, forming a sharp contrast to imply the drastic change of Evenki destiny. The pacified place is loused, and they can catch less and less prey year after year. Evenki ancestors who once lived on the left bank

of the Argun “were forced to migrate from the Lena River Valley, cross the Argun and begin their lives anew on the Right Bank” (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 15). After the relocation across the Argun, the ethnicity gradually weakens from twelve clans to just six. Although the change of natural environment does not directly result in the scattering of clans “as the years flowed and the winds blew” (12), the primitive life of Evenki ancestors is undoubtedly disturbed and changed. Fortunately, the mountains on the right bank of the Argun preserve the nomadic essence of the Evenki ethnic tradition.

The oral tale about Hailancha is another example to illustrate the significance of oral tradition in associating the Evenki ethnicity with nature. Hailancha is an Evenki hero, worshiped by them in confronting natural threats, especially the threats from fierce wild animals. Being an orphan, Hailancha herds horses at a young age for a merchant in Hailar, Inner Mongolian. The horses are often hunted by wolves before Hailancha herds them, but wolves keep away from the horses he cares, because while sleeping, he could make a sound of tigers, audible miles away. After growing old, he is seen as an Evenki hero. Actually, Hailancha, a very famous Evenki general in Qing Dynasty, is not fabricated. His deeds were recorded in *Biography of Qing Dynasty* and *Collections of Hailancha's Zouzhe in the Manchu Language and Chinese Qing Court Special Edition*. Nevertheless, his ability to frighten away the wolves still sounds incredible. Analyses of the apotheosized Hailancha in Evenki oral tradition may reveal the process of Evenki people seeking spiritual dependence when facing threats from wolves. To people living in the mountains, wolves are one of the

major threats from nature and it “cannot be perished just like we can’t stop winter’s coming” (53). Therefore, Hailancha in the oral tales is not merely an ethnic hero, he symbolizes a human power to keep away and defeat the threats from nature, resisting and overcoming unfavorable natural factors.

Generally, Evenki oral tradition bears a distinct feature of nature, playing a requisite role in cultural transmission and inheritance. Its multiple forms, rich content and versatile functions ensure the consistent ethnic values and the prominent social status of national ethnics, facilitating scholars’ thorough study of the nation.

D. Rituals and Shaman Culture

Evenki people attach great importance to rituals. They hold rituals for different purposes: seeking power to conquer natural difficulties; praying for blessings from nature so as to avoid penalties from nature; healing sick people; and recording big events, such as birth, marriage, and death. Most of their rituals are significantly related to and affected by natural environment and Shaman exists as the medium between human beings and Spirits in the rituals.

Shaman is the common English translation of Chinese *wu*, a “spirit-intermediary” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_\(shaman\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_(shaman))), who has practiced divination, prayer, sacrifice, rainmaking, and healing in Chinese traditions dating back over 3,000 years. Like oral tradition, Shamanism plays a prominent part in Evenki culture and is deeply rooted in their daily life. Studying ethnic belief and worship, scholars can never overlook Shaman culture in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*.

The function of the Shaman is implemented through Shaman Dances. When there is a big event or a prayer, the Shaman continues the Shaman Dance for several successive hours or days. The last one in the novel is done by Nihau to pray for extinguishing a catastrophic mountain fire creeping from the northern branch of the Greater Khingan Range. What is exceptionally ironic is that the cause of the fire is a cigarette butt carelessly discarded by two forest workers. The so-called modern civilization from outside the mountains destroys nature for people's carelessness, in sharp contrast with the Evenki people, who carefully invent a unique kind of "mouth tobacco" to substitute for cigarettes so as to "prevent the possibility of an unextinguished cigarette" (Chi, *The Last Quarter* 299).

The depiction of the Shaman Dance is normally spectacular: the meticulous preparation and the striking process — even the Spirit Songs, which are usually touching and shocking to the listeners as well as the readers of the novel.

With all these details, the extremely impressive description of the Shaman Dance in this work is about the cost of natural penalties. In spite of being the medium between human beings and nature, the Shaman has to follow the law of nature. On each occasion when the Shaman dances to save someone or something designated to exist or to vanish by nature, the cost is another life.

When Nidu the Shaman saves Lena from a serious illness, "a grey fawn had gone to the dark realm on Lena's behalf" (8). Another instance is Yoshida's vividly colored wound made vanish by Nidu the Shaman without a trace: the cost is the life of Yoshida's horse. Yoshida is a Japanese Lieutenant coming to the narrator's camp.

As to Nihau, who becomes the Shaman by naturally inheriting the mysterious power three years after the death of Nidu the Shaman, she performs exorcism by Shaman Dancing to save a man's ten-year-old son from another tribe, a clan member named Puffball, and a sixteen-year-old Han boy from outside the mountains, with the death of her own children: Grigori, Juktakan and an unborn infant respectively. Grigori hurtles down from the tallest pine near the camp the very day Nihau is on her way back after saving the ten-year-old boy. Nihau knows this will happen before she leaves the camp, but she has to do so. "The Heavens summoned that child. But I kept him here on the earth, so my child had to go in its place... I'm a Shaman,...How can I see someone in death's clutches and not save him?" (169). Similarly, Juktakan is stung to death by wasps and the unborn baby is born dead when Nihau is dancing. The last Shaman Dance by Nihau to extinguish the mountain fire also exhausts herself in the middle of the downpour, which comes after her dance and prayer at the cost of her own life. "In the middle of the downpour, Nihau intoned her final Spirit Song, but collapsed before she could finish" (301). In brief, the Evenki people's religion and beliefs are dominated by the culture of shamanism. The Shamans have some special power, medicine, and magic to heal the sick, control the hunt, and predict the future. Nevertheless, they have to be subject to nature, acting only as an intermediary between the visible world and the spirit world. Whatever blessings from nature are bestowed by nature at its will. When the Shaman or human beings want something undeserved, they have to exchange something else for it with nature.

III. Consequence of Environmental Change

The history of Evenki ethnicity is actually a record of how the nation depends on nature and gradually gets adapted to a tranquil and harmonious life in mountains and forests. Their endeavor to follow the principles in nature has ensured the prosperity of the nation as well as the flourishing evolution of nature. However, the last century did witness their bewilderment and frustration. After World War II and the implementation of settlement policies for the Evenki, not only the social atmosphere but natural environment underwent radical changes, leaving great unfavorable impacts on Evenki's life style and the sustenance of the ethnic development. WWII put the whole world into a chaos and the settlement policy plunged the Evenki nation into a problematic state of maladjustment and fragility to the unprecedented transformation.

In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, the outsiders' intrusion accompanied with environmental changes due to the settlement policy confines the Evenki people to unnatural surroundings and forces them to face three losses: the loss of freedom in mountains and forests, not only the human's freedom but also the reindeer's, the loss of Evenki native language and oral traditions, and the loss of their ethnic identity.

The Last Quarter of the Moon records three settlement movements: to Uqierov, to Jiliu Town, and to Busu, with the first two as failures and the last one leaving an unpredicted future at the end of the novel. According to the Settlement Policies, the government builds houses, schools, hospitals, groceries, and shops to relocate Evenki people in the name of protecting and civilizing them and preserving the natural environment in mountains and forests. Reindeer, the representative of Evenki

ethnicity, are also restricted to a row of reindeer lots with wire entanglement. The government believes that “An ethnicity is not civilized with prospect and way-out, unless it lays down sporting guns” (259).

However, the life and the residence in settlement are so unfamiliar to those Evenki people who are accustomed to *shirangju* in the mountain forests that no one can sleep during the first few days. In Jiliu Town, for example: “They slipped out of their houses and wandered like sleepwalking ghosts...so did their hunting dogs” (261). The unfamiliar hunting dogs encounter and bark at one another, causing no peace in the middle of the night. As the narrator protests, “I won’t sleep in a room where I can’t see the stars... If I see a pitch-dark ceiling when I awake from my dreams, my eyes will go blind. My reindeer have committed no crime, and I don’t want to see them imprisoned either” (4).

Obviously, the Settlement Policy does not take account of Evenki people’s will, confining them not only physically but also spiritually by depriving them of their way of cultural inheritance. The abrupt transformation from the life in nature to a life in the Settlement spares not enough time for the Evenki people to adapt themselves to the new environment. Education in the Han language and rare communication with outsiders in Evenki native language put Evenki language into an awkward and endangered state. Without natural environment, without an appropriate population of Evenki language users, without a writing system, with the passing away of more and more older generations of Evenki tradition defenders, with younger generations’ assimilation to the mainstream culture, the Evenki ethnic culture, historical records

and survival memories are hardly transmitted. Subsequently, the oral language itself will unavoidably vanish, with the loss of its carrier and vitality. A language bears the history and the culture of that nation, represents an ethnic identity, and is a symbol to unite the people. The diminishing use of Evenki language accompanied with the loss of its oral tradition seems to spell the extinction of the ethnicity not only in reality but also in history. Just as Chi once expresses her worries explicitly, “when a nation without written language is disappearing, we even have no chance to touch it. The primitive atmosphere of it exists no more, which is definitely a misery” (qtd. in Cao 54).

In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, the same pessimistic prospect is also signified through the narrator’s questions and self-answers in each chapter. The narrator is wondering who will come to listen to her story: the rain and the fire; the roe-deer skin sock, coloured handkerchief, hip flask, deer-bone necklace and reindeer bells; the purple chrysanthemums and the birch-bark vase. It is really a tragedy that all these listeners are objects rather than humans. With such a worry to reluctantly accept the gradual disappearance of Evenki language and a mercy to retain the fragile language as well as the unique ethnicity, Chi makes one more effort in *The Last Quarter of the Moon*: to create the figure Shibani, an inheritor of Evenki language and Evenki culture. Shibani is the son of Maikan, Vladimir’s adopted daughter. “Shibani had two great loves: creating Evenki pictographs and making birch-bark handicrafts. He preferred to speak Evenki” (296). “Shibani’s greatest dream was to render our Evenki language in an accurate written form and ensure that it could be passed on to future generations”

(297).

The intrusion and the dominance of the mainstream culture degrade the Evenki culture. Being forced to desert the familiar natural world and having to mix with the outside culture, the Evenki have to desert their purity of ethnic identity, losing “parts or functions of the body; value or symbolic possessions; interactional or significant other; social or cultural symbols or meanings; and, finally, moral or spiritual beliefs or values” (qtd. in Zhu 71). The younger Evenki generations particularly display their unease in this process, like uprooted trees with no place to rest on. Sakhar’s intemperance and Soma’s indulgence in sex seem to be a pathological phenomenon, a kind of self-exile due to the imbalance between their inner world and the new environment. Sakhar is the son of An’tsaur and Yolién and Soma is the second daughter of the narrator’s sole daughter Tatiana. Despite the genetically established tendency of Evenki people towards alcoholism, for example, Sakhar’s heavy drinking, vandalizing, stealing woods, and finally being imprisoned reveals an absolutely chaotic state in his inner world, a conflict between two cultures, a violent resistance to the modern civilization. Having suddenly betrayed their beliefs and traditions and being lost in modern civilization, the Evenki people struggle and disappoint at their situations, which leads them to a wrong way of releasing the emotional pressure.

Irina, Tatiana’s first daughter, becomes the first university student of the Evenki people, but falls in a dilemma between the outside modern civilization and the beauty of nature. Her confusion in identity is filled with affliction and irresolution. A successful study and work experience along with an unsuccessful marriage and

unhappy cohabitation experience leaves indelible pains in her heart. While one or two months' life back in the mountains every year comforts her, she is also bored with the simple life style. Hesitating between the traditional and the modern civilization, she ends her life in a tragedy after a splendid painting of Shaman Dance. At the moment of sighing at Irina's tragic ending, it should be noticed that the identity loss, even her death, implies Chi's worry and conflicting thoughts on the survival crisis of the Evenki people and culture under the impact of modern civilization (Xu 116).

Maksym's loss of identity is illustrated in the last part of the novel. Maksym is the narrator's youngest nephew, Luni and Nihau's son. Resisting the Han language and protecting the Evenki language, being good at woodcutting and helping Shiban to carve Evenki words on woodblocks and even having been naturally chosen to be the next Shaman, Maksym could have been a qualified successor of the Evenki culture and Evenki language. Yet the tragic fate of Nidu the Shaman and Nihao, who both sacrifice tremendously for being the Shaman, warns the tribal residents to cut off his connection with Spirits and "isolate Maksym from that mysterious and gloomy ambience" (308). Therefore, except for his occasional odd behaviors in drought, Maksym gradually becomes an ordinary person and has missed the chance to inherit the mysterious power of the Shaman.

As Chi remarks, "almost all of them are confused and miserable people, whose souls have been crushed into pieces by the rolling wheels of modern civilization" (Chi and Hu, "Embarrassment" 34). The rapid switch of environments forces Evenki people into a rapid shift of identity, usually generating maladjustment in them in the

form of psychological dislocation and causing a cultural fracture in their inner world, which finally leads to a separation of soul from body.

Conclusion

In *The Last Quarter of the Moon*, Zijian Chi builds a delicately designed beautiful world, where the Evenki and nature coexist harmoniously. The world is not only a geographic space but a dreamland and poetic habitat depicted for human beings. Men as creative beings will inevitably intervene and transform nature, while the rude intrusion and disturbance into the natural world has brought and will further bring conflicts and oppositions between men and nature. In the long run, human beings are surely projected to be the victims of their own behaviors. Chi in *The Last Quarter of the Moon* criticizes a serious ecological imbalance caused by the modern civilization and to advise humans to ponder on a feasible way to handle the problems of nature brought by modernization.

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Morning View of Lujiazui, Shanghai

Jian Tang

From Feminine Tears to the Male Gaze: The Demise of the *Huangmei Diao* Opera Film in Late- 1960s Hong Kong

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The year of 1967, when *Dr. Dolittle* was crushed at the Oscars by *Bonnie and Clyde*, marked the fall of the American musicals and the emergence of the new Hollywood era. Around the same time, a parallel movement occurred in Hong Kong cinema: the productions of *The Perfumed Arrow* 女秀才 in 1966 (*Arrow* henceforth) and *Forever and Ever* 金石情 in 1968 (*Forever* henceforth) signaled the end of the *huangmei diao* (“yellow-plum-melody”) 黄梅调 opera film craze. The costume musical genre, based on traditional subjects and adorned with *Huangmei* opera-like music, had been enjoying phenomenal popularity in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia since the late 1950s. However, with the announced arrival of “martial arts century” in 1965,¹ the genre’s glamor started to fade away.

Although considerable scholarship has been devoted to the genre in recent years,

1. In 1965, the Shaws Brothers studio announced in its official magazine *Southern Screen* the launch of the forthcoming New Wuxia Century.

with emphasis on the genre's crown jewel, *The Love Eterne* 梁祝 (*Eterne* henceforth),² little attention has been paid to *Arrow* and *Forever*. In this essay, I will examine how the two films at the tail-end of the developmental trajectory of the *huangmei diao* film was conditioned by the socio-political context in colonial Hong Kong towards the end of 1960s. Often recognized as a quintessential embodiment of a cultural-nationalist form in Chinese cinema, the *huangmei diao* film's uniqueness lies in its formulaic combination of chaste heterosexual romance and cross-gender casting. With its melodramatic devices and high emotionalism, *Forever* perfectly represents and hyperbolizes various aspects of the genre, especially the physical restraint of the lovers and their cultivation of purified emotions. *Arrow*, however, breaks out of its generic conventions and deconstructs the genre by parodying the pure romantic civil drama formula with martial arts and sexually charged elements. Both films' conscious negotiation with the chaste and feminized tradition coincides with mainland China's Cultural Revolution, social upheaval in Hong Kong, especially with the rise of the "new style" martial arts film.

Forever and Ever in the Shadow of Love Eterne

Forever grew out of the attempt by Shaw Brothers to duplicate its earlier, unprecedented success with *Eterne* in 1963. Reveling in genre conventions

2. *Love Eterne* is based on the legend of the butterfly lovers, universally accepted in Chinese culture as the preeminent, archetypal love story. The story is about a young woman in ancient China, Zhu Yingtai, who is only able to study by dressing as a man. In that disguise, she befriends a male student, named Liang Shanbo, who does not see through her masquerade. Zhu leaves school early, taking Liang's promise to visit her soon at her home. Liang visits Zhu belatedly and finds out that she is a woman. Liang's marriage proposal is rejected, since Zhu has already been betrothed to another man. Soon thereafter Liang dies of a broken heart. When the bride Zhu is taken to her fiancé's home, the marriage procession is stopped by a tempest near the site of Liang's tomb. Zhu visits the tomb, and upon her wailing the tomb opens for her to disappear into it. The lovers are united in death, as they escape the tomb as a pair of butterflies.

and simultaneously pushing them into extremes, *Forever* makes an interesting case of the intricate dialectics between the feminine-gendered discourse (a romantic framework), the performance of cross-dressing, and high romanticism/sentimentalism. Like *Eterne*, *Forever* is also based on a legend deeply rooted in the Chinese folk tradition. The most famous version is 麻风女邱丽玉 (Story of Qiu Liyu, the Leper Girl) by 宣鼎 *Xuan Ding* in 1877, which can be summed up as follows:

The hero is Chen Qi, from Anhui traveling in western Guangdong in search of a relative. Destitute, Chen accepts the proposal of a matchmaker to marry into a wealthy local family. Ignorant of the *guolai* 过癩 / *passing on leprosy* custom, he is pleasantly surprised to find that his wife is exceptionally beautiful. The woman, Qiu Liyu, falls in love with the man, whom she does not want to contaminate with her deadly disease. On the wedding night, she tells him about the custom and plans his escape by pretending they have united, which they never did. Chen eventually obtains money from Qiu's family and returns to Anhui. Qiu later inevitably develops the disease and is expelled from her family. She begs her way to Anhui and finds her husband's family, owners of a winery. Even though she is warmly accepted by the family, who are grateful to her for saving the young man's life, she is aware that she has become a burden to her husband and decided to commit suicide. One night she sees a gigantic viper falling into one of the wine pots. Thinking that will

be poisonous, she takes the wine, and her disease is miraculously cured. The happy couple returns to Guangdong and make viper wine as a drug that cures numerous *mafeng* 麻风 patients (Leung 126).

This version has been widely circulating and adopted by various traditional and modern forms in China throughout the beginning of the 20th century, with the most famous version being Yu Opera's 豫剧 *Flower of Female Chastity* 女贞花. Without any doubt, it also set the framework for Lo's cinematic adaptation of the story:

1. A poor scholar, Li Xiaowen, is on his way to the capital to take the imperial examination. During his adjourn at a Buddhist temple, he runs into a local gentry called Liu, who takes a keen interest in Xiaowen and promises him the hand of his daughter, Zhenlian.
2. But, on their wedding night, the bride keeps her distance from the groom and refuses to consummate their marriage. First, she cites fasting for a hundred days as her excuse. Then she confesses that she is infected with leprosy and the marriage arrangements have been made so that she can pass it on in physical intimacy.
3. Xiaowen is so touched by her virtue and integrity that he is willing to be intimate with her despite the terrible consequences. But Zhenlian comes up with tricks that will fool her father and enable Xiaowen to escape.
4. Zhenlian bids a tearful farewell to Xiaowen before he goes home.

5. After the incubation period of the disease is over and the symptoms start to appear, Zhenlian's father finds out the deception and locks her in a stone house;
6. With the help of her loyal maid, Zhenlian escapes and cross-dresses to make her way to her husband's hometown.
7. A desperate Zhenlian, who does not want to become a burden to Xiaowen, tries to commit suicide by drinking poisoned viper wine, but, miraculously, the poison cures her illness.

Lo's film features the archetypal topoi from the original source: The beautiful and virtuous heroine, who refuses to contaminate her groom with her deadly disease, is eventually rewarded with the miraculous curing of her leprosy through viper wine. Thus, instead of a sign of condemnation, the leprous body is an icon of its bearer's virtue. The suffering heroine's chastity and moral superiority are best reflected in her attempted suicide. In the traditional Chinese moral universe, this ultimate act of self-sacrifice elevates her to martyrdom. While the unique *guolai* / *passing on leprosy* custom still functions as the setting of the film narrative and the suffering heroine as the focus, it is significant to observe that the conventional female virtue of chastity is conveyed within the framework of romantic melodrama, which is typical of the *huangmei diao* genre's formula. The shift in focus is reflected in the film's name change from *Flower of Female Chastity* to *Forever and Ever* 金石情 (*Jinshi Qing*, literally *Love like Metal and Stone* – a metaphor of permanence, comparable to “cast in bronze” or “written in stone” in English).

Indeed, the infiltration of such melodramatic elements as female subjectivity and heightened emotions is what differentiates *Forever* from the other versions of the leprosy story. Following the genre's conventions, "a female subject and the female consciousness who guided the vision, the gaze, and perspective" (Chiao 84). Xiangyang Chen aptly points out the crucial and consistent role that the woman's voice plays in the *huangmei diao* film in his study *Women, Generic Aesthetics, Vernacular*. On the functions of the female-dominated choral voiceover in *Diau Chan* 貂蝉, a pioneering piece of the genre, Chen comments:

After a brief prologue, a choral voiceover, becoming female-dominated over its course, is employed for a number of functions: to propel the narrative, relate the back-story, link scenes, comment on a character's state of mind, externalize Diau Chan's interior monologues by relaying her asides, and providing a concluding coda. [...] The enveloping nature of sound thus saturates the film in the feminine. (180)

Setting the tone and rhythm of the narrative, a female-dominated choral voiceover serves a similar purpose in *Forever*. The narrative of the film is framed by the theme song and soundtrack sung by the same off-screen female-dominated, albeit mixed, chorus during the opening credit sequence and in the concluding coda sequence. The female vocal melody strongly suggests that the film's narrative originates from a female viewpoint.

The female perspective also explains the casting of a female actor for the male lead role, a customary practice in *huangmei diao* film productions. Ivy Ling Po 凌

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波, best known for her portrayal of Liang Shanbo, the male protagonist in *Eterne*, was cast to play Xiaowen³ (fig. 1). It might be suspected that Ivy's success in playing male roles resided in her ability to disguise the crossing from her biological sex to a performative masculine identity. But the contrary proved to be true: her cross-gender performance has more to do with unveiling/highlighting femininity than internalizing masculinity. Ivy had a unique face not exactly associated with "average" beauties on silver screen, but her feminine features are rather unmistakable. At 5 feet 3 inches, weighing about 90 pounds, Ivy was shorter in stature than most of her female co-stars. Her singing voice is never low-pitched enough to convincingly pass as a male voice—a powerful signifier of masculinity. Thus, although the female body of Ivy is appropriated as the vehicle to perform the male role, there is obviously no self-conscious eradication of the female "self" taking place. Like her other romantic male roles, her character in *Forever* represents a fully feminized, excessive capacity for being faithful in love. Xiaowen is so consumed by his love for Zhenlian that he neglects the pursuit of scholarly honor and official rank, which was considered to be standard male duties at the time. The most telling example of Xiaowen's identification with femininity and disregard of masculinity is when the female choral voiceover employs a first-person point of view to narrate his exhaustive efforts to seek cure for Zhenlian's leprosy.

3. Originally, Ivy had been chosen for the role of Zhenlian, but her fans vehemently objected the concept and succeeded in getting her to cross-dress to play Xiaowen.



Figure 1. *Forever and Ever*. Scene still. Dir. Lo Wei. 1968.

In contrast to the voyeurism and fetishism associated with the male spectator, Doane sees femininity in cinema defined in terms of masochism (16). The film narrative of *Forever* is filled with masochistic scenarios featuring the female protagonist as victim. The tragic grief and indignation, disappointment and frustration that Zhenlian experiences are seen in the scenario of victimization and suffering and its investment in tears: her confession at the wedding chamber of her meager fate; her farewell to her lover; her being driven out of the house by her despotic father; and her suicide attempt (fig. 2). The masochistic pleasures offered by the suffering woman for the audience are perfectly summed up by Run Run Shaw, the Shaw Brothers' studio boss: "Chinese audience likes watching women in films. What they like even more is to watch them cry, suffer, then end up happily ever after with their lovers when all the ordeal is over" (qtd. in Zeng 31). In the *huangmei diao* world permeated with heightened emotions, the melodramatic construction of the lovers eventually

overcoming obstacles to achieve the fulfillment of desire (有情人终成眷属) confirms what Pansy Duncan astutely observes: “[Melodrama’s] investment in tears, far exceeds its investment in the heterosexual union for which those tears appear to fall. Tears occupy an interesting dual status: as at once the ultimate verification of, and the ultimate obstacle to, the heterosexual desire” (192). True to the genre, the love narrative of *Forever* is primarily designed as a narrative of postponement and deferral of physical consummation and an exhibition of highly sublimated sentiment.



Figure 2. *Forever and Ever*. Scene stills. Dir. Lo Wei. 1968.

The genre’s tendency to privilege the “pure,” virginal, and chaste ideal of love is pushed to its extreme in *Forever*’s leprosy motif. Though essentially physical in nature, leprosy in *Forever* seems to function metaphorically as the partitioning and the erasure of the physical aspect. Doane aptly points out the “marked lack of

narcissism on the part of the sick woman,” measured by her “undesirable appearance” (40-41). In other words, a woman is marked as sick if she is not sufficiently invested in desiring the man’s desiring gaze. In Zhenlian’s case, her physical beauty in the incubatory stage of leprosy makes her an apt target of the male gaze. But the perceived contagiousness of leprosy makes her body undesirable. The result is the absence of a controlling male-on-female gaze where women are presented as an image or spectacle and men as bearers of the look. Chastened of the male perspective and sanitized of any eroticism, *Forever* inverts the patriarchal visual rhetoric defined by Laura Mulvey and frustrates any possible voyeuristic appetites by highlighting women’s agency and feminine emotions.

Furthermore, as one of the most feared diseases, leprosy does not simply make the body undesirable but transforms it into something alienating. Its disfigurement seemed to be evidence of physical corruption, a frightening reminder of the inevitability of disease and destruction. Attached to this deadly disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny. As an affliction that represents uncleanness and danger, the disease is also imbued with moral significance and conceptualized as a metaphor for stigma, sketching the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in society. Rod Edmond accurately observes:

Leprosy [...] is a boundary disease par excellence. It can focus and dramatize the risk of trespass, serve as a punishment for such infringements, and help to re-establish the categories and boundaries that

define out relation to the world by keeping the clean from the unclean, and thereby rescuing purity from danger. (81)

In *Forever*, leprosy is supposedly transmitted through sexual intercourse and physical intimacy. The body of the leper thus becomes the living signifier of isolation, confinement, and exclusion. The curing of the female sufferer through sexual transmission (passing the disease on to her sexual partner) is a unique and peculiar gender-based construct that produces the effect of subtly differentiating men from women, since the custom/belief only applies to women. As male lepers were never believed to be cured through sexual intercourse with healthy women, the burden of purity was mainly on the body of female.

As a result, female leprosy can be construed as symbolizing female body as unclean: the dangerously contagious female body comes to symbolize the female pollution. Physicality needs to be suppressed because female body/sexuality is considered as a source of pollution. Thus, *Forever's* choice of a leprous female protagonist represents “rituals of exclusion” (Foucault 198) by securing the bodily aspect in the enclosed, segmented space, thus “spatial partitioning” of the sexual desires (Foucault 195). The exile of the leper, i.e. of the female body, equals the exile of the sexual desire. On a symbolic level, Zhenlian's near death/suicide attempt is her final act to transcend physical constraints and achieve the goal of purified spiritual love for Xiaowen. The lovers embrace love not in the form of its physical consummation but its symbolic substitution, as Ray Chow rightly claims: “The melodramatic physical restraint of the Chinese lovers as signifying gestures in themselves indicates that the

desires of this exquisite, sentimental world are communicated through a consistent concealment of the lovers' bodies" ([Rereading *Mandarin Ducks*] 71).

In conclusion, in the huangmei diao genre a new feminine aesthetic has established to ensure the triumph of emotional authenticity over sexual desire. True to the genre tradition, *Forever* emphasizes the withholding and postponing of the physical intimacy and the pursuit of rarified and sublimated passion. To preserve an uncontaminated sentimental space, love must be safely partitioned from sexual desire with the device of female cross-dressing and a contagious illness. The leprosy motif is thus critical in maintaining the fundamental asexuality of the cinematic performance space in *Forever*. By reducing the specularizable nature of, and desexualizing, the female body, the loving act itself becomes the beloved object because of the sheer intensity of their love.

Subversion of the Feminized Tradition in *The Perfumed Arrow*

As discussed above, *Forever* hyperbolizes various aspects of the genre's conventions, especially the physical restraint of the lovers and the penchant for melodramatic emotionalism. However, the genre's distinct aura of the fabled innocence, coded as a feminine cultural style, seems to be completely lost in *Arrow*. In this part, I will discuss how *Arrow* breaks out of its generic conventions and indeed deconstructs the very genre by parodying the romantic drama formula. I will trace how the melodramatic devices and high emotionalism represented in *Forever* lapses into comic denouements and sites of sexual desires in *Arrow*.

Arrow is straight-cast, thus breaks with the genre's well-established convention of leading men being played by women. Opposite two male actors, Jin Feng 金峰 and He Fan 何藩, Ivy Ling Bo stars in the lead role of Wen Fei-E 闻蜚娥, a bright and beautiful young woman, who often adopts male persona and dresses as a man (under the name Junqing) to study Confucian classics and learn martial arts. She becomes best friends with two male classmates, Du Zizhong 杜子中 and Wei Zhuanzhi 魏撰之, who are unaware of her true identity. When pressured by her parents to choose a mate between the two, Wen uses a perfumed arrow to decide whom she is fated to marry. That is, she shoots an arrow from her garden and whoever finds it will be her future groom. Not until the arrow is picked up by Wei does Wen realize that she is in love with Du. Later at an inn the cross-dressed Wen happens to rescue a woman from an attempted rape, who mistakes her as a man and then feels indebted. With two brides now available, the film ends on a happy note with two weddings.

This story with the cross-dressing theme is strongly reminiscent of *Eterne* and can be mistaken as a nostalgic nod to the golden age of the genre. But a comparison between similar scenarios reveals the filmmakers' different approaches to the diegetic cross-dressing theme, which poses the central question of how the cross-dresser maintains and conceals her disguised body. There are many 'doubt' situations in *Eterne*, during which Liang comes close to discovering Zhu's true sexual identity: He questions Zhu's pierced earlobes (a female bodily attribute) and expresses his disbelief at her superb sewing skills (sewing like a girl). Similar to *Eterne*, *Arrow* contains classic scenes of doubts, tests (suspicions) and near-discovery of the true

sexual identity of the cross-dresser. Wen's male friends nourish suspicions about her sexual identity. Her gentle and quiet demeanor and her effeminate appearance are repeatedly teased by her male friends, and at one point she must show her martial prowess to convince them that she is not a fragile female. The critical point of doubt is eventually reached, when Zizhong notices something unusual during his impromptu visit to Wen's boudoir and confronts her with questions such as: Why does she have an embroidery frame and a pair of women's shoes in her bedroom (fig. 3)? Like Yingtai, Wen succeeds in neutralizing the awkward situation and warding off the suspicions with the pretense of having a sister. Any of Du's doubts is eventually dispelled when he discovers a pair of women's feet and then Wen's maid hiding behind a curtain and starts teasing Wen for being a romantic Casanova (fig. 4). Although, like Zhu in *Eterne*, Wen's disguise survives this scare and remains under wraps, the "doubt" sequence of *Arrow* imparts a different feel: unlike the innocent exchanges in *Eterne*, those in *Arrow* take on an unmistakably sexually charged undertone. The repeated close-up shots of the embroidered shoes (a significant signifier of female identity, implying foot fetish and sexual obsession in Chinese culture) and the accusation of Wen carrying on a clandestine love affair with her maid reveal the male gaze that puts the gendered body of woman on display and thereby turns it into an object of male desire.



Figure 3. *Perfumed Arrow*. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.



Figure 4. *Perfumed Arrow*. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.

A comparison of another scenario contained in both *Eterne* and *Arrow* makes the difference more striking when the cross-dressed female protagonist is forced to navigate how to share the room and bed with the male protagonist. In *Eterne*, when Zhu becomes ill, Liang insists on staying over in Zhu's room so that he can wait on her at night, despite her ardent objections. The next morning, Zhu's maid discovers,

to her relief, that Liang has spent the night at the desk, instead of on her mistress' bed, and Zhu has taken precautions of placing a nightstand in the middle of the bed as a divider. Thus, Zhu survives the crisis with her disguise and her chastity is unscathed. A similar scenario is seen in *Arrow*, however, unlike her counterpart in *Eterne*, Wen, the diegetic and occasional male impersonator, is caught in the act. When Wen in male garb meets Du in the capital, she is invited to stay over for the night. Upon realizing that she is expected to share the bed with Du, she tries to make a hasty retreat, but to no avail, because Du insists that nothing is improper about two male fiends sleeping on the same bed. Wen hastens to place a nightstand in the middle of their bed as a divider. Fully clothed and with the scholar hat on, Wen quickly crawls into her side of the bed, and pretends to fall fast asleep. The next morning, through Wen's servants' eyes and to their relief, Du and Wen are seen abiding by the boundaries set up by the nightstand. However, Du gets up early and stumbles upon Wen's well-kept secret because Wen's scholar hat has fallen off during the night and her hair is exposed. When Du tries to pick up her hat, he accidentally comes into contact with her hair and realizes that his friend is a woman (fig. 5). Looking at her long, soft and fragrant hair and slender pointed fingers, Du is reminded of her pretty and feminine appearance, her strange behavior, and her bedroom that resembles a boudoir, and detects the female aura and senses a woman in disguise. The unveiling of the cross-dresser's sexual identity (previously kept under tight wraps by her loose, voluminous robe/costume) is unprecedented in the *huangmei diao* film. What is more significant is that the scene of Du looking at the sleeping Wen is a text book case of Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory: the split between male, active gaze which looks and female passivity which

is looked upon. We see the camera surveying Wen by panning her whole body before zooming in to her face (fig. 6). Immediately following this shot, the camera pans to Du, who is watching her. Wen is asleep, i.e. in a passive state, so Du can objectify her and watch with amazement as his sworn brother reveals to be a beautiful woman. He must resist his impulse to reach for her, for fear of breaking Confucian ritual propriety. Using the shot reverse shot between the watching Du and the sleeping Wen, we become aligned with the point of view of the male protagonist. We take pleasure in the power of the voyeuristic as the subjective camera shot constructs a “visual focalizer” and thus shifts our vantage point to the active masculine position that desires her.



Figure 5. *Perfumed Arrow*. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.



Figure 6. Perfumed Arrow. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.

Embarrassed by his discovery and the fact that he has shared the bed with a woman the previous night, Du decides to feign ignorance first. The scene that follows again shows an uncanny resemblance to the “Eighteen Miles” scene in *Eterne*. Like Zhu, the cross-dressed Wen is accompanied by Du on her way home. In *Eterne*, it is Zhu Yingtai in male disguise that needs a tactical maneuver to negotiate the dilemma that she is in: how to tell Liang about her true identity and her love for him at the same time. She improvises on what she sees on her journey and invokes eighteen metaphors of love, including flowers, butterflies, and mandarin ducks, the story of the Cowherd and the Girl Weaver, monks and nuns, and the hall of Guanyin. In *Arrow*, however, it is Du who sees through the female cross-dresser’s disguise and faces the dilemma: how to inform Wen of his new discovery of her true identity and to confess his feelings for her. Like Zhu, Du also uses things he sees in nature to invoke metaphors of love, including mandarin ducks. While Liang is innocently kept in the dark throughout the scene, Du’s knowledge of Wen’s identity makes him aggressive in pursuing her. The lyrics are filled with flirtatious and bawdy dialogues and gestures,

and the crude talk suggests the rising adrenaline and libidinal impulses of the male protagonist (fig. 7). The tone in the lyrics and the way in which the issue of the gendered body is treated here indicates a reversal of the genre's inherited tradition of the chaste narrative. Indeed, it totally subverts the setup by taking the male point of view. We experience Du's point of view gazing at Wen, and take pleasure in the power of the voyeuristic as the camera shifts our vantage point to the active masculine position of desiring her. While women's bodies are objectified, the development of the intimate relationship between the lovers and their expressions of emotions and feelings become less pronounced.⁴



Figure 7. *Perfumed Arrow*. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.

The fascination with the female body in *Arrow* is most apparent in a scene that contains a flash of female nudity when the secondary female lead is drugged by a villain and threatened to be violated. Facing the sadistic threat of the villain, the virginity, chastity, and bodily integrity of the woman are rescued at the nick of the moment. In the attempted rape scene, the actress's full-frontal nude body is clearly

4. For a pertinent analysis of the scene, see Tan's "*Huangmei Opera Films*."

shown on the screen (fig. 8).⁵ The very appearance of the sensual details of her hips and breasts indicates that she is objectified, reduced to a sexual body and the film valorizes the lustful male gaze upon a vulnerable, naked female. Imposed upon with close-ups of the victim's uncensored nude body, the audience is forced to be aligned with the penetrator's leering perspective. The introduction of the lascivious male gaze signals a stark divergence within a film genre otherwise noted for chaste romantic narratives. In the chaste tradition of *huangmei diao* films, where characters' bodies are hidden behind their loose, volumous robes/consumes and lovers barely touch each other, let alone hold hands, kiss or any physical intimacy, the audacious display of nudity in *Arrow* is unprecedented. When the lovers' cultivation of purified emotions in *Forever* eliminates the male-on-female gaze on screen, their desire is deeroticized and channeled into heightened sentiment. The explicit scenes in *Arrow* are giveaways of male erotic obsession materialized in female bodies. Along with martial arts elements, sexual tensions in the film indicate a major shift from the feminine aesthetics, which had dominated Hong Kong cinema since the mid-1950s, towards a masculine aesthetics. It might come as no surprise that Zhang Che, one of the premier martial arts film directors in the 1970s, was the scriptwriter for the film. His most celebrated film *One-Armed Swordsman* would come out the following year, which signaled the rise of male-centered martial arts film with *yanggang* 阳刚 (staunch masculinity) as its core element.

5. The woman laments: "I am ashamed that my clothes are torn. If you carry me back home, how can I ever face my parents?"



Figure 8. *Perfumed Arrow*. Scene still. Dir. Kao Li. 1966.

The Loss of Innocence in the Era of Social Unrest

Genre films emerge as artifacts of their society and serve to redefine and mythologize the way that society sees itself because they reflect societal values and beliefs as well as a need for those values and beliefs. Schatz believes that genres should be seen as a “collective cultural expression,” hence “vehicles of and for the exploration of ideas, ideals, cultural values and ideological dilemmas” central to society (13). The section intends to examine the ideology behind the generic ascendancy of martial arts in Hong Kong cinema and the correspondent disenchantment and decline (although not disappearance) of the *huangmei diao* film. This shift to martial arts seems to be the result of a number of discrete but coincident cultural phenomena: audience fatigue of the perceived feminine aesthetics; the impact of male aesthetics in connection with the Cultural Revolution and anti-colonial unrest.

The domineering position that the *huangmei diao* film occupied between the 1950s and the 1960s in Hong Kong cinema was conditioned by the socio-political context in colonial Hong Kong. The genre appeared at a time when close

to a million mainlanders crowded into Hong Kong and changed the demographics and political structure of the colonial society. Famed film director King Hu once described the predicament of an entire generation of Chinese in exile in the following words: “I envy people with their own homeland. The feeling of having a homeland has almost completely escaped me throughout my life. I have always been feeling like a passerby [*guoke*]” (Hou 86). The experience of geographical displacement and cultural rootlessness of the Chinese communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and diaspora, encouraged a nostalgic ‘craving for China.’ With its expression of a Pan-Chinese classical impressionism⁶ resonating with the Chinese diaspora in the midst of identification crisis and cultural dissipation, the *huangmei diao* genre was elevated to the status of an embodiment of cultural nostalgia.

In fact, nostalgia was not only experienced as a reattachment to the Chinese cultural heritage, but also as a form of resistance to colonization. In the 1960s colonial Hongkong, the genre served as a space of socialization where the silencing effects of the audience as colonial national subjects could be temporarily erased. The opening of the emotions in the audience inhabiting society’s margins was achieved through their identification with suffering protagonists. As a medium for catharsis, the genre built a community which “flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain kind of experience of belonging” (Berlant viii). Thus, the melodramatic excess of the genre enabled the project of cultural identity-searching not as a political program, but as an emotional

6. For a detailed analysis the so-called Pan-Chinese classical impressionism, see E. Chen, “Musical China, Classical Impression.”

adventure.

However, by the mid-1960s, the *huangmei diao* genre's glamour seemed to start fading away, which was reflected in the long and bumpy ride to bring *Forever* to screen: the film was set to shoot in mid-April 1965. Less than two weeks later, its production was abruptly suspended, and not until January 1968 did the film make its way to the theaters. The Shaw Brothers cited concerns over saturated market and decreasing demand for the genre as the reason for the production delay. Putting *Forever* on hold, the studio turned to produce New-Style martial arts films and kick-started the "martial arts century". Although *huangmei diao* films were sporadically made throughout the 1970s (including *The Dream of the Red Chamber* in 1978 and *Imperious Princess* in 1980), *Forever* signaled the beginning of the end of the *huangmei diao* era. The decline in popularity of the genre was partially the result of its increasingly unoriginal landscape with formulaic storytelling and visuals, when studios continually churning out increasingly lower quality imitations. But more importantly, the demographics and tastes of the audiences were changing as the younger moviegoers were born and raised in Hong Kong. In an attempt to keep up with the shifting market, the Shaw Brothers tried to reinvigorate the genre by incorporating martial arts and sexuality into the *huangmei diao* fold, as in the case of *Arrow*. But the New Style Martial Arts film really began to take over the mainstream cinema. As critic Sek Kei points out: "By the mid-1960s the local audience was demanding films more in keeping with local feelings and ambitions. This gave rise to the so-called New Style martial Arts film. Mandarin cinema turned from melodrama to action. The violence in the new

films coincided neatly with a global emphasis on sensory stimulation in films of the late 1960s” (29).

In the same way that the diasporic mentality encouraged the rise of the *huangmei diao* film with nostalgia as its primary mode of expression, the transition to a new genre of sensory intensification and hypermasculinity reflected the zeitgeist of the following era. The refashioning of the martial arts genre coincided with the start of the Cultural Revolution in mainland China and the breakout of violence and social upheaval in Hong Kong. Zhang Che made clear that, in promoting his *yanggang meixue* 阳刚美学 (aesthetics of staunch masculinity), he was merely responding to an emergent market oriented towards the spirit of rebellion instead of romance: “The rise of yanggang was a requirement of the market [...]. The age of love tales was past. The masses were striving ahead in a rebellious mood [...].” (Fu 21).

It is interesting to note that the masculinist form in the New Martial Arts film not only represents a radical departure from the feminine aesthetics, but a drastic break with the innocence of a fantasy world. According to Williams, the mode of emotional excess stands in contrast to more “dominant” mode of realistic, goal-oriented narrative (114). Indeed, *huangmei diao* films in the melodramatic mode are more concerned with emotional excess than psychological realism. It is precisely the genre’s disassociation from realistic narrative that allow its weepie performances to be felt as allegorical and fictional, as Rey Chow astutely points it out in the context of the love narrative of the Butterfly fiction: “For the Chinese reader especially, love’s extravagant, superfluous clashes with the “public” mean that it belongs to a world

which is not “private” but *fictional*.” ([Mandarin Ducks] 48-9) The *huangmei diao* film’s magic lies in its ability to transform its audiences into a dreamy, unreal, and fantasy world. In his interview with Rick Lyman for *The New York Times*, Ang Lee talks about the “feeling of purity and innocence” that *Eterne* conveyed to him (Lyman). However, by the late 1960s, in a world filled with political turmoil and identity politics, the atmosphere that was once conducive to the golden age of innocence was gone. Meanwhile, the New Style Martial Arts film, characteristic of “sensory realism” and unmediated bodily performance, started its meteoric rise.

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Circular Nets for Crab Farming at Xiapu, Fujian Province

Jian Tang

Golden Chicken as Historiocomedy: Sex Work in Hong Kong and Local Popular Culture

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Abstract

Golden Chicken 金雞 was released in 2002. The film traces the life of a sex worker, Kam, from the late 1970s into the early 2000s. The film is a historiocomedy that portrays local history from the life and career of a sex worker, as well as the popular culture she consumed. History is presented in a lighthearted manner, with no moral or social condemnations of prostitution. While many of the historical events in the film are serious matters with long lasting consequences, a comedic angle presents a more palatable version of events to younger audiences who did not personally experience these incidents. There is no shortage of history movies in Chinese language films, but they rarely take a comedic perspective. Chinese historiocomedy is more commonly found in fiction than in film. *Golden Chicken* thus stands out, as the film does not follow the traditional doom and gloom model when portraying historical events. In this paper, I examine how history is re-presented through the local sex industry and popular culture. I specifically focus on the dance hostess and residential “phoenix” phases of Kam’s life. Local popular culture is inseparable

from historical development and is influential in the lives of Kam and other inhabitants of Hong Kong. I focus on how local, diegetic and extra-diegetic, music, cinema, and television signify certain eras and their roles in shaping the culture.

Introduction: Golden Chicken 金雞

It all began on a stormy Saturday night, 14 November, 2002. Kam 阿金 (played by Sandra Ng 吳君如) hurries into the ATM vestibule to get out of the storm, not noticing the man walking in behind her with a knife. The man (played by Eric Tseng 曾志偉) attempts to rob Kam after she moves away from the ATM machine. But she does not take out any cash because her account has less than the withdrawal minimum. Failing to make quick money, the robber decides to leave. However, the storm causes a blackout, and the electronically operated doors are locked. Not knowing how long they would be stuck in the small space together, Kam sits down and shares some stories from work, beginning the episodic narrative of *Golden Chicken*.

Golden Chicken was released in 2002, and it was quickly followed by a sequel in 2003, *Golden Chicken 2*. The third installment, *Golden Chicken 3*, was not released until a decade later, in 2014. The word “chicken” in this context is slang for prostitute in Chinese, and “golden” is in reference to Kam’s name, which literally translates as gold.¹ Hence the English titles of the films are literal translations of the Chinese titles. My main focus in this paper is only the first film from 2002 because the second and third films do not directly address prostitution. *Golden Chicken 2* is set during

1. The pronunciations for chicken and prostitute are homonyms in both Cantonese and Mandarin.

the SARS outbreak in 2003, thus Kam's business suffers with a lack of patrons. She temporarily takes over a small restaurant and does not sell sex for that period of time. *Golden Chicken 3* is in a contemporary setting, and Kam has climbed up the sex industry social ladder. She is now a middle-aged madam leading her own troupe of high-end escorts serving the mega rich, while Kam no longer personally attends to the sexual needs of her patrons anymore.

Golden Chicken is a historicomedy that re-presents local history through the perspective of Kam. She is like the Forrest Gump of Hong Kong history, except Kam sees the world from the margins of society, as a woman and as a sex worker. Yet Kam's world is not so different from any other Hongkonger's. Her life is touched upon by important political, social, and cultural events that have also influenced the lives of the viewers. This aspect of familiarity and collective memories are very important in marketing to the local audience, especially around the time when pan-Asian blockbusters began to trend in the East Asian region. Kam is not a significant figure in these sweeping historical changes, but she represents the Hong Kong people that continue to persevere in the face of economic hardship, political unpredictability, and even widespread diseases. While *Golden Chicken* does not make any social or political statements in its portrayal of history and the local sex industry, there is a message of hope. The film begins with a heavy storm in the dark of night, but concludes at the dawn of a bright new day.

In this paper, I examine *Golden Chicken* as a historicomedy through its portrayal of local history. I specifically focus on how history is re-presented by prostitution and

local popular culture. Regarding prostitution, I focus on Kam's time as a dance hostess in the nightclub and as a self-employed "phoenix" working from her own apartment. For popular culture, I examine the importance of the diegetic and extradiegetic local music soundtrack, as well as the diegetic news programs, television dramas and cinema that have influenced Kam and Hongkongers' lives.

The prostitute is a common trope in Chinese literature and film. In early Chinese cinema, there is *Goddess* 神女 (Dir. Wu Yonggang 吳永剛, 1934), starring the legendary Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 (1910-1935). In Hong Kong cinema, there is the landmark film *Rouge* (Dir. Stanley Kwan 關錦鵬, 1987), and the *Unwritten Law* 法外情 trilogy (Dir. Ng See-yuen 吳思遠, 1985; Taylor Wong 王泰來, 1988; Michael Mak 麥當傑, 1989). More recent examples include *Whispers and Moans* 性工作者十日談 (2007) and its sequel *True Women for Sale* 我不賣身, 我賣子宮 (2008), both directed by Herman Yau 邱禮濤. In these films, prostitutes are victims of government institutions, the patriarchy, and social mores. These films also portray prostitution as being harmful to the sex workers, their families, and to society, in which the only cure is to not participate in this line of work.

In contrast, *Golden Chicken* stands out as a film that portrays an optimistic and hardworking prostitute. Kam is not portrayed as being oppressed or as a victim, and she does not even consider herself a victim. She has great agency in her life to make her own decisions, ranging from career changes to having a child. Her work is no different than others in the service sector, while it provides Kam with a sufficient income to be economically independent. This independence is attributed to hard work,

without being associated with drugs, and having absolutely no desires to become a long-term mistress of wealthy men. There is no condemnation of “clean” prostitution throughout the three films, and sex work is not presented as a social ill or associated with diseases. Kam resists against those who attempt to show her any sympathy as she is thought to be a “fallen” woman. She is empowered through her embrace of her identity as a “chicken.” Although she receives payment for sexual services, she is still in firm control of her life and her own sexuality. *Golden Chicken* does not glamorize sex work, nor link prostitution with decadent lifestyles. It is simply a form of labor.

Observing History Through Not So Sexy Work

Despite the protagonist being a sex worker, all three *Golden Chicken* films do not include any nudity. Any erotic and sexual aspects are diffused through Sandra Ng’s unsexy star persona. Sandra Ng was in her late thirties when filming *Golden Chicken*, but she still posed as a schoolgirl in a high school uniform with pigtails, contributing to the film’s comedic effect. Most of the films’ humor is situated in the local spoken language. Hong Kong Cantonese is peppered with local slang, puns, English cognates, and local cultural references. For example, one of Kam’s clients, Professor Chan (played by Tony Leung 梁家輝) said, “The past? The poop has been flushed down the toilet” 舊事? 舊屎沖左落屎坑. This is a pun on the pronunciations of “the past” and “feces” in Cantonese. Prostitution is thus sanitized to be safely situated in a historical context without overt erotic distractions. Even scenes of sexual intercourse are weirded to defy the sexy aura that is generally attributed to sex work, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Kam begins working at a nightclub in the 1980s into the early 1990s, an era marked by the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, and the birth of her son. Kam's nightclub career is the beginning of her economic independence and adulthood. Nightclubs flourished in Hong Kong from the 1970s all the way into the mid-1990s. Kam is very proud of her profession as a dance hostess, as reflected in her conversation with Auntie.² Auntie comments that Kam has become prettier after becoming a "chicken." Kam defiantly declares she is not a chicken, but a dance hostess. Auntie insists that Kam is a prostitute by asking, "Do you sleep with men? And do you take payment after sleeping with them? If yes, then you are a chicken!" This exchange between the aunt and niece also demonstrates that nightclubs were places of nocturnal entertainment as well as a hub for women willing to sell sex. Although Kam may be providing sexual services, she is not the typical dance hostess.

Contrary to the charm, glamour, and beauty expected of hostesses, Kam is foolish and extremely naïve. Lacking the comeliness and the cunningness, Kam takes on the role of the nightclub clown. Her tenure at the night club coincides with Jackie Chan's rise to fame by his breakthrough role in *Drunken Master* 醉拳 (Dir. Yuen Woo-ping 袁和平, 1978). She performs an imitation of Jackie Chan's drunken boxing at the tables for a tip, but she is never sitting at the tables to physically serve and entertain the men.

2. There are different forms of address for aunts from different branches of the family, and it also depends on the birth order of the individual's parents in relation to the aunts. Kam's aunt should be the wife of her father's elder brother, as she calls her *boniang* 伯娘.

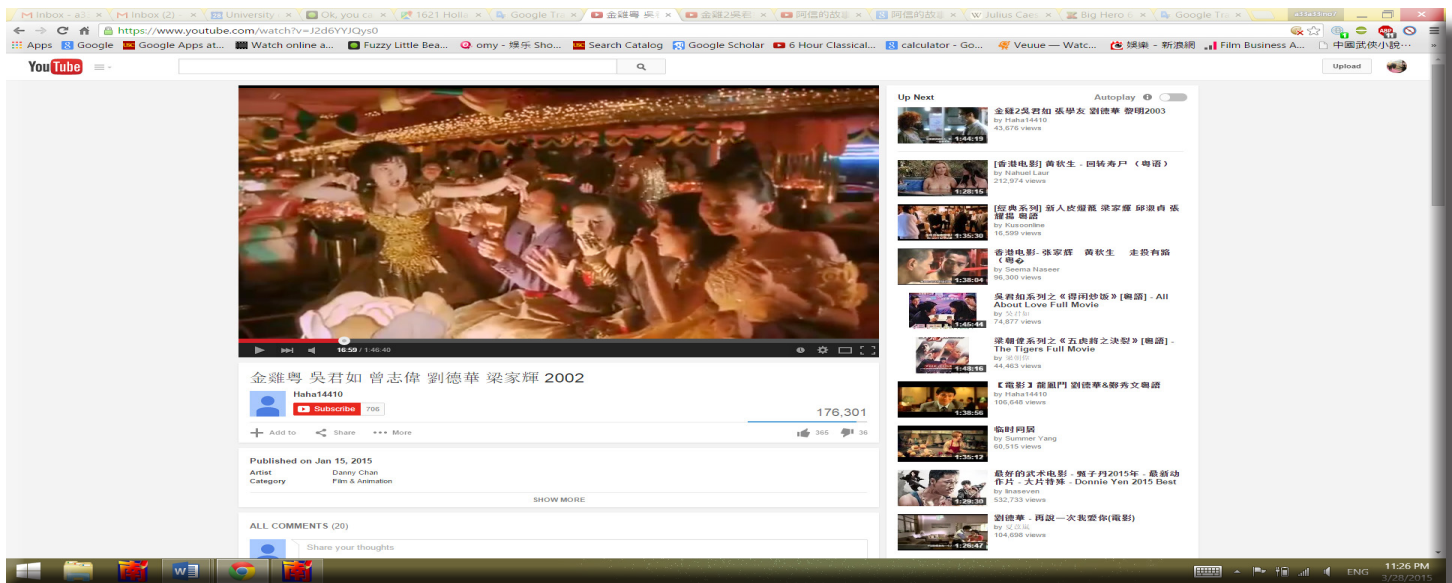


Figure 1. Kam performing tableside drunken boxing for the nightclub patrons in *Golden Chicken*.

In one scene, Kam is once again performing drunken boxing as she follows the car moving in the nightclub. The nightclub's main walkway is wide enough to accommodate an automobile, which takes the women and their patrons from one point to another. The hostess sitting in the car tells the patron beside her that she is interested in a small Louis Vuitton handbag. The man takes out a stack of cash from his pocket, and encourages her to buy a big handbag. Seeing his generosity, Kam also announces that she is interested in a red-white-blue bag 紅白藍膠袋 as she chases the car while boxing. Red-white-blues are nylon canvas bags typically associated with the lower classes. The man also hands Kam some money, but tells her she should get a red-white-blue to hide herself in. Kam's request for money to buy the tricolor nylon bag indicates that she is well aware of her social status in the nightclub and in society, therefore she asks for a grass root item instead of a luxury good. She identifies with the lower class of Hong Kong, despite serving the rich. Kam's lack of higher education and certain types of social connections disqualifies her from ever

entering the elite class. At the same time, her status better relates to the majority of the local audience.

In 1984, the same year that the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed, Kam gives birth to a son. The year is indicated by a brief scene on television, Television Broadcast's (TVB) *Police Cadet '84* 新紮師兄. *Cadet* enjoyed huge popularity upon its release in 1984, and is the first of a trilogy with an ongoing plot and veteran characters. The scene from *Police Cadet* is nothing iconic, but the main characters, played by Tony Leung 梁朝偉 and Maggie Cheung 張曼玉, are visible on the T.V. screen. Unlike the kissing scene from TVB's series *The Fate* 火鳳凰 (1981) (as discussed below), *Police Cadet* is never referred to by the characters. The camera simply pans to the television screen as Kam exits the frame. This significant year in Hong Kong history is not noted by news footage of political figures' meetings, instead it is marked by a work of entertainment and Kam's childbirth. The year of 1984 is thus domesticated, with lots of scenes inside Kam's her apartment and glimpses of a local television series. The parties that decided the fate of Hong Kong, the Chinese and the British, both "foreigners," are oddly missing. Like Kam's pregnancy and childbirth, the handover is an irreversible change inside the "body" of Hong Kong and her people.

We do not know who the child's biological father is. Kam dupes one of her nightclub patrons, Richard (played by Felix Wong 黃日華), into thinking the child is

his.³ Richard is a successful Chinese-American businessman, making him the perfect candidate because he is childless and wealthy. Most importantly, he resides abroad. In the year that Hong Kong was decided to return to the motherland, Kam has Richard take the child abroad soon after birth. Kam is separated from her child for the rest of her life. Richard's home in the United States is a subtle reference to people who left Hong Kong and immigrated to western countries after 1984 because they feared living in a communist country. It is ironic that once the colony was scheduled to return to the motherland, lots of people decided to separate themselves from their homeland of Hong Kong. Sending the child abroad is not only an escape from Hong Kong's unpredictable future, it is also an outlet for Kam's child to leave the lower social classes of her own hometown. Her child would be able to escape the stigma of being the offspring of a prostitute. Instead, her son will be the only child of an affluent and respectable overseas Chinese businessman in the United States.

In *Golden Chicken* and the other films regarding prostitutes with children (mentioned above), the women all give birth to sons instead of daughters. It is as if the reproduction of a man of her own blood can redeem what the women can never be in society. It does not matter whether the sons grow up to be successful or not, as long as they never descend into the same situation as their mothers. And even without parents, a man can start his own family, in contrast to a woman's inability to be integrated into the patriarchal order without the presence of a father or a husband.

3. We discover in *Golden Chicken 2* that the child's biological father is actually Kam's Mainland maternal cousin Qun 馮仁坤 (played by Jacky Cheung 張學友), or Quincy in the English subtitles. Since Quincy is a Chinese citizen, and Kam is from Hong Kong, the Mainland thus represents the fatherland and Hong Kong is the motherland. Yet with the child growing up abroad, he is neither Chinese nor a Hongkonger. Kam's child must adopt the national and cultural identity of America, which is only bridged through the relationship of an accepting adoptive father.

In Kam's case, she leaves her family very early in life, and her parents never appear throughout the film. Her father only appears very briefly in the second film, indicating his limited presence in Kam's childhood and youth. Kam also does not have any long-term, stable romantic relationships, hence she never even considers marriage as a life goal.

Despite giving birth to a child, Kam does not truly become a mother. She does not even spend time with her child after giving birth, since Richard takes him soon after he is born. We only see Kam cuddling another's baby, as his/her mother urges Kam to return the infant. Having given birth to a child is only a biological change, and Kam has no identity or social changes that typically accompany motherhood. The quick removal of the child leads to Kam's permanent status as a single woman prostitute, in which her body can only be used as a source of pleasure for men, but never as a nurturing parent. Her breasts, known for their great size in the pleasure quarters, never nurses her child, but are fondled by men. Kam's son never appears in *Golden Chicken* or its sequels; the only news about him is relayed to Kam through a friend. Despite the positive and uplifting portrayal of Kam, her inability to raise her child is one factor that places a touch of sadness and regret in her life. Yet, it is because she is not burdened by the responsibilities of child raising that she can continue to live a carefree lifestyle. Kam is not the self-sacrificing prostitute-mother, like in *Goddess* or the *Unwritten Law* trilogy. Her willingness to let go of her maternal responsibilities actually liberates her from shackles of traditional female roles.

Golden Chicken ends the 1980s by showing the Tiananmen Incident on television news. Kam, along with her colleagues and patrons, watch as the tanks roll into the

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plaza as a man walks backwards to avoid being run over. The nightclub audience is extremely emotional, wailing and raising their fists at the television. The hostesses are still wearing their ostentatious nightgowns and jewelry, and the golden light from the chandeliers still shines brightly in the background, serving as a stark contrast to the bleak cool tones emitted from the screen. The white light from the screen is casted onto the viewers' bodies, illuminating their crying faces. In a place where men pay for happiness, the patrons are overwhelmed with pain, just like the madam and her girls. Washed in the cold lighting and semi-hidden in dark shadows, these night-clubbers share the shock and pain that the rest of the world had experienced on 4 June 1989 as the event unfolded in Tiananmen Square. Just like the night-clubbers, audiences from around the world were also watching the tanks and the students on their television screens. Their experiences and memories of historical events are thus mediated through the television screens, collapsing the fictional story of *Golden Chicken* with the real television footage and fictional images of films and television series shown in other scenes.

During my research for this paper, I viewed *Golden Chicken* online. Many of the platforms I visited are Mainland Chinese websites. Chunks of the film would be missing when I searched on Tudou a few years ago, permanently removed from the website. Recently, I found the film on Facebook, which is also a censored version. The editing on the Facebook version was done well, and if one has never seen the complete version of the film, the viewer never would have known that a part of the film was missing. Even though the film was not marketed to a Mainland audience, the digital versions have been subject to the same censorship as Chinese productions. But

because the hardcopies of the film are no longer easily accessible while the digital versions are, *Golden Chicken* could easily be permanently altered due to this change of viewing habits over the last two decades.

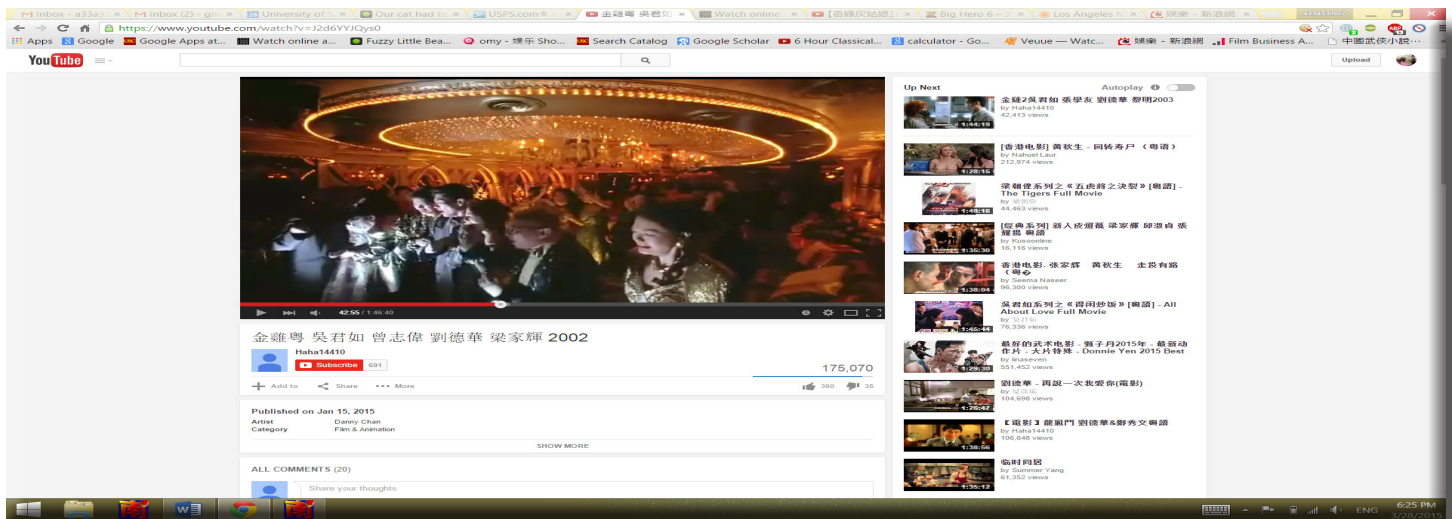


Figure 2a (top) and 2b (bottom). The television screen is not shown in full in this scene, but in between people’s buttocks, there is just enough to see the tanks and the man. In Figure 2b, we see some girls and patrons gathered in front of the television.

In the 1990s, the “northern maidens” 北姑 broke into the local sex market.⁴

These Chinese sex workers who have descended from the north, are eager to work and aggressive in their competition for patrons. In contrast to the popular local dance

4. Northern maidens is a homonym with a type of mushroom that literally translates as northern mushroom.

hostesses whose attentions and sexual services are generally ceremoniously bought by patrons through stacks of cash and promises of name brand handbags and fine jewelry, the “northern maidens” are eager to sell their sexual services for less, and without any courtship or grooming. One of the non-local hostesses speaks Cantonese with a heavy accent, and claims she has never worked in the sex industry while back home. Instead, she was a salesgirl, and did promotions on various products. But with her heavy accent, “promotion” 推銷 sounds like “playing the flute” 吹簫. “Playing the flute” is slang for fellatio. She is thus touting her skills through a declaration of innocence and inexperience of sex work at the same time.

Unable to compete with the younger and more aggressive northern girls, Kam decides to end her career as a dance hostess to work as a masseuse in a massage parlor, a thinly veiled location for alternative prostitution. Her departure from the nightclub formally concludes a chapter of Hong Kong history, in which making money and glamour were important goals in the colony. It is while working at the massage parlor that Kam encounters Chinese bank robber Ye Ziqiang 葉子強 (played by Hu Jun 胡軍), as if the immediate aftermath of glamorous decadence is a period of lawlessness, unrest, crises and instability.⁵

Indeed, the 1997 Asian economic crises brought down many businesses and small investors. Kam was one of the victims who lost her home to the stock market. Hong Kong had barely emerged from the aftermath of the economic crises when *Golden Chicken* was released, hence the memories of the crisis were still the fresh repercussions visible in society. After the foreclosure, Kam moves into a smaller

5. The bank robber Ye Ziqiang is in reference to Yip Kai Foon 葉繼歡 (1961-2017), who was notorious for being heavily armed when robbing banks and jewelry stores in the 1990s.

apartment, and sets up her own private business as a “one phoenix per a floor” 一樓一鳳.⁶

One of Kam’s clients she works for as a “phoenix” is Steely Willy 小鋼炮 (played by Eason Chan 陳奕迅). Their experience of being together is both awkward and comical, with no sexiness or lust associated with their preparation or intercourse. Kam starts off with a shower while still in her underwear, with a plastic apron on top. As she scrubs Steely Willy’s back, she picks up a bottle of dish soap from the counter and squirts it onto his body as she scrubs. Kam’s actions and “tools” closely resemble those of a cleaner more than a sex worker, emphasizing the labor aspect of sex work with no hint of sexiness.

While in bed, Steely Willy requests that Kam role-plays as his ex-girlfriend by using intimate nicknames, biting his shoulder, and popping the pimples on his back during intercourse (see Figures, 3a, 3b, and 3c). The camera is focused solely on Kam’s face, and we see her expression of both awe and disgust when she hears these requests to bite his shoulder and pop his pimples. Kam is still in disbelief as he urges her on. She fumbles to try to bite his shoulder while actually biting his upper arm. The act of sexual intercourse is not portrayed as intimate, dirty or provocative, rather it is very awkward. The man’s desire to relive his intimate moments with his ex-girlfriend produces requests that are not only unusual for Kam, but she also finds it disgusting. It is the details of provoking sexual desire, rather than the sex itself that makes her experiences with each client unique.

6. Phoenix is an alternate term for chicken. Sometimes, prostitutes are referred to as “elder sister phoenix” 鳳姐.

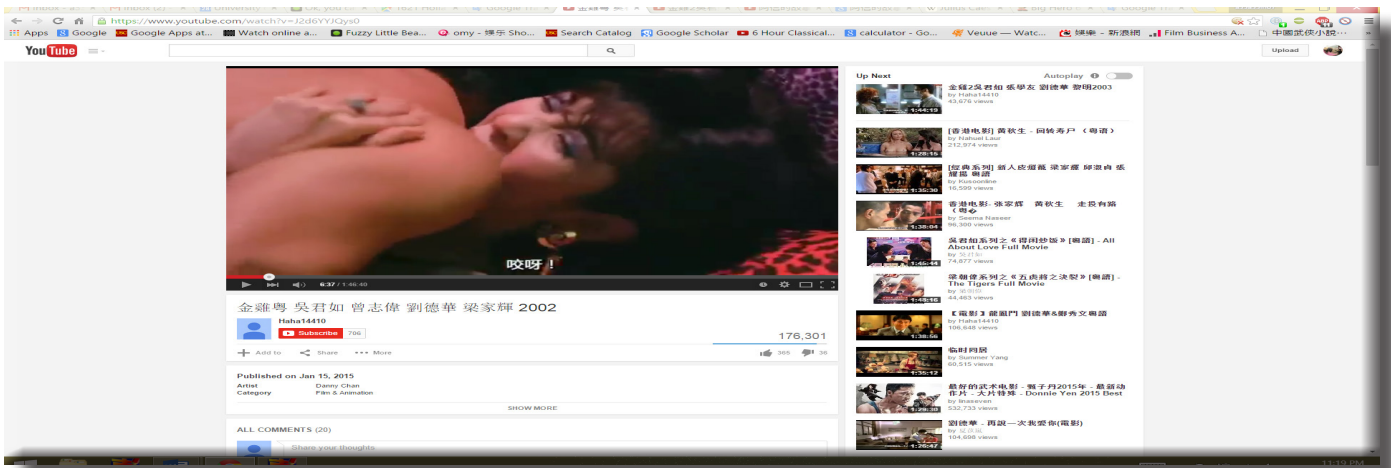
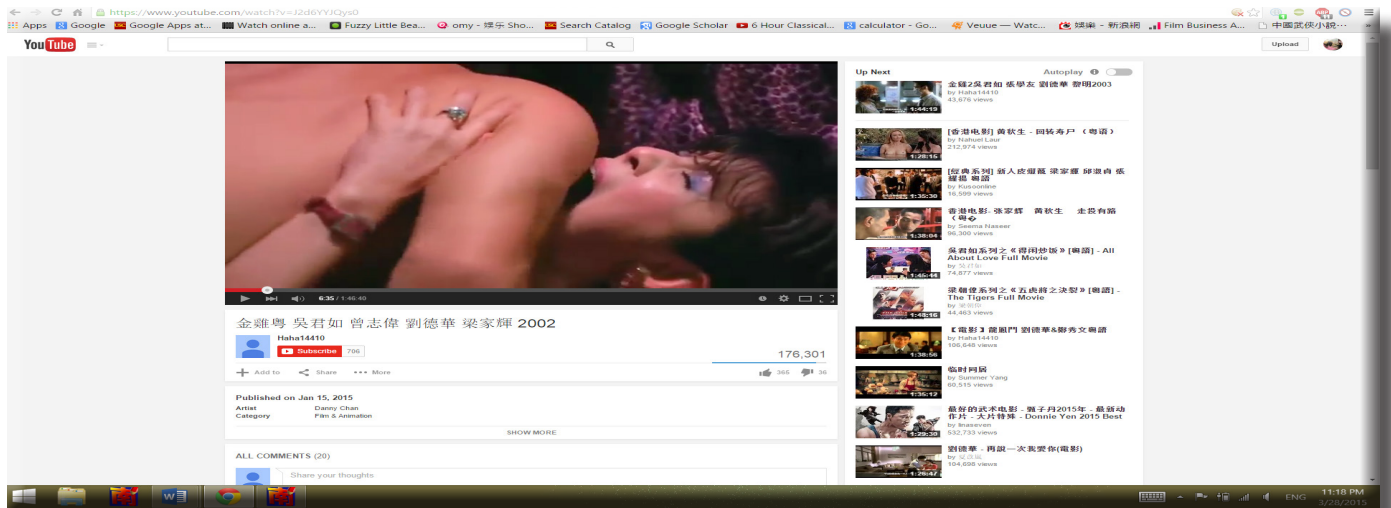
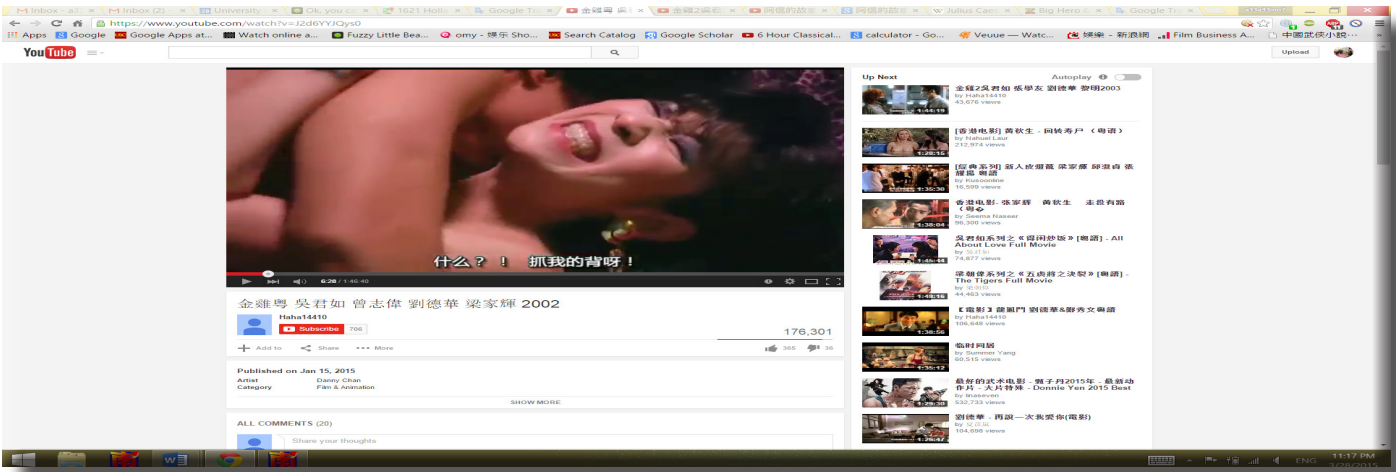


Figure 3a, 3b, and 3c. Figure 3a is Kam's reaction when he requests her to pop the pimples on his back. Figure 3b is Kam biting Steely Willy's arm. In Figure 3c, Kam finally bites his shoulder.

Kam is already a well-established “residential phoenix” when she encounters Steely Willy. But she owes her success to Andy Lau 劉德華 (playing himself).⁷ This is the only supernatural segment of the film, when Andy Lau crawls out of Kam’s television set in the middle of a commercial, like the ghost in *Ringu* 午夜凶鈴 (Dir. Hideo Nakata, 1998).⁸ He personally instructs Kam on how to moan in bed with passion. He points out that it is essential for Kam to tailor her moaning to clients of different ages, sizes, and ethnicities.

This is actually a real commercial commissioned by the Hong Kong government. The main message is to remind those working in the service sectors, whether they are bus drivers or saleswomen, that they must mind their attitudes when interacting with clients. Andy Lau’s lines from the commercial: “Your attitude in service is not enough in this day and age” 今時今日咁既服務態度係唔夠既 has become a popular sentence in daily life. This didactic commercial is thus superimposed onto the sex work industry in *Golden Chicken*, in which her awareness of considering services for different clients becomes the turning point in Kam’s business.

Although nothing is eerie about Andy Lau climbing out of the television set like in *Ringu*, it is significant that he crawls out in the middle of this specific commercial. Here, Andy Lau is a representative of the government, which is a haunting force in the lives of Hong Kong’s citizens who do not get to elect their government officials. *Golden Chicken*’s incorporation of Andy Lau and this commercial is a good example of how the decisions made by the Hong Kong government have impacted the common

7. Andy Lau appears earlier in the film while Kam is working as a masseuse.

8. Foreign film titles are usually translated differently when released in different locations. While *Ringu* was known as *Wuye Xiongling* in Hong Kong, the film was released as *Qiye Guaitan* 七夜怪談 in Taiwan.

people. The government's messages are "brought to life" through the materializing body of the superstar in Kam's apartment, and his role in eventually improving her flesh selling business. The parody of the government's commercial also demonstrates how the media regulates and influences the daily lives of Hongkongers.

Local Popular Culture and History

In real time, the film takes place in one night, but Kam's flashbacks trace career changes from a young teenage prostitute to a self-employed sex worker span from 1970s into the early-2000s. *Golden Chicken's* episodic, achronological narration allowed the many cameo appearances to contribute to a coherent storyline. The cameos include pop singers, comedians, as well as television and film actors. This collection of stars is homage to the local entertainment industry, and integrates the stargazing aspect into this film. These cameo appearances reflect the producers and directors' network in the industry. Sandra Ng and her longtime romantic partner, director and producer Peter Chan 陳可辛, have long-term working relations and friendships with many of Hong Kong's biggest stars. Andy Lau and Eason Chan are only two examples of star cameos in the film. Peter Chan was the producer of the first two *Golden Chickens*. In addition, his company Applause Pictures, was the distributor of the films. The couple's personal friendships and power in the industry contributed to the *Golden Chicken* films' commercial success, as well as weaving the film into the local star system and fandom into its metanarrative.

Like many places around the world, Hong Kong had once heavily depended on television for entertainment and information. With the opening of TVB in 1967,

the people of Hong Kong had free access to television programs for the first time. Since then, television and TVB have become crucial parts of Hong Kong popular culture. TVB's television dramas and their theme songs enjoyed enormous popularity because of their daily exposure to the audience, sometimes for months. The dramas and theme songs were all in Cantonese, whereas English and Mandarin songs had been popular earlier. These early dramas and theme songs have become part of the collective memories of the Hong Kong people. Even younger viewers born much later can associate these dramas and songs with a certain era through late night reruns and its availability on the internet.

This interconnectedness between television news, dramas, and the music industry is best illustrated in the segment regarding Kam's fish ball girl 魚蛋妹 days. She began sex work in her mid-teenage years as a fish ball girl, the nickname for adolescent girls that sold sex in the 1970s and 1980s. Kam's teenage years in the fish ball stall reflects the societal ills of rogue youth caught in consumerism when the local economy took off in the 1970s. Kam recalls that she took the first metro to work after it began operating on 12 February, 1980. This is the first time a television set appears in the film. The screen shows Princess Alexandra's (1936-2004) presence at the opening ceremony, and then it switches to show people waiting in the metro station for the train to move out. In addition to the anchor's voiceover telling the audience about celebration activities, the opening of Danny Chan's 陳百強 "Reaching for the Stars" 摘星 is playing along with the anchor's voiceover. Only the first few seconds of the song are played, and Danny Chan's voice is not heard until later in

other songs of the film. The setting immediately cuts to the staircase leading up to the fish ball stall, lined with young girls in school uniforms and men groping at their bodies. Inside the dark stall, we see the madam avidly watching TVB's *The Fate* while the girls and their patrons pant and moan in the dark. The madam is watching a classic scene from *The Fate*, when Chow Yun-fat 周潤發 forcefully kisses Carol Cheng as the iconic, intense piano opening of Jenny Tseng's 甄妮 "Fate" 命運 (*The Fate*'s theme song) plays in the background (see Figure 4). A fish ball girl in school uniform exclaimed, "Wow! Chow Yun-fat is kissing Carol Cheng!" 哇! 周潤發錫鄭裕玲啊! as she is pulled away by a client to perform their own dramatic kissing. The imagery of this kiss scene not only suits the mode of the business in the fish ball stall, but it is also a memorable scene from the drama, collapsing contemporary social changes into contemporary media.



Figure 4. The madam sits on the left. The schoolgirl is in the middle, and on the television screen are Chow Yun-fat and Carol Cheng kissing.

This brief but rapid change of juxtaposed scenes of news programs, popular music, and television dramas are not all in chronological order, but are approximate

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references to the time period in which these songs and television series were released. As mentioned above, the Hong Kong Metro opened in 1980, but Danny Chan's "Reaching for the Stars" was released in 1984, and *The Fate* was first aired in 1981. As Kam's flashbacks, this mixing of times and events is reasonable, since memories are seldom accurate. Accuracy is not necessarily as important as reminding the audience of their collective memories through watching the same television programs and listening to the same songs like Kam and her fish ball colleagues.

Not all the songs in the film are in Cantonese, yet it is important to note that a majority of the soundtrack is by Danny Chan (1958-1993) and Roman Tam 羅文 (1950 -2002), both influential figures in the local music industry. While Danny Chan died young, Roman Tam went on to become an iconic figure in Hong Kong Cantopop. Some of Roman Tam's most famous works are associated with TVB as theme songs, yet his most influential work is "Below the Lion Rock" 獅子山下. This song is featured towards the end of *Golden Chicken*, after Kam finally achieves success in running her own establishment. "Below the Lion Rock" serves as a reminder that hard times will pass as long as one is willing to endure hardship and push forward. Despite Kam's atypical field of work, sex workers are an important part of the local cultural fabric and are an integral service provider for the working class.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, two sequels were released after *Golden Chicken*, and Andy Lau again appears in both films as himself. In *Golden Chicken 2*, he is already the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in the near future of

2046. In *Golden Chicken 3*, which is set before the frame narrative of the second film, Andy Lau is a potential candidate for the position of Chief Executive. While none of the *Golden Chicken* films make any direct statements regarding local politics, the placement of Andy Lau in the highest office in Hong Kong is an attempt to project a better future, with a leader who is popular with the people. The contemporary and forward-looking aspects of *Golden Chicken 2* and *3* departed from the first film's historicomedy approach in presenting local history through the perspective of a sex worker and through local popular culture.

Kam's life is a simplified re-presentation of local social and cultural changes. Her career as a nightclub dance hostess and later a self-employed residential "phoenix" shows the ups and downs that the people of Hong Kong experienced due to economic boom and crises. The nostalgic elements in the film derive from music, cinema, and television dramas that were produced in the 1970s into the 1980s. In addition, a good number of cameos played important roles in *Golden Chicken*, not only adding a stargazing element to the film, but these actors are all familiar faces to the Hong Kong audience. Their fame is not separated from their characters, in which the film pays homage to the local entertainment industry as well as folding the fandom into the film's metanarrative. The second and third *Golden Chicken* films, and even the sister work *12 Golden Ducks*, all use this cameo strategy as well. However, this strategy only fared well for the *Golden Chicken* trilogy, and *12 Golden Ducks* flopped in the box office. Hence, the popularity of *Golden Chicken* is based on the combination of local history and local popular culture. Locality is the most important element,

since the humor and stars are all based on familiar issues or events, and punned and parodied in Cantonese dialogue.

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Taiji Practicing in the Morning, Shanghai

Jian Tang

Gratitude Is the Sign of Noble Souls: Acknowledging Acts in Chinese Online Medical Consultation

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Abstract

Our qualitative and quantitative analysis of 1000 Chinese cases of medical consultation between patients and consultants from the www.rxys.com has revealed the notable presence of acknowledging acts through direct or indirect strategies, syntactic and

discursive representations as well as emotional displays. While this quantitative survey can be regarded neither as comprehensive nor conclusive, we consider it as a first step towards detecting and categorizing different ways of expressing gratitude in online and offline linguistic data. As a result, the ensuing results were found: first, acknowledging acts vary from cyberspace to reality with distinct characteristics, though it remains unchanged with regard to the stereotyped modes of grammatical and discursive construction. Second, acknowledging acts sometimes are emotionally charged with multimodal means like emoji or emoticons. Thirdly, no significant difference is found between female and male groups as for the employment of acknowledging acts in cyberspace, which is against the “Lakoff’s Hypothesis” that the male is of less courtesy when compared with the female. Fourth, acknowledging acts are deployed differently among different age groups in cyberspace, which speaks for a discursive approach for studying acknowledging acts in online medical consultation.

Key words: Acknowledging act, Chinese politeness, media, gender, age

Successful communication in any language requires not only the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also pragmatic competence and knowledge about the culture of the language. One important aspect of pragmatic competence is understanding and production of speech acts and their appropriateness in a given situation (Cheng, 2006). Therefore, speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts, and how their act is appropriately shaped and guided is the primary concern of “Emancipatory Pragmatics” (Hank, Ide & Katagiri, 2009, p. 5) in the 21st century. As one of the speech

acts frequently used in interpersonal relationships between language users, successful performance of acknowledging acts may result in positive feelings, whereas failure of acknowledgment may have negative consequences. Acknowledgement can be tentatively defined as “An illocutionary act performed by a speaker which is based on a past act performed by the hearer. This past act benefits the speaker, and the speaker believes it to have benefited him or her. The speaker feels grateful or appreciative, and makes a statement which counts as an expression of gratitude” (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986, p. 167). Kumar (2001) highlights the significance of expressions of acknowledgment in the following words:

Expressions of gratitude in the normal day-to-day interactions between the members of a society seem obviously to fall in the category of the “social” use of language. Expressions of gratitude and politeness are a major instrument, the use of which keeps the bonds between the members of a society well-cemented and strong. (p. 6)

It is noteworthy that the use of thanking may differ from culture to culture. For instance, ‘thank you’ used in American English is more common as an expression of gratitude; while in British English it is more a formal marker (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; Hymes, 1972). As Coulmas (1981) puts it: “The social relation of the participants and the inherent properties of the object of gratitude work together to determine the degree of gratefulness that should be expressed in a given situation. Differences in this respect are obviously subject to cultural variation” (p. 75).

Many researchers, working from diverse perspectives, have considered

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acknowledging act, along with other courtesy-marking phenomena, to be a phenomenon of special interest, as being prototypical of socially appropriate interaction in general or a ritual marker. All these studies, however, have tended to be based on the investigation of production strategies with regard to the categories of acknowledgement construction, employed in relation to Speech Act Theory or conversation analysis. As yet, however, the potential of acknowledging act in non-western culture as an individualized politeness strategy (dealing with how rapport or coordination is managed between language users politely by means of expressing gratitude) has received relatively little attention, in particular as for the interrelation between its enrichment and other social parameters like media, gender and age. In fact, the knowledge of the categories and strategic functions of acknowledgement may not only serve to prevent potential failures or misunderstanding in the process of interpersonal communication, but also help to elicit a smooth and rewarding rapport between the language users. As indicated by Wolfson (1989), the use of acknowledgement and its answer may vary according to the gender, age and degree of intimacy of language users.

This study focuses on the use of acknowledging act as a strategy of politeness in online consultation between patients and medical experts. This genre of communication has recently assumed prominence as a means of promoting appropriate use of health care services and ensuring that patients are matched with the most appropriate and least costly services (Rutledge et al., 1999). In this sense, the research also has the potential to provide effective medical treatment whilst simultaneously maximizing efficiency

and improving access to care (Warren et al., 2012). Taking all these into account, this study reports on a qualitative study on the relationship between acknowledging acts and politeness management with regard to the perception and interpretation of gratitude expression as it occurs in online conversation between Chinese consultants and patients (with questions) in the cyberspace.

Literature Review

A substantial amount of carefully designed research has been carried out on the in-depth analysis of expressions of acknowledging acts in daily language use. These expressions are traditionally seen as speech acts with politeness-marking function. Searle (1969) regards thanks (for) as an illocutionary force that indicates device (IFID) which is specified by a set of rules:

Propositional content rule: past act A done by H (hearer)

Preparatory rule: A benefits S (speaker) and S believes A benefits S

Sincerity rule: S feels grateful or appreciative for A

Essential rule: counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation. (p. 63)

The existing studies on the construction of acknowledging act can be classified into two categories: the first category examines how acknowledging act is expressed and responded to by native speakers of a certain language, mainly English. For instance, Leech (1983) puts thanking under the “convivial” (p. 84) category of speech

acts, i.e. a speech act which is intrinsically polite or courteous. In Holmes (1984), the expression thank you is considered a positively affective speech act which can be boosted, as opposed to a negatively affective speech act which can only be mitigated. In Aijmer's (1996) study, the types of "benefaction" (p. 68), are grouped into two broad categories, material and immaterial things, in the London-Lund corpus. It is interesting to note that Aijmer has 131 examples of "thanking for a proposal to do something" out of 199 in her "immaterial" category (65.8%). The second category of studies investigates the employment of acknowledging acts by second language learners. It was demonstrated that learners' responses were significantly different from native speakers in comprehension and production of certain speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996, 1999; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996, cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 2003). In this regard, the research to date has demonstrated that even advanced level language learners have difficulty adequately expressing gratitude in a target language (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986).

Despite the lack of research focus, expressing gratitude through acknowledging acts is considered very important in most cultures. Just as Goffman (1976) states, "middle-class children in our societies are taught to preface every statement to an adult with a request of by-your-leave and to terminate every encounter, if not every interchange, with some version of thank you" (p. 10). Cheng (2006) holds that expressing gratitude is a speech act taught at an early age and commonly performed by native speakers of most languages. It should be noted that unlike other speech acts, the speech act of gratitude has not been extensively examined (Kasper & Blum-Kulka,

1993). Moreover, the studies into native speakers' production of gratitude speech act in Chinese are scarce. The present study, therefore, attempts to examine Chinese speakers' expression of gratitude in a computer-mediated context in cyberspace, specifically in term of the interrelated picture of deployed strategy use and media, gender and age.

Methodology Issues

A. Research Questions

In view of the research gaps sketched out above, this study is intended to reveal how the use of acknowledging act signals politeness in consultant-patient conversations in cyberspace. The following specific questions will be addressed:

- 1) What types of acknowledging strategies do patients use in their conversations with the consultants in cyberspace?
- 2) What types of emotional display conjugate with acknowledging act in our data?
- 3) Is there any difference between different gender/age groups when an acknowledging act is constructed?

B. Data Collection

All the data in this study were collected from a not-for-profit medical counseling website, named “Rexinhaoyisheng”, which roughly means “Always–ready–to–help Doctor”) at www.rxys.com. In China, perhaps also in many other countries of the world,

the social factors like ill-balanced doctor-patient relationship, high hospital threshold, and expensive medical cost have forced the public to turn to non-governmental medical institutions and medical consulting service institutions. In response to these factors, some websites have set up online counseling programs, aiming to establish a non-profitable platform between medical experts and patients.

Since acknowledging acts are not manifested in every situation, a saliently ill-balanced power relationship between the medical expert and patient is controlled to guarantee the adequacy of gratitude production. This website has been found to enjoy the ensuing strengths: first, owing to the general and anonymous accessibility of the information on the website, the researcher could collect data without having to consider the restriction of research ethics. Second, the data on this website are naturally and authentically produced without any modification by the researchers in that there is no barrier for anyone to participate in consultation with the on-line doctors, and all the participants come in of their own free will whereby the responses are spontaneous without rehearsal. Third, the researcher can collect data wherever possible instead of going to the fixed venue, which also makes it easier for double-checking and replicating the study. Moreover, this website is an open program that imposes no restriction on the geographical location of the participants, which avoids time and space constraints over the patients, enabling us to collect diverse and reliable data in a larger range, and thus the universality of the data is relatively free from bias.

As shown in Table 1, 1000 cases of online dialogues were retrieved from the website around the topics of health care, gynecology, andrology, obstetrics, ENT, internal

medicine, surgery and pediatrics between the medical experts and patients, covering both genders of five age groups: 50+, 49–40, 39–30, 29–20, and 20–. Since both age and gender are very important indicators of accurate diagnosis, these information are always provided by the patient at the beginning of the dialogue when profiling their diseases to the consultant. After the data were adequately retrieved, all the contents of the dialogues were double-checked by the researchers who were familiar with the online data collection and analysis but without any modification to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the data (according to ANOVA and Turkey test, $R=0.960$, which means that the data are of high reliability).

	Age Groups				
	-20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Male	100	100	100	100	100
Female	100	100	100	100	100
SUM	200	200	200	200	200

Table 1. The cross-table of age and gender for data collection

While analyzing the acknowledging act in the online medical consultation context,

both qualitative and quantitative methods have been applied in the current research. Qualitatively, acknowledging acts have been firstly identified according to IFID, and then they are categorized in terms of forms, discourse types and multimodal analysis, finally further comparative gender-oriented and age-oriented analyses are conducted to illustrate the relationship between acknowledging acts and social and cultural dimensions. Quantitatively, the distribution of acknowledging acts will be calculated and processed statistically in different forms and discourse types among different gender/age groups, which provides hard-fact evidence for or against the qualitative analysis in the previous researches as well as the current one.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the qualitative analysis and quantitative distribution of the various forms of the acknowledging acts and discusses their implications of politeness.

A. Types of Acknowledging Strategies by the Patients in Online

Consultation

To address our first question of what types of acknowledging strategies do patients use in their conversation with the consultants in the cyberspace, we analyze our data from three perspectives: IFID, as well as its syntactic concurrence and speech act sequence.

In terms of speech act verbs, acknowledging acts can be first classified as direct and indirect with the former consisting of lexical forms while the latter being

unique syntactic construction like “不好意思，麻烦您了(I am sorry to trouble you so much)” (in our data, only four cases have been found). According to our data, it is found that direct acknowledging is mainly constructed with the help of “谢谢/感谢 (thank)” and its variations as the IFIDs in the forms of “thanks, thank you (very much/ a million/ so much/ for your help), thx, I really appreciate it, etc.”.

From Table 2, it is clear that the interactants use significantly more direct acknowledging than indirect ones (900 vs. 4). For the former, the stereotyped forms of acknowledgment like 谢谢/感谢 (Thanks) are used more often than others. What is interesting is that interjections like 啊 [ah], 了/啦 [le] and 哦 [oh] are frequently used with direct acknowledging forms to deliver the emotional charge of the patient so as to highlight the sincerity and authenticity of their gratitude to the expert. Similarly, the repetition of acknowledging forms 谢谢谢谢 (thanks, thanks) functions along the same vein to stress the weight of gratitude from the patient according to the “principle of quantitative iconicity” (Wang, 2003, p. 7). With more verbal efforts, the patients successfully place a high value on their obligations to express gratitude to the consultants in light of the constraint of “Obligation of S to O” (Leech, 2014, p. 92) in the framework of Grand Strategy of Politeness.

Table 2. Forms of direct acknowledging IFIDs in our data.

Acknowledging Strategies		Examples	Frequency
Thanks	Alone	谢谢 / 感谢(Thanks)	457
	with interjection	谢谢啊 / 啦 / 了 / 哦 (Thanks!)	62
		哦谢谢(oh, thanks)	
	with repetition	谢谢谢谢 (thanks, thanks)	9
	in abbreviation	谢了 / 啦 (thx)	9
	with vocatives	谢谢王医生 / 老师 (doctor Wong, teacher)	175
Thank you	You	谢谢你	58
	you as honorific	谢谢您	82
Thank you	with degree adverbials	太感谢了 / 太谢谢你了 / 太感谢您了 / 非常感谢 / 万分感谢 (thank you very much / a million)	22
	with reason adverbials	谢谢你的答复 / 回答 / 回复 / 建议 / 指导 / 帮助 (thanks for your replies / advices / guidance / help)	26
SUM			900

(* Together with four cases of indirect acknowledging IFIDs, the sum is 904).

When the acknowledging act is realized in an abbreviated form, it is against the constraint of “Obligation of S to O” (Leech, 2014, p. 92) according to Grand Strategy of Politeness, and this may not be appropriately acceptable in offline context. However, it is free from approbation in virtual communication since the netizens intend to express the acknowledgement of the other’s help with minimum verbal efforts in congruence with the “principle of economy” governing the language use in cyberspace. In other words, cyberspace set lower expectancy of politeness expressions towards the others whose time-taking key-in of the words turn out to be the best excuse. This kind of tolerance is further supported by the co-occurrence of IFID “thanks” with vocatives like 谢谢医生 (doctor, stressing the professional identity)/老师 (teacher, highlighting the expertise edge) /亲 (dear, underlining close distance) in the online dialogue between the patient and medical experts, of which 老师 (teacher) /亲 (dear) can never be used to express gratitude to a doctor in face-to-face communication but acceptable in computer-mediated situation.

It is because the patient cannot switch the label of the doctor at their own wills, which is against the naming or vocative rule of Chinese culture—be right and proper. Otherwise, that is considered as typically impolite, which is particularly true for 亲 (dear) used solely between interactants of extreme intimacy in offline communication. However, these turn out to be acceptable in cyberspace where they are taken as the devices of pragmatic empathy to narrow the distance between the two sides rather than markers of crude offence or lack of deference. Moreover, direct acknowledging forms are sometimes accompanied with adverbials of degree (placing a high

value on the consultant's generosity) or reason (laying stress on the high value of patient's obligation) to enhance the positive face of the addressee. As for the indirect acknowledging form “不好意思，麻烦您了(I am sorry to trouble you so much)”, it reveals that Chinese like any other oriental cultures (for instance, the Japanese acknowledging form “*Doomo sumimasen deshita* (I am very sorry)”) sometimes focuses on the trouble they have caused the benefactor rather than the aspects which are pleasing to the recipient (Ide, 1998). This can serve as the dividing line between easterners and westerners when responding to favors from others.

With regard to the syntactic concurrence of IFIDs, two types of sentences (declarative and imperative) are identified according to their forms in the data as shown in table 3 where declaratives outrank imperatives significantly for acknowledging acts in cyberspace, which has never been reported in the existing literatures. As for the subcategories of declaratives, it is worth mentioning that IFIDs in simple present tense ranks highest (845) in terms of frequency, followed by future tense (53), simple past tense (4), which demonstrates that the patients not only cater for the current need of the positive face of the addressees with the use of IFIDs in simple present tense, but also highlight that through the employment of simple past tense (placing a high value on addressee's qualities and the patient's obligations) and future tense (placing a high value on the patient's wants) all of which contribute to the expression of sincere gratitude from the patient from different temporal dimensions.

Table 3. Categories of syntactic concurrence of IFIDs in our data

Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency
Declarative	Simple present tense	谢谢您(Thank you)	845
	Future tense	谢谢，以后还会麻烦您的 (Thanks, and I will turn to you for help in the future)	53 902
	Simple past tense	刚刚麻烦您了 (Sorry that I troubled you so much just now)	4
	Imperative	Pray or wish 祝你开心(May you be happy)	2 2

It is demonstrated in table 3 above that IFIDs of acknowledging acts consist of eight types (expressive, evaluative, expository, vocative, apologetic, informative, commissive and benedictive) according to their roles in the data with reference to Dijk (1979), Chen (1999) and Sbisà (2000) in the context of speech act sequence. Just as Dijk (1979) comments:

Speech acts usually do not come alone. They may occur in ordered sequences of speech acts accomplished by one speaker or by subsequent speakers, e.g. in the course of a conversation. Much in the same way as sentences may occur in sequences which should satisfy a number of

constraints, e.g. those of semantic coherence, in order to be acceptable as discourses, we should expect that speech act sequences are not arbitrary. Thus, a serious linguistic pragmatics should not only account for speech acts, but also for the relations between speech acts and the ways these relations are expressed in the sentences and texts used to perform such speech act sequences. (p. 447)

Our findings are shown in Table 4, where *expressive* ranks the highest (508) in terms of frequency, followed by *informative* (278), *empathetic* (82), *expository* (26), *apologetic* (4), and *evaluative* (4), with *commissive* (1) and *benedictive* (1) being the least. It is clear that sometimes, an acknowledging event is made up of other speech acts, which are conducive to the rapport management between the interactants, since the latter flesh out a fuller and richer image of the patient on the other end of the computer. To some extent, these concurrent speech acts help to enhance the positive face of the addressee by placing a high value on medical expert's qualities as well as the indebtedness of the patient to the addressee (Leech, 2014).

Table 4. Categories of speech act sequence of IFIDs in our data

Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency	
Expressive	Express gratitude directly	谢谢了	508	
Evaluative	Evaluate the received favor or help	谢谢，非常满意； 回复很棒	4	
Expository	Expose the content of the favor	谢谢您的指导；谢 谢解答	26	
Empathetic	Express gratitude with honorifics	谢谢您/亲	82	
Apologetic	Express gratitude via apology	麻烦您了；打扰 您了	4	904
Informative	Inform the addressee of the deeds done	谢谢，选了好评	278	
Commissive	Make a promise to the addressee	你如果给我的方法 治好了， 我一定去山东感谢 你。	1	
Benedictive	Pray for the addressee	谢谢，祝你开心	1	

B. Types of Emotional Displays by the Patients in Online Consultation

In face-to-face acknowledging expression, emotions can be displayed in the following ways: They can be expressed non-verbally or prosodically through facial expressions, gestures, and intonation; through bodily symptoms such as nodding, hand shaking, and bowing, or verbally through interjections, emotion words, expressive speech acts, etc. Emotions can also be described through explicit representations or meta-comments. All of these cues may index emotions. Schwarz-Friesel (2007) suggests a two-partite distinction of means of expressing emotions: (1) verbal expression and visual intensification, and (2) verbal descriptions and metacomments. In our analysis, we take these categories as a starting point, but only find visual intensification, but no verbal descriptions or metacomments as shown in table 5. As illustrated in table 5, the majority of these are accessible by means of direct expressing.



Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency
Emoticon	Made up of strokes or punctuations or letters	:) ^ω^	14
Emoji	Made up of smiley that iconize the facial expressions or gifts	 	12

Table 5. Categories of speech emotional displays of acknowledgment

This may be partially explained by the fact that IFIDs of acknowledging acts have a two-fold function as a marker of both verbal expression and description. Moreover, in the exchange of cost and benefit between the interactants, the patient should return the favor as soon as possible to the address if he/she sincerely places a high value on the qualities of the medical experts. Just as Haverkate (1993) pointed out:

Giving thanks is a speech act which serves specifically to redress the balance in the cost-benefit relation between speaker and hearer, which means that the thanking formulas compensate symbolically for the cost invested by the hearer for the benefit of the speaker... not to redress the cost-benefit balance by not thanking the other... is considered as a form of impolite behavior (p. 160).

C. Interrelationship between Acknowledging Act and Genders/age Groups

Putting our picture together, we claim that the relationship between acknowledgements, emotional displays, genders, and age groups can only be appropriately reported if one regards the overall meaning of acknowledging acts as a complex reciprocal relationship between their relational meaning and emotional evaluations. We regard these dimensions as being interrelated because all of them can have a direct impact on the other and therefore cannot be separated when defining the notion of gratitude expression.

Interrelationship between acknowledging act and genders. From the perspective

of interpersonal pragmatics (Locher & Graham, 2010), the linguistic signaling and conversational management of acknowledgment is of central importance. From these discourse-analytical perspectives acknowledging acts not only constitute social-psychological states, but are bound to socially-normative discursive practices of identity construction and rapport engagement.

As shown in table 6, it is indicated that there is significant difference found between two genders (sig.=0.03, $P \leq 0.05$) as for the forms of acknowledging IFIDs in our data, and it deserves special attention that identity-sensitive IFIDs reveal that females are more polite than male counterparts. Moreover, the female patients exhibit sharper awareness of honorifics compared with males when using “您” (57v.s.25) and “你 (20v.s.38)” in a reverse way. Besides, it is always the females rather than the males who intensively place a higher value on the medical expert’s qualities through the use of IFIDs with degree adverbials. All these contribute to a politer image of females in terms of the use of acknowledging IFIDs in medical consultation in cyberspace, which is also in congruence with female speech style hypothesis proposed by Lakoff (1975).

Table 6. Cross-table of forms of acknowledgment and genders

Acknowledging Strategies		Examples	Frequency		
			Male	Female	SUM
Thanks	Alone	谢谢 / 感谢(Thanks)	222	235	457
	with interjection	谢谢啊 / 啦 / 了 / 哦 (Thanks!) 哦谢谢(oh, thanks)	30	32	62
	with repetition in abbreviation	谢谢谢谢(thanks, thanks) 谢了/啦 (thx)	5 5	4 4	9 9
Thank you	with vocatives	谢谢医生/老师/亲 (doctor, teacher, dear)	71	104	175
	You	谢谢你 (Thank you)	38	20	58
	you as honorific	谢谢您(Thank YOU)	25	57	82
	with degree adverbials	太感谢了/太谢谢你了/太感谢您了/非常感谢/万分感谢(thank you very much/ a million)	6	16	22
Thank you	with reason adverbials	谢谢你的答复/回答/回复/建议/指导/帮助(thanks for your replies/advices/ guidance/help)	14	12	26
	Apology as acknowledgements	不好意思, 麻烦您了(I am sorry to trouble you)	0	4	4
SUM			416	488	904

When it comes to the gendered differences in syntactic categories of acknowledging acts, it is clear from table 7 that there is no obvious difference between the two genders in the use of simple present tense of declaratives. However, there is a sharp discrepancy

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in between as for the other categories, with the females producing more verbal efforts or prayers than the males do. This implies that females are more competent in acknowledging diversities and more successful in constructing themselves as decent and deferent towards others' favor and help. On the contrary, the males prefer to a narrow range of linguistic choices to express their gratitude and are blunter in verbal construction of their acknowledgment for the addressee.

Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency		
			Male	Female	SUM
	Simple present tense	谢谢您 (Thank you)	420	425	
Declarative	Future tense	谢谢，以后还会麻烦 / 找 / 打扰您的(Thanks, and I will turn to you for help in the future)	10	43	902
	Simple past tense	刚刚麻烦您了 (Sorry that I troubled you so much just now,)	1	3	904
Imperative	Pray or wish	祝你开心(May you be happy)	0	2	2

Table 7. Cross-table of syntactic categories and genders

Table 8 indicates that the type of speech act sequences in constructing acknowledgment is generally more diverse in female verbal production than that of males, except expressives (251v.s.257) and informatives (136v.s.142), which are more oriented toward the objective state of acknowledging information of “what we are doing here” (Murdock, 1989, p. 119) for the interactants in talk.

Table 8. Cross-table of speech act sequence of acknowledging act and genders

Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency		
			Male	Female	SUM
Expressive	Express gratitude simply and directly	谢谢(了/啦)	251	257	
Evaluative	Evaluate the received favor or help	谢谢，非常满意； 回复很棒	1	3	
Expository	Expose the content of the favor	谢谢您的指导；谢 谢解答	2	24	
Empathetic	Express gratitude via honorifics	谢谢您/亲/医生/ 老师	21	61	
Apologetic	Express gratitude via apology	麻烦您了；打扰 您了	1	6	904
Informative	Inform the addressee of the deeds done	谢谢，选了好评	136	142	
Commissive	Make a promise to the addressee	你如果给我的方法 治好了， 我一定去山东感谢 你。	0	1	
Benedictive	Pray for the addressee	谢谢，祝你开心	0	1	

However, the fact that the females outrank the males in the remaining categories (3 v.s.1 for evaluatives; 24 v.s.2 for expository; 61 v.s. 21 for vocatives; 6 v.s.1 for apologetic; 1 v.s. 0 for both commissive and benedictive) of acknowledging act sequences in cyberspace indicates that the females move further beyond the sole signaling of “what we are doing here” into conversational actions, with the greatest humanized impact related to the strong sense of status of the participants, as well as their rights and obligations (Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998). Therefore, the females are claimed to be more engaged than males when producing acknowledging acts in the context of medical consultation in cyberspace, which can be further supported by the distribution of the emotional displays of acknowledgments between two genders as shown in table 9.

Categories	Description	Examples	Frequency		
			Male	Female	SUM
Emoticon	Made up of strokes or punctuations or letters	:)	2	2	14
		:’(0	1	
		^ω^	0	1	
		:D	0	2	
		(☹☹☹)	0	3	
		8-)	0	1	
		(☹_☹)	0	1	
Emoji	Made up of smiley that iconize the facial expressions or gifts	☺☺	0	1	26
		😊	1	9	
		😄	0	1	
		🌹	0	1	
			0	1	
SUM			3	23	26

Table 9. Cross-table of speech emotional displays of acknowledgment and genders.

If the explicit display of negative emotions with the emoticon or emoji is taken as the signal of impoliteness, then the absence of positive emotional displays in acknowledging acts would also fall into the same category. To be specific, Culpeper once claimed with a focus on impoliteness and negative emotional display:

Displaying emotions such as contempt or anger has nothing in itself to do with impoliteness. However, somebody displaying great contempt for and anger at someone and doing so publicly may be judged (...) to have acted in an inappropriately and unfairly hurtful way (...), causing an emotional reaction such as embarrassment or anger (...). (Culpeper, 2010, p. 60)

D. Interrelationship between acknowledging act and age groups

Languages may not have changed in the ancient times the way they do today, when the computer-mediated mode of communication amplifies and makes global what used to be local in dazzling changes of linguistic forms for the same intention. Actually, most of the changes arise out of this tension between “old” and “new”, which is undoubtedly related to speakers’ ages, as Mouton (2012) noted:

Age is one of the variables the sociolinguist takes into account, because, from the moment speakers are socialized to behave in a particular way, the way they speak tends to fit in with what is expected of a certain age group. Scientific studies show that the age variable should not be taken in isolation, but correlated with others such as education, sex, etc.

because, it does not affect uneducated rural speakers in the same way as urban speakers embedded in a multitude of social networks. (p. 6)

If accepted, this observation directs the research on Chinese acknowledging act in cyberspace towards an age variable so as to map out the fuller picture of the gratitude expression empirically. Since early attempts to investigate acknowledging act suffers to some extent from the failure of excluding the age variable, their findings are surely vague as for the account of the interrelationship between gratitude expression and age. Accordingly, “age variable” is focused on here with a belief that it is time to assess the interrelationship in between by drawing on empirical data.

Taking the perspective of generation-specific use of language (Cheshire et al., 2017), the focus is the language of different cohorts of individuals living within a speech community, as hinted by Labov (1994) that individuals tend to preserve their speech patterns as they move through their lifespan. Therefore, the comparative study of generation-specific language necessarily reveals the profile and projection of the change of language use. As shown in table 10 below, there is no significant difference between the five age groups with regard to the use of acknowledging IFIDs when expressing gratitude in online medical consultation. This can be explained by the universally stereotyped role of IFIDs in constructing acknowledgment to the addressee.

Table 10. Cross-table of acknowledging IFIDs and age groups

Acknowledging Strategies		Frequency					SUM
		-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	
Thanks							
	Alone with	88	95	93	94	87	457
	interjection with repetition	19	12	11	10	10	62
	in abbreviation	2	2	3	0	1	9
	with address	1	1	2	4	1	9
Thank you	terms	33	31	29	20	32	175
	You	10	8	10	18	12	58
	you as	10	9	20	22	21	82
Thank you	honorifics						
	with degree	0	7	6	4	5	22
	adverbials with reason						
	adverbials	1	4	8	6	7	26
Apology as		0	2	1	0	1	4
acknowledgements							
	SUM	164	171	183	178	177	904

However, it is found that the younger generation (age groups of -20 and 20–30) respectively produce more colloquial forms of acknowledgment than the others by the frequent use of more interjections (19/12) and weaker sense of honorific usage of “YOU” (10/9) compared with older generations. On the one hand, these findings reveal that the younger generations are not so polite as the older ones with regard to formality of gratitude; on the other hand, there is a gradual shift of youth culture from traditionalism to modernism in which being young is a credit or privilege for more freedom in language use or creation. This shift is particularly true when a further comparison is done between age groups -20 and 20-30. For instance, the former are reluctant to use “thank you” with degree adverbials (0) as intensifiers of placing higher values on the medical expert’s qualities, and the latter intend to use that (7) as the other older generations do (6/4/5). Moreover, this roughly remains the same for the acknowledging IFIDs with reason adverbials for the same reason, which indirectly implies that age group -20 may be taken as a dividing line between maturity and immaturity in the appropriate use of polite gratitude expressions.

Eckert (1997) once pointed out that “only the middle aged are seen as engaging in mature use, as ‘doing’ language rather than learning it or losing it” (p. 157). According to our research, the middle age groups do display some interesting points. For instance, it is found that age group 40-50 is the lowest in using acknowledging IFIDs, together with address terms (20) and repetition (0), but highest with abbreviation (2). This may be attributed to the special value of this age in Chinese culture: they are caught in the middle between the younger and the older as the backbone of the family and

the society with achievements and success. Therefore, they mostly take the invisible addressee on the other end of the computer as equals, with whom the vocatives for unequal parties as well as the redundant use of gratitude expressions are omitted. However, the casual and informal abbreviation of acknowledgment is used most. In other words, what links these seemingly disparate findings is their alleged function of constructing equal status with the addressee.

In the West and beyond, adolescence became an increasingly culturally salient life stage during the second half of the twentieth century, marked linguistically in a range of age-exclusive uses of language like slogan or jargon. The findings in our research as shown in table 11 indicate that one more entry could be added into that set of age-preferential uses of language. In other words, when the Chinese patients express acknowledgment in cyberspace, the younger generation prefers to use only a few tenses in expressing gratitude compared with other age groups, which highlights the strictest observation of the “principle of economy” among the youth in online communication. It is widely believed that the younger generation is the prime innovator and precursor of short linguistic structures in online communication (Tagliamonte, 2016).

Table 11. Cross-table of syntactic categories and age groups

Categories	Description	Frequency					SUM
		-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	
Declarative	Simple present tense	168	170	173	171	163	845
	Future tense	2	10	9	10	22	53
	Simple past tense	0	0	1	1	2	4
Imperative	Pray or wish	0	1	0	0	1	2
	SUM	170	181	183	182	188	904

The lack of diversity in gratitude expressions in our data by age group -20 is further verified by some particularly striking recurrent observation in table 12: they are also the lowest (167) in terms of the diversity of speech act sequences when producing acknowledging act if compared with other age groups. Interestingly, the older age groups like 40–50 and 50+ are more productive in the diversity of speech act enrichment when expressing gratitude to the addressees, who are the only groups give a full display to all the eight types of speech act sequences in acknowledgement construction. This is partially against the claim by Eckert (1997) that the older generation is losing the sense of language use. Moreover, these two age groups are the politest one with courtesy among all the patents consulting online.

Table 12. Cross-table of speech act sequence of acknowledging act and age groups

Categories	Frequency					SUM
	-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	
Expressive	87	108	105	109	99	508
Evaluative	1	0	0	2	1	4
Expository	3	1	8	7	7	26
Empathetic	18	21	23	9	11	82
Apologetic	0	1	1	1	1	4
Informative	58	61	49	56	54	278
Commissive	0	0	0	0	1	1
Benedictive	0	0	0	0	1	1
SUM	167	192	186	184	175	904

As for the emotional displays with acknowledging acts, it is found that emotional indexing is not rare and seems to play a vital role in communication. To be specific, generation-specific shift of emotional indexing is typically taking place over the youngest and the oldest generations when code-switching occurs between verbal symbols and visual symbols, as shown in table 13.

Table 13. Cross-table of speech emotional displays of acknowledgment and age groups

Categories	Examples	Frequency					SUM
		-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	
Emoticon	:)	4	0	1	0	0	
	:’(1	0	0	0	0	
	^ω^	0	1	0	0	0	
							14
	:D	0	1	0	0	0	26
	(◉◉)	0	0	1	0	2	
	8-)	0	0	0	0	1	
	(◉_◉)	1	0	0	0	0	
	◉ω◉	1	0	0	0	0	
Emoji	😊	3	2	1	1	3	
	😬	0	0	1	0	0	12
	🌹	1	0	0	0	0	
SUM		11	4	4	1	6	26

We believe the pattern of preferential age switching whereby adolescents and senior citizens use a higher proportion of stigmatized variants of visual emotional signal than speakers of other ages may impinge on the construction of unique identity by the younger group. In this sense, these emoticons or emojis notably address the need of constructing an age-related identity in gratitude expressions in cyberspace, and further illuminate the difference between age groups in terms of the socially psychological display of emotions in computer mediated communication. Given the quantitatively attestable presence of emotional display in table 14, it is therefore sound to claim that age and generation-specific differences in the emotional displays of acknowledging acts can be put to use within cyberspace as part of general discussions and explorations of politeness variation and pragmatic awareness enhancement.

Conclusion

So far, a number of studies have examined the acknowledging acts of various linguistic or cultural groups in different contexts. However, more work still remains to be done in Chinese computer-mediated communication with the help of naturally occurring data. In this connection, the present study has filled in a gap by exploring the use of acknowledgments in consultant-patient conversations in the cyberspace. In particular we are interested in seeing what forms of gratitude expressions are used, how their politeness are implied, and how the use of acknowledging acts gets influenced by the mediateness, gender, and age of the communicator. It has been found that both direct and indirect acknowledging are used lexically in the consultation between consultant and patient in their online communication, and the types of acknowledging

falls into thanks (alone, with interjections, with repetition, in abbreviation or with vocatives), thank you (with you as a referent for equal status or honorific, with degree adverbials or reason adverbials). Syntactically, declarative forms outranks the other forms, together with scarce use of imperatives for acknowledgments. As for the co-concurrent speech act sequence of acknowledging acts, eight types have been found: where *expressive* ranks the highest in terms of frequency, followed by *informative*, *empathetic*, *expository*, *apologetic*, and *evaluative*, with *commissive* and *benedictive* being the least. Finally, some emotional displays of acknowledging acts have been found with multi-modal analysis. In short, the acknowledging acts has been found to be realized in more forms than the previous studies in online communication in our data.

With regard to the relationship between acknowledging act and politeness, it is found that all of the forms of the consultants' gratitude expressions may have the implication of underlining the positive face in the context of consultant-patient communication. More specifically, it is revealed that patients use a lot of acknowledging acts in the conversation with the consultant for the sake of politeness, which means that they place a high value on what pertains to the expert they are turning to for help. Their politeness orientations are mainly set towards the patient's need of self-image construction with courtesy and further smooth assistance if needed in the future. Thus, by and large, the patients' use of acknowledging is not only riveted on the act of consultation alone, but also motivated toward interpersonal interaction, which might contribute to next round of information inquiry. Besides, it is indicated in our

data, the female patients are better at acknowledging act initiation than the male counterparts, and the younger generation is not doing so well as the older generations in terms of the diversity of acknowledging forms. This is consistent with the prior research findings that females are observing the politeness principle more strictly than the males, and so it is between the old and young in constructing acknowledging acts.

Theoretically, this research would enrich the previous classification of acknowledging acts and extend the research focus from the single speech act to its realization in specific socially and culturally situated context. Practically, the study can offer something to digest for the construction of a harmonious doctor-patient relationship on the basis of expressions elicited for patient education. It should be born in mind that some issues need to be addressed further if the validity of the research findings is not to be reduced. First, the size of the corpus is not accommodating enough and the sources of consultation episodes are not adequately diversified. Second, the procedure of data identification and analysis are not free from slips, which may be bettered if non-verbal or multi-modal acknowledge signals are included in the analysis of the data. Although the findings of the current study speak for a discursive approach for studying acknowledging acts in online medical consultation, it is suggested that this is taken as a starting point to further explore the interface of acknowledging act, politeness, relational work and online communication.

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Taking Wedding Pictures

Jian Tang

Fantasy of Freedom: Narrating Sex and Love in Yu Dafu and Eileen Chang

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Abstract

How are sex and love narrated in modern Chinese literature? How is freedom articulated in this subject? How are the subject's agency, quest for freedom and social norms interacted? This paper will address the above questions through the examination of two short stories for the republic era of China: "Sinking" (1921) by Yu Dafu and "Sealed Off" (1943) by Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing). Notably, the expression and negotiation of sex and love are not only the shared theme in the two stories, but also the commonly used strategy to revolutionize modernity and individual identity during that period. The investigation of these texts attempts to suggest that fantasizing freedom, on the one hand, is affected by the subject's negotiation with social agency, constrained and disciplined by social norms; on the other hand, the agency does not necessarily respond to freedom but rather to constraint which actively conforms to the social norms. Eventually, the paper intends to illustrate that the interaction of agency-freedom-social norms should not be reduced to the binary of repression and resistance. Instead, Yu's and Chang's short stories will be the examples to reveal the dual facets of the complicated and dynamic relationship underlying the literary discourse in modern China.

A Review of Sex and Love in Modern China

Admittedly, one might spontaneously relate to revolution when examining the theme of love and sex in the mainstream narratives of modern Chinese literature. As Jianmei Liu aptly puts it, “Revolution and love are two of the most powerful discourses shaping Chinese modern identity” (Liu 3). In her monograph, Liu starts with the genealogy of “revolution plus love” in Chinese literature and argues that this formula of revolution and love has a long tradition in the literary history before the May Fourth Movement. In the late Qing fictions, the theme of heroism and romantic love is already promoted by intellectuals to “[help] build national identity and [propel] the evolution of humanity” (9). Yet obviously, using individual love to embody the national spirit of revolution as a common theme of literature flourishes during the May Fourth period, which is closely associated with and reflected by the rising of feminist writings, in which “the emancipation of women’s bodies associated with the rise of women’s subjectivity became one of the most important signs of literary modernity at this historical moment” (13). One example among the feminist writings is Ding Ling’s *The Diary of Miss Sophie* (1928), which, according to Liu, “confronts the conventional configuration of women” (14). To summarize the literary tradition of writing love and revolution and the scholars’ perception, Liu addresses that “love contains irreducible components of the individual’s sexual identity and bodily experiences, relationships between man and woman, and a sense of self-fulfillment; revolution is related to the trajectory of progress, freedom, equality and emancipation. . . . recent scholarship has usually considered them as the two major tropes of modernity” (3). Here, Liu challenges this prevailing view by poignantly pointing out that this ideological construction of love and legitimization of modernity makes

both terms “transhistorical or immutable” and their “historical identities” invalid (3). In this respect, Liu suggests that gender relations should not be understood as the timeless and “homogenizing power” to perpetuate modernization (8). Specifically, she is keen on the “split personality” of Chinese intellectuals and their “conflicted modern consciousness” (210) towards the portrait of a utopian image of a strong and modernized China.

Apart from Liu whose study systematically explores the theme of love, other scholars have also been attentive to the depictions of (sexual) desire and the identity/subjectivity in struggle within modern literary discourses. One of the commonalities among these studies is that they often highlight the interaction between the subjectivity and the transformation of Chinese society. For instance, in his 1997 book, Ban Wang analyzes several Eileen Chang’s works to examine the fashioning of a viable self as well as the construction of a workable identity in the context of modern China in the 19th to 20th century. The analysis of modern political figures or writers, including Eileen Chang, foregrounds how a political subject actively adapts to the modern nation-state and sustains a unified self when confronting the traditional culture. Throughout the years, many scholars have delved into Eileen Chang’s works, such as “Love in a Fallen City” and “Lust, Caution,” to unpack the implications of love, social realities and power relations. For instance, Belinda Kong analyzes “Love in a Fallen City” to explore how Shanghai is represented in the biopolitical tension between the forces of modern vis-a-vis tradition, and China vis-a-vis the West. In addition, Xiaoping Wang shows the predicament of marriage and love by revealing that individualism in

Chang's work is in a deep crisis, which further results in the crisis of culture—partly due to the constraints of the society's semicolonial and semitraditional feature. Only a few academic articles touch upon the analysis of "Sealed Off," which foreground the love and tension between two sexes, as well as the allegorical relationship between the protagonist's romance and the image of cosmopolitan Shanghai/modern China. Among them, Xudong Zhang argues that the fleeting romance between the two protagonists in a secluded tram alludes to the fantasized interiority of Shanghai city, which further associates with the making of Shanghai as an allegory of modernity in the 20th century China.

Moving on to the scholarships on Yu Dafu, a significant amount of scholarly emphasis has been placed on Yu's appropriation of foreign texts and representation of Western/modern culture. Valerie Levan examines the emotional expressions in English occurred in Yu's collection *Sinking* and argues this linguistic phenomenon indicates Yu's efforts to create his own written language as he is writing in the intersection of Chinese tradition and foreign modernity. In addition, Yu's works, especially his short story "Sinking", are compelling to literary scholars for its self-dissection and the delineation of individual desire. The crisis of selfhood is allied with the crisis of nationhood, whereas sexuality is combined with patriotism (Liu 14). Focusing on "Sinking," Jing Tsu provides an example of using the Freudian psychoanalysis to explore the individual's interiority. Tsu argues that the construction of a new self has paralleled with the quest for modernity. In this sense, the protagonist's masochistic suffering is the literary expression of the nation's failure and suffering.

Analyzing Yu Dafu's works and his identity as a modern writer, Hongbing Zhang also adopts the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis. By constantly drawing upon the Lacanian theorization of desire, Zhang argues that Yu's petit-bourgeois desire prevents him from transforming into the writer of revolutionary and proletariat literature. In the article, Zhang uses the short story "Sinking" as a point of departure, and unravels the rupture in Yu's literary development: "Sinking" is considered as the paradigm to start the literary revolution in modern Chinese literature, however Yu's later writing drifts away and is eventually distant from the revolutionary literature. Challenging the conventional readings that either attributes Yu's detachment to the restriction of class consciousness or the lack of comrades' support, Zhang proposes to reexamine Yu's case in the Lacanian framework of human desire and the sublimation to the Thing. In this light, Zhang contends that what holds back Yu's transformation from a literary revolutionist to revolutionary writer is his firm belief that "self" is the sublime object of literature, which is apparently contradicts with the essence of proletariat literature in which the Other—the masses—is elevated to the dignity of the Thing (19-20).

So far, the literary review has revealed at least two trends of present studies on love and sex(uality): on the one hand, the analysis on these two stories has placed more emphasis on how the subject's sexuality and subjectivity contribute to the representation of China's legitimate modernity; on the other hand, these scholarships are more attentive to the contradiction and confrontation between tradition and modern, rather than literary representation of social norms and the subject's agency

during the Republican era. In other words, the subject's desire is once again regarded as the means to articulate and interpret the nationalist discourse, and further, serves as what Frederic Jameson called the "national allegory" (69). Yet, Liu's research has indeed casted a new light upon the discussion of love and revolution, in the sense that it elucidates how modern intellectuals, especially the woman writers, negotiate with their social positions in the name of social progress using the formula of love and revolution (134). Although Liu's work has reinterpreted and reconstructed how love-and-revolution formula shapes modern discourses, the formula *per se* is left unquestioned, which renders love and revolution remaining as the take-for-granted monolithic concept that dominates how scholars and critics approach a modern text. Therefore, motivated by Liu and to further her arguments, this paper attempts to not only explore the intellectual's "split personality" in imagining the utopian China, but also to deconstruct the formula of love and revolution. In other words, by de-revolutionizing sex and love and extracting them from the political context of modernizing China, this paper intends to examine the representation of sex and love in the modern literary texts as the revelation of the subject's agency and (inter) subjectivity, rather than the allegory of a nation's fate.

The Oedipus Complex: Desire and Anxiety in "Sinking"

Yu Dafu's short story features a young Chinese student and his oversea experience in Japan at the beginning of 20th century. The protagonist, who has no name throughout the story, loses his parents at a young age. He is brought up by his elder brother who sends him to Japan for college. The story has a detailed narrative of the protagonist's

oversea experiences by highlighting his helplessness and paranoia, eventually then, the self-destruction. In the narrative, the author, Yu Dafu, has dedicated much energy to delineate the young man's psychic life through the depiction of his desire presented in various modalities, such as his sexual desire and his desire for mother. As desire is central to the subject formation, it is of great importance to examine how desire is mapped out so that to analyze how the subject is formed in Yu's story.

At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is explicitly depicted as a solitary, reserved and melancholy young man. But ironically, he keeps distant and indifferent to his classmates, nevertheless the emotional change when he meets with girl students is hard to disguise. For example, the "quickenened breath" and "burning cheeks" (Yu 35) are the most manifest signs of his uneasiness. If it is still too farfetched to argue these features signify the protagonist's repressed sexual desire, then peeping at the innkeeper's daughter taking a shower or eavesdropping lovers having sex clearly denotes the sexual desire which constantly unsettles the protagonist. However, the protagonist keeps repressing his desire through either self-loathing after masturbation or keeping himself further away from people. The way in which he represses the desire is to elicit the sense of shame: after masturbation, he "couldn't help but feeling ashamed of himself" (42); or "cursed himself severely in his heart" by repeating "shame, shame" (49). Such inner conflict is well explained by Freud in "The Ego and the Id," in which he thinks that one's unconscious id has been constantly repressed and dissolved by the superego which is mediated and disciplined by the moral prohibition (19-20).

Yet, the protagonist's repression is not confined to the unfulfilled sexual desire. To further unravel his repressed desire, I need to take into consideration his daydream. Perhaps the fact that the story begins with the protagonist's daydream shall, to some extent, imply its significance. In his daydream, the protagonist feels "the gentle breeze dense with the fragrance of violet [blowing] on his pallid face" and his body "[feels] soothed and languid as if under a mild intoxication." Eventually, he "[feels] as if he were sleeping in the lap of a kind mother" (Yu 32). In the later part of the story, the protagonist refuses to attend the Christian college, for "as a lover of freedom, he chafed under such superstitious restrictions" (37). Instead, he idles at home writing "stories... featuring himself as a romantic knight-errant" and he is "more and more enveloped in a world of fantasy" (38). Now one can at least discern two dominant features of the protagonist's daydream and creative writing—the fantasy of freedom and the longing for mother. Freud contends that daydreams signify the dreamer's unfulfilled childhood wish to alter the unpleasant reality, and fantasies are substitutes for the unsatisfied desire. In the protagonist's case, both the lack of freedom and the absence of mother mark his desire, which are substituted by the daydream. In the daydream, he discloses the desire for freedom and motherly comfort; but in the reality, he must repress the desire as he is under the surveillance of moral norms.

Then, the question becomes: How to understand the absence of and the longing for mother in the protagonist's daydream? In one sense, the absence of mother could be understood by its literal meaning in the text: the actual mother figure never shows up in the protagonist's accounts. But it is more important to fully grasp the signifying of

the Mother in the Freudian and Lacanian analysis of the Oedipus Complex. Referring to the dynamic struggle of id-ego-superego, Kaja Silverman explains superego is rooted in the Oedipus Complex which is conversely dissolved by superego. This process is neither unitary nor linear; rather it sees the cyclical development in which the affections for mother recurrently appears and is repressed. Building upon Freud's analysis, Lacan further explains that in the Imaginary, the unidentified subject sees no separation between himself and the mother. But as soon as he senses there is a world outside himself through the identification of others, he realizes the separation. This separation results in the unsettled desire of reuniting with mother. But the clinging to mother determined by the Oedipus Complex is always under crisis, meaning the desire is constantly repressed. The crisis signifies the entry into the Symbolic Order in which the subject is marked by lack—the absence of the Mother and the imaginary unity. In “Sinking,” the searching for this subject is rooted in the Oedipal crisis, in which the protagonist longs for the never fulfilled desire of reuniting with the “lost” Mother through his daydream. In this sense, the subject emerges from the split and alienation as he is repressed by what forbids him to fulfill the desire.

The repression, according to Lacan's 1958 essay, is the power of the Father. The protagonist's father passed away when he was three (Yu 36). In this case, his elder brother inherits the power of father and executes his patriarchal power on the protagonist. In psychoanalytic theories, the subject holds the grudge against the father because of the Oedipus Complex, but meanwhile he identifies with the powerful father and eventually becomes the father. In other words, what the subject experiences is

the inherent paradox: the Law of the Father represses the subject; but conversely the subject is shaped to imitate the Father. In “Sinking,” the phallogentric system and the phallic authority dominate the protagonist’s life. His elder brother picks his major and sends him to Japan for college, which is against his will of choosing an idyllic life. Towards the end of the story, the protagonist quarrels with his brother and sends him a letter to sever “the ties of kinship” (47). Consequently, he believes his brother “[is] so unkind” and he “hate[s] his brother like a viper or scorpion” (48). The hatred of brother initiates him to change his major, which he believes is the revenge:

As a means of *retaliation*, he gave up his study of medicine and switched to literature, intending this change of major to be a declaration of war, since it was brother who had urged him to study medicine...the sooner he died, the easier it would be to maintain a lifelong enmity toward his brother. For he was quite afraid that he would be reconciled with his brother in a year or two, and he changed his major to help strengthen his sense of enmity. (Yu 48; Italics added)

Through the protagonist’s internal monologue, one could tell his hatred and retaliation is not merely because he hates his brother. Rather, he needs to hate his brother, because the brother is the powerful but problematic symbol of phallus that represses him. Consequently, retaining the “sense of enmity” enables him to possibly retrieve what he has lost—freedom and the Mother. Here, the protagonist undergoes the “castration anxiety.” Being afraid of the Father’s punishment which is the castration, the subject disguises and represses his desire for the Mother. In the meantime, he

also feels the need to empower himself so that to defend himself against the Father (Silverman 140-41). Castration anxiety illustrates the protagonist's paradox: he is, on the one hand, the reserved, weak and "castrated" man. But on the other hand, he envies the brother's phallic authority and always loathes himself for his weakness and cowardliness. He blames himself for being emasculated and anticipates retrieving his masculine power. In the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order, the subject realizes the split between his own self and the Other. To be noticed, the Other is not the objects external to the subject (Deleuze 65); rather, his self "is always alienated in the Other" (Moi 100). In terms of the protagonist, the subject formation is not realized through the identification of the other—the protagonist's peers; but, it is through the identification of his own "Other"—the repressed desire. The desire is the id, the unconscious which emerges in the protagonist, as he is being repressed by the Father's power.

The Power of Nation: the Mother and the Father

The protagonist's separation from the Mother and the ceaseless efforts to reunite with her result in his castration anxiety and the split of the self and the Other. In this section, I will continue to investigate what the absence of the Mother signifies. To begin with, I need to discuss a key feature of the Mother in Yu's text: this sign undergoes iteration and differentiation, in which its meaning differs and defers. In his 1982 essay "Différance," Derrida specifically reminds us that the meaning of signs is not only differential, but also "defer[s] the presence of what they signify through endless substitutions of signifiers" (Chandler 248). In this light, the meaning of "Mother" in

Yu's text is neither ontological nor essentialist; rather, the sign undergoes fundamental changes which gives rise to the fluid and mutable meanings. In Yu's story, the Mother first signifies China—the protagonist's homeland. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist's monologue implies his attachment to the country— "Isn't the scenery in China as beautiful? Aren't the girls in China as pretty? Then why did I come to this land country in the eastern sea" (Yu 35)? Towards the end of the story, the protagonist's lament once again reveals his attachment which further transforms to the despair as he realizes he could never return to his country: "Looking up, he saw a bright star trembling in the farthest reaches of the western horizon. 'Underneath that shaky star lies my country, my birthplace, where I have spent eighteen years of my life. But alas, my homeland, I shall see you no more'" (55)! It would not be exaggerating to argue that the meaning of the Mother undergoes constant changes, which, at the beginning, signifies the protagonist's homeland. However, the protagonist takes his homeland as his love(r) (*qingren* 情人):

"I will love nothing but my country, and let my country be my love"
(52).

Meanwhile, the protagonist creates and nurtures this love (*aiqing* 爱情):

I want neither knowledge nor fame.

All I want is a 'heart' that can understand and comfort me, a warm and passionate heart and the sympathy that it generates and the love born of that sympathy!

What I want is love.

If there were one beautiful woman who understood my suffering, I would be willing to die for her. If there were one woman who would love me sincerely, I would also be willing to die for her, be she beautiful or ugly.

For what I want is love from the opposite sex.

O ye Heaven above, I want neither knowledge nor fame nor useless lucre. I shall be wholly content if you can grant me an Eve from the Garden of Eden, allowing me to possess her body and soul. (36)

This passage is the protagonist's self-dissection in his diary. The diary starts with venting his grievance and complaining about the suffering as an oversea student in Japan. Feeling useless to serve his homeland and helpless to empower himself, the protagonist ends his diary with the fantasy of love. In fact, the metaphorical relation between the intellectual's patriotic devotion and the pursuit of love (specifically of beautiful women) is not uncommon in Chinese literature, especially considering the literary tradition originated from the Lyrics of Chu (*chuci* 楚辭). As Zongqi Cai summarized, “the Beautiful Woman’ shows how the literati reconceptualized woman as an abstract, static object of desire—for spiritual fulfillment, sensual pleasure, or both. In “On Encountering Trouble,” by Qu Yuan (340? –278 b.c.e.), the first-known literati poet, we can already see feminine beauty conspicuously transformed into a symbol of moral virtue” (Cai 1). Yet, to contextualize the semiotic relation between love and country in Yu's text, I am attentive to the “différance” of the specific word—

love. To make it more evident, I put the original Chinese next to the English word “love,” so that to differentiate “lover” (*qingren*) from “love” (*aiqing*). The meaning of “love” keeps repeating, but it differs and bifurcates between *qingren* and *aiqing*. In this case, the meaning of the sign “Mother” defers and differs into the ceaselessly changing among homeland, love as *qingren* and love as *aiqing*. Hence, love (*aiqing* and *qingren*) is the protagonist’s strategy to articulate his reminiscence of the homeland that he is forever parted from. Synthesizing with the earlier discussion of desire, I contend that the protagonist’s repressed desire is his fantasy of freedom to express his will and wishes, reflected by his longing to love and to be loved, which is further decoded as the devotion and attachment to his homeland.

To decode the Mother, it is also important to highlight that the Mother is “present” and yet “absent” for the protagonist (Derrida 9). In his article, Dian Li analyzes the absence of mother in Ai Qing’s poetry. His analysis demonstrates that while Ai Qing’s birth mother is absent, his foster mother is both absent and present. The dislocation of birth mother and foster mother results in the poet’s identity anxiety. Furthermore, the absence of the Mother and repudiation of the phallic signification of the Father attribute to the poet’s defiance of both signs. In light of this discussion on the presence/absence of the Mother, I first argue that the Mother as homeland in Yu’s text is ubiquitously present. Apart from the monologues where the protagonist recalls the beautiful sceneries in his homeland and confesses his devotion to take her as his love, the impact of her presence is reflected in the protagonist’s grief over the nation’s weak and vulnerable fate. The protagonist is sensitive to the estrangement between

Japanese students and himself, which has further transformed into his antagonism against Japanese:

They are all Japanese, all my enemies. I'll have my revenge one day. I'll get even with them.

They are Japanese, and of course they don't have any sympathy for you. It's because you want their sympathy that you have grown to hate them.
(34)

.....

Oh, you fool! Even if they seemed interested, what are they to you? Isn't it quite clear that their ogling was intended for the three Japanese? Oh, the girls must have known! They must have known that I am a "*Chinaman*"; otherwise why didn't they even look at me once? *Revenge! Revenge!* I must seek revenge against their insult. (35)

.....

For the Japanese look down upon Chinese just as we look down upon pigs and dogs. They call us Shinajin, "Chinaman," a term more derogatory than "knave" in Chinese. . . . O China, my China, why don't you be strong!
(52; italics added)

In the quotes, the psychological crisis of the protagonist is obvious: he distrusts the Japanese students; he is furious for being neglected and insulted; and he has the

strong desire to revenge. The crisis originates from the protagonist's anxiety of his identity as "Chinaman," since the Mother as homeland cannot cease to be present in the protagonist's mind, even though he is away from the land of China. It is for the homeland that he goes abroad and it is also the birthplace where he wishes to return to. But the protagonist's dilemma resurfaces here—although he always desires to reunite with the Mother/the homeland, the moral burden forbids him to fulfill the desire.

Why did I come to Japan? Why did I come here to pursue my studies? Since you have come, is it a wonder that the Japanese treat you with contempt? China, O my China! Why don't you grow rich and strong? I cannot bear your shame in silence any longer! (35)

And even if I accept the fact that I am here, there is no reason why I should have entered this cursed "high school." Those who have returned to China after studying only five months here, aren't they now enjoying their success and prosperity? How can I bear the five or six years that still lie ahead of me? And how can I be sure that, even if I managed to finish my long years of studies despite the thousand vexations and hardships, I would be in any way better off than those so-called returned students who came here simply for fun? (36)

If the protagonist is burdened by the helplessness to empower the homeland and the inability to return home, a burden, I contend, that is due to the absence of the Mother. Here, the protagonist's homeland has become the metaphorical Mother. And

since the Mother is absent, the protagonist has to *imagine* the homeland as his loving mother and his gentle lover. Additionally, the absence contributes to the protagonist's anxiety of searching for the Mother and aggravates the dilemma that on the one hand, he desires to reunite with the separated Mother, but on the other hand he forbids himself to do so. Relating to my earlier discussion, it is the Father that represses the subject's desire to the Mother. However, in the protagonist's case, what holds him back from returning to the homeland is ironically the mission commanded by the homeland (the Mother). In the protagonist's monologues, it is apparent that the purpose and goal of studying abroad is to serve and empower the country after he comes back. His bitterness results from his incapability—the protagonist cynically accuses the phony oversea students of idling abroad for several months and returning to enjoy their success and prosperity, but he remains in Japan to suffer from the loneliness and desperation. The incapability of devoting to the country haunts the protagonist and imposes the incredible moral and social burden on him. In this case, the homeland is not only the Mother, but also the phallic sign of Father. Similar as the protagonist's elder brother who is the embodiment of the Father's phallic authority, the homeland once again symbolizes the power and constraints.

To further interpret the paradox of homeland, I need to borrow Mingwei Song's arguments on the discourses of Chinese youths. He argues that Chinese youths during the May Fourth period and their discourses originate in the mission of rejuvenating China. The national rejuvenation foregrounds the application of new knowledge (modernization) to revitalize the Chinese tradition. Hence, there is the inherent paradox

in this youth discourse. Furthermore, Song specifically mentions Yu Dafu's "Sinking" as the "audacious representations of young people's emotional and sexual experiences in defiance of social norms" (Song 117). In this regard, what the social norms embody is both the pressure of the Chinese tradition and the mission of modernization. By analyzing Yu Dafu's "Sinking," I reveal that the protagonist's desire for freedom has been repressed by the social norms in the phallogocentric system. I argue that on the one hand, China as the protagonist's homeland is the sign of Mother, which represents the protagonist's desire; yet on the other hand, it is also the phallic sign of Father that constrains and disciplines the protagonist. More specifically, in this sense, the national mission as social norms to rejuvenate China represses the protagonist in "Sinking;" and consequently he resists the social norms, which results in the ceaseless tension and struggle.

Fetishism and Substance: Desire and Sexuality in "Sealed Off"

Written in 1943, Eileen Chang's short story "Sealed Off" delineates the fleeting romantic moment between Lu Zongzhen and Wu Cuiyuan in a tramcar for a short period of time when the city Shanghai is sealed during the Anti-Japanese War. The analysis of "Sealed Off" aims to illustrate a different facet of the interrelations of agency-freedom-social norms.

As the Freudian and Lacanian theories of subject suggest, the formation of subject is genderly different. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss how the desire and sexuality are respectively represented in the interaction between the hero, Zongzhen, and the heroine, Cuiyuan. At the beginning of the story, after the tram stops for the sealed off,

Zongzhen spots Cuiyuan among the passengers who looks as ordinary as himself. Not only does Cuiyuan's dressing and hairstyle makes her a mediocre and conservative young woman, but especially her appearance—the “uncertain, unfocused, afraid-she-had-offended-someone kind of beauty” (Chang 179) with the bland and lacking-definition face. But surprisingly, later in the story, when Zongzhen deliberately approaches Cuiyuan to avoid his nephew, he confesses that when he “took her features separately,” he admitted “she had a certain charm” (179). In a close-up look between the two, Cuiyuan in Zongzhen's eye is even more charming and attractive, shining with the tender and feminine glamour: “to his eyes, her face was the spare, simple peony of a water color sketch, and the strands of hair fluttering at her temples were pistils ruffled by a breeze” (181). Furthermore, Cuiyuan's blushing has made Zongzhen excited, which makes him see her even prettier. Here, Butler's discussion perhaps will shed light on Zongzhen's perception of Cuiyuan. In the phallogocentric structure, Butler mentions, the linguistic mark of sex (for example, “feminine”) is produced by the system of sexuality, which in turns reinforces its heterosexual desire (Butler 34). In light of this, Zongzhen's underlying desire is revealed through the feminine features of Cuiyuan which are increasingly reinforced in Zongzhen's sensations. Interestingly, Zongzhen's affection for Cuiyuan and his desire is evoked by Dong Peizhi, his nephew. In Peizhi's gaze, Zongzhen's “soundlessly announce[d] flirtatious intent” (Chang 178) clumsily shows his “disgraceful” masculinity. But right after Peizhi retreated, Zongzhen's manner “turned respectable” (179) again.

In light of my earlier analysis of the Other, my contention is that in “Sinking,” the Other is the “*a priori Other*” which designates a structure that “conditions the

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functioning of the entire perceptual field” yet is “transcendent with respect to the terms which actualize it” (Deleuze 65; italics original). On the contrary, the Other in “Sealed Off” is “the concrete Other” which indicates the “subject of another field” (66). In the interaction between Zongzhen and Cuiyuan, Zongzhen is the subject; while in Peizhi’s gaze, Zongzhen is the object. In the process of being both the subject and the object, Zongzhen experiences the “split” between the conscious and the unconscious (Lacan 580); the latter one drives Zongzhen’s unidentified self to attain the unattainable—his desire. In the flirtatious interaction between Zongzhen and Cuiyuan, not only is Cuiyuan’s feminine feature discovered by Zongzhen, but also Zongzhen’s masculinity and self is evoked—he feels he is “only and entirely a man,” who is starkly contrast with what he was before— “he was an accountant, a father, the head of a household, a tram passenger, a store customer, an insignificant citizen of a big city” (Chang 181). Furthermore, Deleuze also discusses the pleasure brought by desire and argues that it is rather an interruption (Deleuze 139). According to Deleuze, “pleasure is the attribution of the affect, the affection for a person or subject, it is the only means for a person to ‘find himself again’ in the process of desire that overwhelms him” (138-39). Associating with the discussion on Zongzhen’s split between the conscious and the unconscious, I contend that Zongzhen’s subjectivity is formed by the interruption brought by his affection, which is embedded in the tripartite relations of split—attain the unattainable desire—the interruption in the process of desire. So, what specifically is Zongzhen’s desire and what does it imply? In the conversation between Zongzhen and Cuiyuan, Zongzhen intensively complains about his marriage, his wife and his bland life:

“I really don’t understand why I go home every evening. Where is there to go? I have no home, in fact.” Zongzhen continued: “You, you don’t know what kind of woman she is.”

“Even then I was against it. My mother arranged the marriage. Of course I wanted to choose for myself, but ... she used to be very beautiful... I was very young... young people, you know ...”

“Then she changed into this kind of person – even my mother fights with her, and she blames me for having married her! She has such a temper— she hasn’t even got a grade-school education.” (Chang 180)

With Cuiyuan quietly listening and nodding, Zongzhen feels so close and intimate to her that “they are in love.” Cuiyuan is a lovely woman to Zongzhen, since he does not want her, “she would drift away; she was a part of him and understood everything yet forgave everything” (181). As the conversation proceeds, Cuiyuan tentatively asks him whether he will file a divorce. Not surprisingly, Zongzhen refuses but confesses that he would rather take a concubine and “plan to treat her like a wife” (181-82). In this respect, Zongzhen’s desire is embedded in his dissatisfaction and impotency to manage his own life and marriage. Before “flirting with” Cuiyuan, Zongzhen is the man in castration anxiety for his weakness and repressed desire to execute his phallic power. But after talking with Cuiyuan, his vexation of being a petty citizen and a boring husband converts to the thrill as soon as he realizes that he is the man to Cuiyuan. Here, the Freudian fetishism and Silverman’s reviews of the Lacanian subject interpret Zongzhen’s internal change. Man’s fetishism is rooted in the castration

anxiety during the phallic stage, when the young boy believes that woman (mother) once had a penis but was castrated. In order to relieve his own fear that his own penis is in danger, he finds the substitute for the woman (mother)'s penis. In other words, the fetish is “a token of triumph over the threat of castration and protection against it” (Freud 843). In addition, by reviewing Lacan's theories, Silverman further points out that the female subject “escapes that ‘castration’ which alone assures the male subject his symbolic potency” (Silverman 186). As the female subject who “lacks lack,” she “continues to ‘be’ the phallus” while signifying castration in the Symbolic Order (186-87). In this connection, I argue that Cuiyuan is the fetish to Zongzhen. Zongzhen's internal change implies his triumph over the castration anxiety. Cuiyuan's tender femininity as well as Zongzhen's fantasy of having a concubine exactly like Cuiyuan assures his temporary retrieval of masculinity, which reinforces Zongzhen's authority in the phallogocentric structure.

As mentioned earlier, male and female subject undergoes different paths of subject formation. Even more provocatively, feminist theorists like Luce Irigaray believes that “both the subject and its Other” of the feminine gender *cannot* be represented in the phallogocentric signification (32-33, italics added). However, I would illustrate how the female subject's sexuality is represented in “Sealed Off.” For the heroine Cuiyuan, there is a clear-cut division of people in her mind: they are “good” or “real.” Cuiyuan herself “is a good daughter, a good student” (Chang 177). People in Cuiyuan's family are also good people. They are well-mannered, well-off and classy as “they listen only to the symphonies of Beethoven and Wagner” (177); yet, to Cuiyuan, they are dull and

ignorant as Cuiyuan sarcastically points out that when listening to the symphonies, they do not know what they listen to. As a result, “in this world, there are more good people than real people...Cuiyuan wasn’t very happy” (177-78). Passengers in the tram are also like Cuiyuan’s family. They are living a busy but meaningless life and are indifferent to others. Moreover, they are the hypocrites who ridiculously pretend to know everything. By contrast, Zongzhen is the exception in Cuiyuan’s eyes. “She looked at him again...Stretching out from his sleeve, and resting on the newspaper, was a warm, tanned hand, one with feeling—a real person! Not too honest, not too bright, but a real person. Suddenly she felt flushed and happy” (179). But as soon as Zongzhen exposes his selfishness and hypocrisy, Cuiyuan is so devastated that she bursts into tears. “‘It’s over,’ thought Cuiyuan. In the end, she’d probably marry, but her husband would never be as dear as this stranger met by chance...He was a good person—the world had gained one more good person” (182)! As for Cuiyuan, being “good” and “real” are diametrically opposed; yet notably, “good” person was once a “real” person.

Among the psychoanalytic theorists, Lacan is the one who discusses “real.” The phallus, emphasized by Silverman, is “motivated by the real” (Silverman 187). It is the “pound of flesh” that female subject lacks, while male subject “exchanges for his symbolic legacy” (188). More importantly, Silverman pinpoints the significance of understanding the real. Since male subject is both “represented and repressed by the phallus,” he is more alienated from the real. On the contrary, the female sexuality is “*censored* rather than *repressed*” (187; Italics original) by the phallus, which opens

up a space to represent female sexuality. The Lacanian “real” shares the similar connotation with “substance” in Butler’s theorization of female sexuality. To contest the metaphysics of substance, Judith Butler suggests that the substantial subject is “socially instituted” (23). Based upon Foucault’s arguments that sexuality is the cause of the binary categories of sex rather than its effect, Butler reveals that “sex” is the effect of the desire and sexuality (20). Although the “real person” in Chang’s story cannot be entirely equate with the Lacanian real or the Butler’s substance, these theories indeed inspire the discussion. In Cuiyuan’s psychological movements, the real person alludes to the subject with desire; the good person alludes to the censored female sexuality or the repressed male sexuality (by the phallic symbolic order). The transformation from the real person to the good person signifies the dissolution of desire, which is intentionally adapting to the discipline of social and cultural norms symbolized by the phallus. In other words, the good person becomes the embodiment of social norms. As the tram is full of good people and seeing more people turning into the good ones, Cuiyuan in fact witnesses the reproduction of social norms.

“Are You Free?”: Gender Performativity and Social Norms

What are the social norms respectively for Zongzhen and Cuiyuan? For Zongzhen, the social norms regulate him to behave like the passengers in the tram. At the beginning, Zongzhen is depicted as the ordinary clerk working in the bank, the “straightforward fellow” (laoshiren 老实人) who never laughs even when he finds something funny (Chang 176). Sitting in the corner of the sealed tram, Zongzhen silently observes the people surrounding—those who behave like him or live a similar life as him. For

Zongzhen and the passengers in the tram, they are indifferent and dull in the same way. When Zongzhen starts to read newspaper to kill time and avoid attention in the tram, other passengers mimick him “to fill this terrifying emptiness” and “to avoid the painful business of thinking” (176). “Neatly dressed in suit and tie, with tortoiseshell eyeglasses and a leather briefcase” (175), but how they actually live opposes to the smart and classy look—they gossip about the co-worker who knows how to toady up to the bosses; they follow their wife’s order to buy hot dumplings for dinner, but have to awkwardly stuck them under the arms. On the other hand, for Cuiyuan, the social norms regulate her to follow the standards of her family:

The Wu household was a modern, model household, devout and serious. The family had pushed their daughter to study hard, to climb upward step by step, right to the tip-top...A girl in her twenties teaching at a university! It set a record for women’s professional achievement. But her parents’ enthusiasm began to wear thin and now they wished she hadn’t been quite so serious, wished she’d taken more time out from her studies, tried to find herself *a rich husband*. (177; italics added)

Apparently, Cuiyuan is in the crux of the tension between tradition and modernity. To satisfy her family, she has to be educated in a modern school, have a decent job and marry to a well-off family. According to Butler, social and cultural norms enforce the gender performativity. Consequently, Cuiyuan’s speech and act have made her a banal and inconspicuous good daughter and good student. In addition, she also foresees her future as a good wife—accepting the family arranged marriage and marrying someone rich. In terms of Cuiyuan’s performative acts as well as the social norms that discipline her, the obvious paradox is that modernization, including Cuiyuan’s

modern education and Zongzhen's job in the modern company, is nothing more than the new and advanced apparatus that denote a better social status; however, those who advocate modernization either know nothing about it (like Cuiyuan's family) or make themselves look good to other people through being "modern" (like Zongzhen and the pretentious passengers in the tram). Therefore, Cuiyuan is like Zongzhen in the sense that both of them are hypocritical and living a masquerading life.

By the end of their conversation, Zongzhen asked Cuiyuan, "Are you a free woman" (Chang 182)? Before Cuiyuan answered, he said, "You aren't free." And the reason why he makes such a judgment is that he believes Cuiyuan will not agree to marry him. For Zongzhen, his freedom is just to fantasize about marrying another woman to complement his phallic authority; for Cuiyuan, her freedom is to break the family's control and be with a "real" person. The sealed off tram is the momentary rupture in social norms that define them, which opens up a space for them to utter their desire and enact their agency. Eventually, in the story, both of them discard the chance to be free: Zongzhen pretends that he cannot find his pen to mark down Cuiyuan's phone number, and Cuiyuan is reluctant to give him her pencil to do that. Their fleeting moment of romance disappears with the end of sealed off. When the tram moves again, Cuiyuan looks through the window and sees the passers-by. For her, these people "lived for that one moment. Then the tram clanked onward, and one by one they died away" (183).

Situating the story in the sealed off tram where the space is circumscribed and the time freezes, this context is a typical example of chronotope. To express the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed

in literature” (Bakhtin 48), chronotope makes time artistically visible and the space responsive to the movement of time and the immediate reality which endows the phenomenon with meaning. The chronotopic moment of sealed off explains Cuiyuan’s realization that “everything that had happened while the city was sealed was a non-occurrence” (Chang 183). What happens during the sealed-off is “an unreasonable dream” (184). Yet, it is the chronotopic sealed off that has made the subject’s agency and the restricted freedom possible. This endows Zongzhen and Cuiyuan’s encountering with meanings. By the end of the sealed off, it is manifest that Zongzhen and Cuiyuan have made their choices by enacting their agency. But, what they choose is anything but to be free from the regulations of normative principles. Their agency responds to the confinement by conforming to the social norms, which is opposed to the analysis of “Sinking.” Here, my discussion attempts to emphasize that the subjects’ performative act is circumscribed by restricted choices. Rather than being repressed by social norms and trying to subvert them, they meticulously bargain their freedom within the scope of social norms and choose whatever would benefit them the most.

To conceptualize the subject’s agency beyond the binary of repression and resistance, Saba Mahmood’s study on woman’s liberation in the Islamist movement is helpful. She argues that “[social] norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority” (Mahmood 23). The subject’s agency implies the malleable restrictions with “undertak[ing] particular kinds of moral actions” and “bound[ing] up with the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed” (29). The moral actions illuminate the

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“kind of authority” through which the subject performs on oneself and recognizes the truth about herself (qtd. in Manmood 30). In “Sealed off,” the enacting of agency is not particularly restricted with “moral action,” but it is definitely bounded up with the social disciplines—using the language in the story, it is acting to be a good person. Thus, as Eileen Chang’s story reflected, the restricted freedom is produced by the subject’s agency under the disciplines of social norms.

Concluding Remarks: the Myth of Freedom and Social Norms

In this paper, I examine the representation of sex and love as well as the interaction of agency-freedom-social norms in Yu Dafu’s “Sinking” and Eileen Chang’s “Sealed Off.” I argue that, in “Sinking,” the immanent paradox that dominates the protagonist’s life is his identification with phallic authority while fearing it. The problematic phallic sign of Father is the mission from protagonist’s homeland to modernize China, which represses the protagonist’s desire for freedom in the phallogentric system and consequently results in his resistance. On the other hand, the reading of “Sealed Off” suggests that even though the chronotopic moment interrupts the social norms that define the subjects, offering the characters a rare opportunity to enact their agency and articulate their freedom, they eventually conform to the social norms, which I explain that they meticulously bargain their freedom within the scope of social norms, rather than trying to subvert the them.

In sum, by using Yu and Chang’s works to contextualize the representation of sex and love, I conclude that the interaction of agency-freedom-social norms, on the one hand, is embedded in the structure of repression and resistance; yet more importantly,

through living up to the social norms that define them, the subjects enact the agency to make their choices and realize their restricted and qualified freedom. In my reading of the two stories, I attempt to rethink how the popular framework of “revolution plus love” might or might not work for the modern literary discourses. As Frederic Jameson’s arguments that the third-world literature works as the national allegory have a major impact on how to approach and interpret literary works in modern China, the application of a new formula—sex and love—makes the writings of desire no longer confine to a reflection of one’s revolutionary resolution or an allegory of nation’s fate; rather, they reveal the subject’s desire and agency, and precisely how they are rooted in and interact with the social norms. In such way, this paper reworks and enriches the framework of “revolution plus love” by demonstrating how the functions of love and sex go beyond the representation of a utopian modernity or negotiation of social positions. In other words, love in modern literary discourse is not bound to be in service of revolution. Instead, the discussion of sex and love helps to illustrate how the enacting of the subject’s agency transgresses the boundary prescribed by revolution; and further allows the subject to calculate their free will and life choice by negotiating with the social norms rather than being unconditionally subjugated.

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Shanghai Museum of Science and Technology

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The Changing Role of a Cultural Magazine in the 21st Century:

The Origin and Digital Reimagination of Ricepaper Magazine

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Publishing has fundamentally transformed in recent years, hastened by the speed of content delivery from the Internet and changing user behaviours across a wide spectrum of disciplines. In 2016, Ricepaper Magazine, an Asian Canadian literary publication, examined the circumstances in which the functions of the publisher of print magazines have changed in recent years and their implications for a primarily digital future. In analyzing a number of recent market surveys in the literature on the key aspects of the changing landscape of publishing including the print market, industry and market trends as well as consultations with fellow publishers, Ricepaper Magazine transitioned from an exclusively print-based format to a digital media publication. But this is not a story about a local magazine going out of print; rather,

it the journey of how a community-based volunteer-led magazine that developed a niche among academics and cultural navigators have transformed itself into a global literary and arts publication that speaks to the Asian diaspora within and beyond Canada through the deployment of new digital technologies.

Origins of Ricepaper Magazine as a Community Initiative

Ricepaper Magazine traces its origins to the late 1970s during the time of the Vietnam War, the Afro-American movement and Third World minority movements. In Vancouver, the Cultural Revolution in China influenced local politics and unleashed the first of a series of Asian immigrant waves beginning with those who fled the 1967 riots of Hong Kong interspersed with influence of Berkeley liberation activists in the Vancouver scene.¹ In fact, the founder of Ricepaper Magazine, Jim Wong-Chu, was one of those Hong Kong migrants who had been deeply influenced by the politics of Chinatown, often a clash between Kuomintang and Communist sympathizers. The inspiration for the front cover of his first book *Chinatown Ghosts* features prominently a defaced photo of Mao Zedong, from a clash that had happened in Vancouver's Chinatown.²

During this time, a group of University of British Columbia students, inspired by a radicalized visiting Asian American professor began the process of re-examining their history and identity. Dr. Ronald Tanaka, who taught at the University of British Columbia in the 1970s during his brief stay in Vancouver, gave lectures on identity,

1. Sylvia Yu. "Birth of a Genre." *Pacific Rim Magazine*. (1999). <http://langaraprm.com/1999/arts/birth-of-a-genre-while-asian-canadian-authors-produce-a-body-of-literature-for-their-bi-cultural-identity-the-asian-canadian-writers-workshop-is-fostering-coaching-and-promoting-a-new-generation-o/>

2. Jim Wong-Chu. *Chinatown Ghosts*. Arsenal Pulp Press, Vancouver, 1986.

identity politics, community, and history and captivated a generation of artists and cultural activists. After his departure, some of these university students formed a coalition to continue their identity exploration, hosted a conference, and created historical exhibitions on campus. Some of those university students continued their work in the community, exploring the arts and writing as expressions of their experiences.

It is not surprising that early Asian Canadian writing primarily focused on the Japanese and Chinese experience in Canada, mainly because those were the dominant ethnic group who immigrated to Canada prior to immigration restrictions. The group functioned more as a means for internal communication and to nurture ideas and legitimate each other's projects, such as poetry and fiction manuscripts. That exploration took them back to their roots and ignited a desire to express who they were as Canadians of Asian descent. In 1976, the Chinese Canadian writers workshop and Japanese Powell Street Revue joined forces to develop *Inalienable Rice*, an anthology project featuring Chinese and Japanese authors. Some members from both sides decided to join forces to become the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop (ACWW), with its earliest membership including Paul Yee, Sean Gunn, SKY Lee, Rick Shiomi and Jim Wong-Chu. Seeking to restore the narrative experiences of Asian Canadians, the work of the ACWW began to retell Canadian stories from the perspectives of the marginalized "Oriental" in Canada.

The seeds of Ricepaper were first sewn through a genealogy of publishing projects, with the first being *Inalienable Rice*, an anthology developed by these mainly Chinese and

Japanese Canadian writers. ACWW and one of its original members, Jim Wong-Chu, who later became the magazine's first editor, continued their publishing experiments and went on to develop a special Vancouver edition of Asianadian magazine (Volume 3, Number 2, 1980) and followed-up with a special edition of the *West Coast Review* (Vol. 16, Number 1, 1981) and assisted in the creation of *Many Mouthed Birds* an anthology comprised entirely of Chinese Canadian authors.

These pioneers penned titles that have become Asian Canadian classics: Wong-Chu published Canada's first English language poetry collection *Chinatown Ghosts*, SKY Lee wrote *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, and Paul Yee with *Teach Me to Fly, Skyfighter!* But publishing was not a career but rather as exercises in identity exploration and formation; these writers continued their day jobs as letter carriers, nurses, archivists during the day and toiled in their writing at night. With only a few texts produced that reflected the Asian experience in Canada, schools and libraries still lacked the books that represented the Asian Canadian experience. Hence, Ricepaper was created out of a need to promote and connect fellow Asian Canadian writers across the country. However, as Wong-Chu recalls,

Until the early '90s, there was not much of a critical mass of Asian Canadian writers; there were about twenty of us. The university English departments were producing a lot of young people who wanted to write, so within a couple of years, about twenty members of the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop suddenly went up to seventy members. That's when the newsletter was born, around 1995, but we also realized that we should

*make it into a society. In 1995, the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop Society (ACWW) became a non-profit entity. And then "ACWW" produced its first newsletter. Ricepaper magazine was born out of that newsletter.*³

What is left unsaid, but is equally important to recognize, is that Ricepaper's early writing despite being pan-Asian, was mainly by Chinese Canadians. Like Jim Wong-Chu, many involved in the community were activists first, and writers second and Chinatown was a hub for the many dedicated and motivated young individuals who eventually would go on to become prominent individuals in the community. Those early editions of Ricepaper feature a list of influential Chinese Canadians who went to have stellar careers in the literary and arts world. Some of those pioneers include: Jim Wong-Chu, Sean Gunn, Sid Tan, David HT Wong, Larry Wong, Kuan Foo, and Terry Jang Barclay. Their art reflects their identities as Canadians of Chinese descent.

The Success of a Magazine in Twenty Years

Of all Asian Canadian literary and artistic publications, Ricepaper has proved the most enduring.⁴ In its early years, Ricepaper Magazine was a collective staffed entirely by volunteer writers and financed by donations and fundraising campaigns. Its mandate was simple: to assist members to publish or showcase their work and talent. In providing a supportive and culturally sensitive environment for writers from a common Pacific Rim Asian heritage, Ricepaper provided a safe space for more established writers to guide emerging writers through the difficulties of the

3. Zhen Liu. "'The Generation that Responded to Duty': An Interview with Jim Wong-Chu." *Ricepaper Magazine*. 15 June 2017. <https://ricepapermagazine.ca/2017/06/interviewjimwongchu2014/>

4. Zhen Liu. "Asian Canadian communal literary enterprise." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 31.1 (2018): 81-103.

publishing field.

It was not until 1999 when Ricepaper was awarded a literary arts and magazine grant by Canada Council that the magazine evolved and was distributed coast to coast. The ongoing funding helped Ricepaper to support a small staff, office space, and printing costs. While Ricepaper continuously remade itself, changing its design, style and even its size (from a 8.5-by-11-inch magazine size to a 6.5 by 9 inches literary journal size), its editorial direction and voice remained relatively consistent to its commitment to providing a voice to a vibrant and evolving Asian Canadian identity and culture and become a well-known venue in Canada for inclusive, representative and progressive dialogue. Prominent artists that have been featured in the magazine include Wayson Choy, Joy Kogawa, Denise Chong, Kid Koala, Sook-Yin Lee, and Tobias Wong, as well as cultural producers and figures such as David Suzuki, Bing Thom and Roy Miki. Ricepaper also nurtured its own emerging artists; those who have worked or written for Ricepaper magazine have gone on to become notable writers and cultural activists, including Evelyn Wong, Todd Wong, Kevin Chong, Alden Habacon, Craig Takeuchi, and Rita Wong. In fact, one of its early editors, Madeleine Thien, honed her craft under Wong-Chu's mentorship and won the Man Booker Prize and the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Despite its successes as an arts and literary publication, Ricepaper discontinued circulation of the print magazine after its twentieth year. Although it ended memorably with a publication of *AlliterAsian: Twenty Years of Ricepaper Magazine* which featured the best of its published pieces, many people in the literary and publishing

community were left wondering how a magazine of such enormous influence could succumb to market forces.⁵ While Ricepaper Magazine ended its print run 2016 in order to rejuvenate the organization and re-affirm its mandate and position as a supporter of Asian Canadian writers and publishing, its next step proved vital: it needed understand how it could flourish in a fluctuating and sometimes discouraging publishing industry before it could reinvent itself.

Publishing in a time of Paradigm Shifts

Even before the advent of the Internet, researchers of magazine publishing had already pointed out the development of print communication process was no longer a straightforward linear chain from author to magazine to reader.⁶ The emphasis between writer and magazine in the publishing cycle has fundamentally changed with the advent of digital and web media and with it, the traditional business model of publishing.⁷ Increasingly, the cultural and literary sector are dependent on deep pockets from investors or private donations rather from the traditional base of advertising revenue, magazine subscriptions, and government funding.

Lapham Quarterly publisher David Rose has argued that suffering magazines are fixated on audience development. As such, the problem is magazines essentially do not get much further than their existing audiences; they can keep hold of a certain percentage of their readership with very rudimentary renewal techniques. As Rose

5. Nikki Celis. "Ricepaper magazine shuts down its print edition." Georgia Straight. 26 April 2016. <https://www.straight.com/arts/679731/ricepaper-magazine-shuts-down-its-print-edition>

6. Quint Randle. "A historical overview of the effects of new mass media: Introductions in magazine publishing during the twentieth century." *First Monday*, 6.9 (2001). <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/885/794>

7. Santos Silva. (2011). The future of digital magazine publishing. *Information Services and Use*, 31(3), 301-310. http://elpub.scix.net/data/works/att/109_elpub2012.content.pdf

puts it,

*Oh, these poor little magazines with their tiny readerships, if only people appreciated them more. It's partly true. But the bigger side of that is, well, if only you knew how to read a budget. If only you actually knew anything about publishing.*⁸

Yet, this “Field of Dreams logic” — *if you build it, they will come* — is symptomatic of small magazines. Ricepaper’s decision to discontinue the publication did not come easy: it was a slow and methodical examination first initiated in 2011 when Canada Council notified the organization about a three-year phase-out of the Equity Capacity Building grant. In a meeting with its funders, Ricepaper’s editorial board recognized that the magazine would need to rethink its publishing model. In a climate of increasing production costs and decreasing revenue, the its editorial team began to investigate low-cost digital platforms as a possible alternative.

Relevant research has shown that some small and independent literary magazines have evolved in the digital environment, with such publications adapting well in the digital environment, the key to success should be a focus on new digital consumers and their reading habits. Indeed, five trends pervade across these new readers’ behaviours globally:

- Online Publishing and Free Open Access - In web publishing, the most sustainable business model is one driven by online advertising (e.g. Google Ads)

8. Caroline O’Donovan. A conversation with David Rose, little magazine veteran and publisher of Lapham’s Quarterly. *Nieman Lab*. September 2014. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/a-conversation-with-david-rose-little-magazine-veteran-and-publisher-of-laphams-quarterly/>

- Mobility - Mobile devices have become one of the main research tools – e-books have shown the success and ubiquity of mobile devices
- Personalization & Technology - Devices are increasingly built to understand reading environments, including location, proximity, lighting, speed, and acceleration to render appropriate information
- Enriched Content - Publishers are creating highly intuitive, interactive rendering environments in which to engage readers
- Google - 2.2 trillion searches are performed on Google each year, up from 4 million in 1998. 94% of readers cite Google as ‘very likely to use’ for reading and finding articles to read.⁹

Another important part of the reader’s journey involves the publication of their written pieces. Traditionally the print publisher would publish the content under a publishing agreement with the author whereby the publisher undertakes to produce and market the magazine publication, hopefully for a profitable margin. In recent years, this business model is slowly eroded by online publications which are now recognized by the readership as an established (and relatively inexpensive) alternative for reading. While its main literary staple - fiction and poetry - would never go away, Ricepaper’s editorial style would be dynamic, mobile, and streamlined.

Web-zines and E-Reading

One of Vancouver’s local publications served as a warning sign for Ricepaper. The

9. Susan Currie Sivek & Alyssa Townsend. (2014). Opportunities and Constraints for Independent Digital Magazine Publishing. *Journal of Magazine & New Media Research*, 15(1).

publishers of Xtra West, a famous LGBTQ+ magazine, Pink Triangle Press, were well aware of the emerging trends of online e-publishing models when it decided to cease its print model in 2015. In the case of Xtra West, its Head of Digital Media, David Walberg disclosed that its online webzine dailyxtra.com grew by about 30 percent in 2014, and the readership was estimated to be doubled in the same time. In “The real reason Xtra is moving entirely online,” Niko Bell reveals that 90% of Pink Triangle Press’s revenue now comes from the web.”¹⁰ Like Xtra West’s demise, Ricepaper was not immune to the economic forces of the publishing world. Inspired by its counterparts in the publishing world, Ricepaper looked to new electronic and digital media tools.

Transitioning from Print to Digital

The forces of change within the publishing industry have arguably impacted the most in the delivery of content, from print to digital. Publishers who used to manage production of only print format and unwilling to embrace change are facing the prospect of being forced into early retirement. As Lichtenberg described in his paper on the progressive evolution of publishing in the age of digital abundance, “as this decade begins, publishing finds itself in the midst of a phase shift (like water to ice) from print to a complex new world of digital, where the dimension of the change, its speed, and its extent are unknown.”¹¹

So what are the opportunities for print publications like Ricepaper? Although the

10. Niko Bell. “The real reason Xtra is moving entirely online.” *Xtra West.com*. 2015, January 17. <http://dailyxtra.com/canada/news/the-real-reason-xtra-moving-entirely-online-97931>

11. James Lichtenberg. “In from the edge: The progressive evolution of publishing in the age of digital abundance.” *Publishing research quarterly* 27.2 (2011): 110-111.

prospect of the magazine business looks grim as the revenue decline in print is inevitable, it is not yet a death sentence if proactive measures are taken. Print will still have a role to play in the magazine market, but its revenue base will slowly be eaten up by replica web-based magazines and new technological alternatives. While studies show that e-books and webzines have yet to displace print as the ultimate solution for readers, the reality is that interactive and integrated solutions are going to become the product of choice for the reader in the future.¹² Near the end of 2015, Ricepaper realized it needed to refocus on its core audience and membership and support their needs rather than channel its energies on a struggling enterprise in the guise of the quarterly print publication. One strategy included creating digital solutions, for example, by combining legacy content (twenty years of it) with technological resources to create new reading experiences for its audiences and membership.

The Digital Transformation: Ricepaper 2.0

In taking a cue from other magazines, Ricepaper began exclusive web features to augment the print publication. Seeing this is already what magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Walrus*, *Wired*, and *Time* already do, the digital magazine augmented its editorial with articles, podcasts, and video that can only be accessed on the web. Web features now included audiovisual features that highlight the theme but would be impossible to include in a print feature of Ricepaper. There would be some features that are accessible free-of-charge to the general public and others that

12. Bill Kovarik. (2015). *Revolutions in communication: Media history from Gutenberg to the digital age*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

are “subscriber-only.” The purpose of these distinctions served to create enough web traffic by having the general public being able to read all of the articles while still maintaining a subscriber base for some revenue. Ricepaper introduced some other new initiatives that re-imagined the publication:

Crowdfunding - Ricepaper has successfully engaged in crowdfunding which is a process whereby small amounts of money are solicited from a large pool of people, in order to support a project or an endeavour.¹³ Using Kickstarter and Patreon in raising awareness of Ricepaper’s social justice initiatives, the magazine has fundraised for the publication of the anthology *Currents*, and currently starting a quarterly PDF print-on-demand format magazine.

Podcasting - Using simple technology such as free software online like Soundcloud and a personal iPhone for recording, Ricepaper has introduced an extension of its written pieces with a popular series of interviews with Asian Canadian writers, publishers, and artists called, *TalkRice*. Already generating more than 10,000 downloads within one calendar year, the series will soon be syndicated on Apple’s iTunes. In addition, Ricepaper also hosts video interviews on its YouTube channel as a complement to its social media presence on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, generating a large online audience that caters to the millennial generation comfortable with mobile technology.

Literary Festivals - LiterASIAN Festival is the first Asian Canadian writers conference of its kind in North America. Started initially 2013 as a public program to showcase local Vancouver-based Asian Canadian writers, the festival has expanded to Toronto

13. Andrea Hunter. ““It’s Like Having a Second Full-Time Job” Crowdfunding, journalism and labour.” *Journalism Practice* 10.2 (2016): 218-220.

to become truly national conference, featuring writers from across Canada.

Print-on-Demand - Using Amazon's service that does on-demand printing called "Create Space," the magazine has expanded its role in independent book publishing using its in-house design and editorial team in producing and promoting Asian Canadian writers to a global audience that was simply not achievable in its previous model as a quarterly print magazine of only a few hundred subscribers. Ricepaper has also launched a book series, including Vincent Ternida's *The Seven Muses of Harry Salcedo* and *Immersions: A Ricepaper Science and Speculative Fiction Anthology* as the first of many books that can be purchased anywhere in the world and easily findable online.

The Digital Media Future of Ricepaper

In the digital realm, Ricepaper has continued to be a radically inclusive space that provides community resources for understanding Asian Canadian histories and contemporary issues as well as a forum for the constant re-visioning of what it could mean to be "Asian Canadian" through a culture of inclusive debate. This way forward offers a direction that promotes the presence of Ricepaper as a central node in Asian Canadian communities while avoiding the betrayal of the original mandates to narrate what it means to be Asian Canadian, which includes resisting the hidden racisms hidden now in an era of neoliberal restructuring of an emerging global reality.

In other words, the question for promoting the Ricepaper is not: what should we do? It is rather: who and what should we be? While the early issues of Ricepaper

reflect the product of Canada's harsh immigration restrictions, the next generation of writers for Ricepaper should embody the intercultural and hybrid global citizen, one whose writing is not defined and limited by nationality or place of birth. In this sense, Ricepaper should be promoted among communities that could be called Asian Canadian instead of either rebranding itself to conform with the standards of entrenching ourselves in radical politics to the exclusion of groups that may also identify with terms like "Asian Canadian."

Ricepaper began as a newsletter even before its official incorporation as a non-profit. In its early days the magazine sought far and wide for submissions since few Canadian Asian descent had published or enrolled in creative writing schools. Ricepaper was often the only literary stage for generations of writers. The year 2020 marks the twenty-fifth year of its existence; twenty-five years is an eternity in the publishing world. It is time for celebration and reflection on all of Ricepaper's accomplishments – all of the amazing stories, struggles, and successes. It's time to pave a new path for fresh voices in a hungry literary landscape.

Chinese Canadian Authors Who Have Published or Edited in Ricepaper

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An Old Town Named Longmen, Zhejiang Province

Jiang Tian

Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool

Zhang Wei

Dongwei Chu (tr.)

How much ink has been needed to dye this stretch of sand black! Decades have passed but its color remains. The younger generations have no clue why there is such a large stretch of black sand amid the dozens of square miles of brown soil and sand.

However, I clearly remember that here in this place there was originally a black pool and the day the pool was demolished it dyed the mud and the sand black.

Over the years, the pool of dark clear water has often come into my dreams to flash in front of my eye. I still remember how I lingered all day around the pool watching blackfish darting to and fro, their bodies gleaming like charcoal bars and their eyes sparkling like crystals. Because the water was too clear, even the scales of the fish were discernible.

The pool was located below a sand ridge northwest of our little thatched cottage. When and how did it come into being? And why didn't the loose sandy soil drain it? Today it is all a mystery. In the boundless wilderness, similar mysteries abound that are simply not explored.

On the two sides of the pool grew some wild copal trees, and when autumn came, a big frost cast red the leaves and petioles, which gradually fell off, some into the pool, some onto the edge of the pool. We collected copal tree leaves, wove them into hats, which we put on our heads, and mimicked various animal sounds....

Beside the pool were some eroded wood stakes, which often carried some mushrooms. When you picked the newly grown mushrooms, some new ones would quickly grow. It was an interesting place that held a mysterious appeal, quiet, deserted, unfrequented except for visits by one or two children. On the sandy ridge to the right of the pool there were two weed-covered mounds said to be two graves. What kind of people had come to this remote corner to build the graves? Everyone wondered.

Then I heard the legend of Black Pool. The legend rendered the place all the more eerie and bewildering. Years later, as I went to see the pool and found a stretch of black sand in its stead, a terrible sadness crept up. My steps became heavy.

My mother told the story to me. And I will tell the story to my children. I will take them to this place.

If you don't pay attention, you'll find it no more than a sandy ridge and a legendary black pool, a commonplace landscape of a wilderness. But if you trace its origin in the legend, you will get a big surprise....

It is the mark of a mysterious aquatic family.

Once upon a time, there lived an old couple below the sandy ridge, who made a living by farming. Due to the poor quality of the soil, they managed to have a meager

harvest by sowing more seeds than normal. Back then, the pool was like any other pool, not black at all. The old couple irrigated their land by fetching water from it, and around the pool were planted peanuts and Jerusalem artichoke, with corn and wheat growing in the better lots. The old couple scrimped and saved, wearing coarse clothes. Having no children, they had drifted here from a faraway place. The way they came is a wee bit like ours--we have also drifted here and we also have a lonely cottage....

The old couple lived a simple life. One night, the old man had a strange dream. He dreamed of a tall skinny man with bulging eyes pleading with him tearfully. They were a big family driven away from their ancestral land for some particular reason. At the moment there being no place for them to go, they asked the owner of this piece of land to allow the family to stay.

The old man asked, "How can we accommodate you here?"

The crying man pointed to the pool and said, "This place is very good; it is enough for us to make a temporary home. If you can kindly agree we will never forget you."

"That's no big deal. You can stay there if you think it's good."

The man was so moved that he knelt down on his knees to say thank you again and again.

When he left, he accidentally cast down a string of water beads. In the morning, when the old man woke up, he found the water beads under his bed had not dried up yet. Pointing at the water stains he told his wife about the strange dream. His wife tapped on her knee in surprise and said she had a similar dream. The old man

worriedly held his wife by the shoulder and said, “Did you agree to his request in the dream?”

“Yes, I did.”

The old man heaved a sigh of relief.

The old couple crossed the sand and went straight to the pool. They immediately noticed the color of the pool had changed. There were a lot of blackfish merrily frolicking in the water. Thinking of the drenched old man in the dream, the husband slapped his own head, saying, “This is an aquatic family!” As he was about to turn back, the wife pointed to the edge of the pool, where was a tableful of eats and drinks alongside a stack of banknotes.

They understood it was the reward from the aquatic family. So they sat down, had breakfast under a wild copal tree, and then went home with the money.

From then on, they lived a very comfortable life. On festival days, the old man in the dream would appear again to thank them profusely, followed by another sumptuous banquet beside the pool. In a flash a year passed.

One day, a fisherman going to sea passed the pool and caught sight of the blackfish in the pool. He shouted to the old man, “There being so many fish, why don’t you catch them?”

The old man shook his head.

“Let me catch the fish, sell them and give you half of the money--what do you

think?”

The old man still refused.

Later, the fisherman brought three other people to see the pool and together they made a request of the old man, who still did not agree.

In the night, the water-soaked man appeared again in a dream to beg the old man, “My family and I appreciate your good intentions for not agreeing to them; but early tomorrow morning they will get into the pool; please help us when they come....”

The old man agreed.

Sure enough, the next day, the fisherman really brought a bunch of people. Armed with buckets and scoops, they jumped into the pool to catch fish. The water only reached to their chests, but they couldn’t catch a fish by any means. The fish were dexterous. When a scoop reached down, they quickly escaped.

When the old couple came to stop them, the fisherman said, cajoling them, “When the fish are caught, more than half of the income is yours. In time, you can replace your mud house with a tall, big, blue-brick house. Besides, we’re not going to catch all the fish; some will be spared so that they will multiply and you have all the fish back. It will be an endless source of income for you! “

The old couple looked at each other, wavering. The fisherman pushed on until they finally nodded their consent.

As they stood on the edge of the pool watching this group of people fishing, the

promise they made in the previous night was completely forgotten.

The fisherman and his men worked very hard to scoop water out of the pool in hopes of draining it, but saw little decrease of water after working themselves to headfuls of sweat. When the water was poured onto the edge and into the ditch, a large area of earth was dyed black. The old man, watching from ashore, smiled as he stroked his beard.

“This pool of mine, you just can’t fathom it. Working like that, you won’t be able to dry it after a year’s time.”

The fisherman asked why. He said, pointing at a corner of the pool, “Down there at a slant is a water hole leading to an underground water course. If you don’t block it, you’ll never be able to dry it. “

The fisherman immediately asked everyone to take off their clothes. Then, he rolled their clothes into a ball, tied it up with weeds, and then dived underwater. Sure enough, there was a water hole. He blocked the hole tight with the ball of clothes.

They worked very hard scooping water out of the pool and to their delight the water decreased bit by bit. In half an hour, the blackfish in the pool thickened like rice in a porridge and frequently bumped into their legs--creak, creak, creak. The fish were black and bright, big and fat. The fisherman held one up, watched it struggling in front of him, and then threw it to the old man on the edge of the pool.

As they reached out the fish scoop to catch more fish, they heard a loud rumbling sound shaking underground. The fishermen froze in alarm. The sound continued for

a little while; then bang! The blocked water hole ejected a water beam to strike down everyone in the pool.

They shouted and screamed, their faces gone pale, and climbed out of the pool in panic.

Everyone was stupefied seeing the water gradually rising to its previous level. The gang thus stood for a while and then left in fear and despair.

In the same night, the old man once again dreamed of the soaked man. His clothes as shiny and smooth as before, he stood there, with not the least mildness in his bulging eyes. He looked at the old man fixedly. “It is no big deal that you couldn’t persuade them to stop, but you shouldn’t have given them such a vicious suggestion. You’re a man of no conscience, selling my whole family for a little gain; you’ll receive no good results.

With that, he disappeared into the night.

Waking up in a cold sweat, the old man sat up and saw his wife sitting in a daze. His old woman said she dreamed of the water-soaked elder as well.

The next morning they got up and went to see Black Pool first thing in the morning. When they arrived at the edge of the pool, they found it unusually quiet. There were no ripples, nor were there many fish. On a closer look, they saw some water-drops on the bank and a little fish lying on land, dead. Following the trace of water they crossed the sandy ridge ... The aquatic family had migrated away in despair and chaos. The couple went a long way in the direction of their migration and saw nothing but water-

drops here and there and a few deserted fry now and then.

Six months later, the old couple weakened and soon fell ill. Later, they died together in the cottage. Someone found them and buried them on the sandy ridge beside the pool.

There were still a few small fish, probably a legacy of the aquatic family. They multiplied here to continue the family line.

I was alarmed and scared by the legend. When I looked back at the pool, I couldn't help shuddering. Now the baby blackfish in the pool became so sacred that I even didn't dare to look at them for long. Should they have any memory, they would be talking about the catastrophe of long ago; and why they were left here to become an eternal mystery.

Because of the legend, as far as I remembered, no one had ever come to touch the little blackfish in the pool, nor to fish here. Maybe these little fish were a most worthless branch of that aquatic family, because they never grew up and didn't reproduce much. They swam at the bottom of the pool, looking very tired and very lonely. I rarely saw them flip and flop; they merely gently swam like humans tiptoeing.

From then on, whenever I looked at the two mounds on the sandy ridge again, I believed they were two graves, inside which were buried two treacherous souls.

I once searched for their traces following my mother's guidance in the direction of their retreat--it was said they had gone away from between the two graves. Along the way, it was all wild grass and dense woods. On this strange route, I only saw

a lush growth of wild flowers, fragrant, blooming in twos and threes amid a large expanse of green. I even thought they were the spirits of the little fish left on the tips of the grass blades; and the stigmas of the flowers were like eyes of the fish, round and bright. I did not dare to pick the wildflowers.

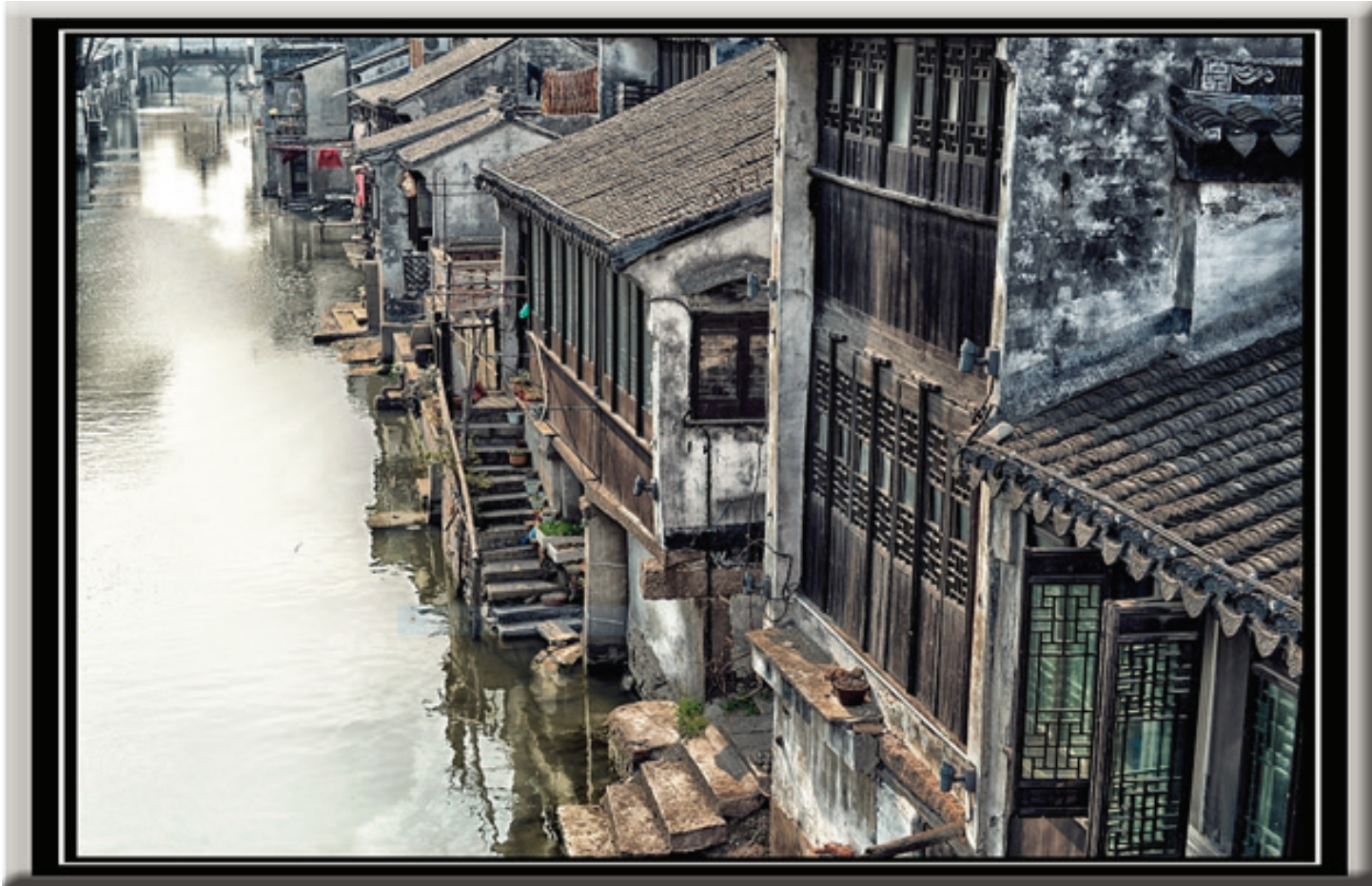
The road went straight to where the sun set--the vast sea. Thus I concluded: from then on the fish of Black Pool became part of the ocean....

One question remained: where had they initially come from? What kind of force had driven them here? Had there also been a betrayal? If so, they would have been thoroughly disappointed today....

As I looked at the two graves covered in the wild grass, a feeling of disgust and pity arose. Even after they died the couple didn't wash off their shame, a shame too great in magnitude to wash off; it does not just belong to them but also belongs to all those who had lived in the wilderness before them and have been living there after them.

At the end of an autumn after 20 years, I am searching the old place for the grove of red copal trees, longing to walk for a while on the fallen leaves in the silvery frost. The chilly autumn wind ruffles up my hair, which hides my eyes and prevents me from seeing the familiar grove and grassland--everything is gone except for the dark sandy soil....

No one else can unlock the secrets of the black soil except me, who will



Ancient Town of Shaxi, Taichang, Jiangsu Province

Jian Tang

Mankind's Fall from Grace

On Zhang Wei's "Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool"

Kaile Chu

Zhang Wei's stories are more profound than they seem. The few I have read so far -- "Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool" (2019), "The Story of Ah Yah" (2019), and "A Bitter Debate in a Dream" (2017), among others -- all more or less concern humanity's greed, their inherent selfishness that leads to frequent violence upon Nature, and the reckoning that is bound to follow. In these stories, the author's outlook on mankind is rather pessimistic, and "Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool" is a typical example.

The story starts with the narrator's trip back to his hometown, where lies a curious patch of black sand amid square miles of brown soil. Legend has it that the place was once a pond "like any other", by which an old couple lived. One day, the two came across a family of mystical black fish, and accommodated them in the pond; consequently the fish family gave the old couple their blessing and occasionally food and cash in return. When a gang of fishermen pressured and cajoled them into handing over the pond for their fishing, however, the old couple

complied, and even offered them suggestions on how to drain the pond to get the fish, despite having promised the aquatic family the night before that they would protect the fish at all costs. The black fish family, disgusted with the betrayal, abandoned the pond altogether, and the old couple died soon after. The patch of sand dyed pitch-black by the pond water persists, as a reminder of the tragedy that once befell this place.

Notable in this particular tale is how it initially starts as a classic good vs. evil story, the old couple portrayed as decent people, resolutely defending the blackfish family against the fishermen's clutches. At this point it is reasonable for readers to expect a positive outcome in a face-off between the heroes and the villains. But then everything goes down the drain after the fishermen starts bringing up statistics -- the temptation of the supposed economic benefits have proved too great to resist, so the couple gives in, and, their promise "completely forgotten", sells out the blackfish family by becoming collaborators of the fishermen. Had they not allowed their innate greed to overcome their sense of honour, they would have had the fish family's blessing for years to come, yet by yielding to the temptation of money and going back on their words, they have proved themselves morally corrupt and undeserving of such blessing. In a subversion of readers' expectation, it is thus revealed that the "heroes" are no better than the "villains", and their demise comes as a result of retribution for their weakness and what is in fact their treacherous doing.

The entire story is obviously fictitious, yet there is reality to it -- humanity has

grown egotistical and uncaring of other life forms symbolized by the blackfish family. The couple and their descent into treachery can be seen as a direct allegory to mankind and its gradual degradation, starting out as protectors of Nature yet ending up blinded by self-interest and short-term gains. And just like how the couple falls prey to their own shortsightedness, humanity would sooner tear itself to shreds than attempt to suppress its own innate greed. As Zhang Wei's dog in "A Bitter Debate in a Dream" is "full of being" as pointed out by Fraser Sutherland (2017), so are Zhang Wei's fish in the present story, which reverses the roles of humans and animals by depicting animals as beings that know honor and gratitude and humans as ungrateful animals deprived of sense of decency.

Such a bleak view permeates Zhang Wei's works. We can see something similar in "A Bitter Debate in a Dream," which tells the story of an enforced dog eradication campaign in a town with extended discussions by the characters of the ethical implications of animal slaughtering for the benefit of mankind. Although the narrator eloquently wins the argument against dog killing, his dog is killed anyway. In the end, holding the corpse of the dog, he deplores, "I'm sorry. I have not been able to protect you. Not until that moment did I understand that this time around there was no need for them to give advance notice and no need for argument either" ("Bitter Debate" 43). Under Zhang Wei's pen, humans can become hopelessly unreasonable animals and cruelty to animals exactly mirrors human cruelty for each other. In another story, "The Story of Ah Yah," the avarice of a family knows no boundaries and the faithful animal that has brought them wealth is persecuted with a vicious trap because the

family doubts the loyalty of the animal. When the family was going to finish off the auspicious animal with a knife so as not to benefit other families, she “ran all the way back into the woods leaving behind her history of serving humanity.” One after another, these tragic tales illuminate Zhang Wei’s motif that mankind has already fallen from grace, for people have become undeserving of Nature’s care.

Yet Zhang Wei sees a ray of hope shining through his dimly-lit world. *Maybe* -- if people so much as remember past mistakes and look ahead -- things will change for the better.

A major writer in China, Zhang Wei is viewed as, in the words of American translator Eric Abrahamsen (2013), “the most productive, the most often honored, and the most favored by readers” of Chinese authors. More and more of his works are being translated into the English language. The crystal clear translation of “Remembering Blackfish in Black Pool” in this issue of *the quint* gives a glimpse of Zhang Wei’s vision, his art of storytelling, and his masterly use of language, a facet that is often difficult to capture in translation.

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Making a Wish in the Temple

Jian Tang

The Song of the Dandelion

San San

Sun Cheng Ping (tr.)

“Why don’t you go to see Xiaoman? You were good friends, weren’t you?” Mother inquired. I knew that she would continue, “Now, she is in trouble, and you keep far away from her. Can you call this friendship?”

This sort of nagging had happened several times since the beginning of the summer holiday. Compared with other mothers, my mother seemed much more concerned with her children’s souls.

Xiaoman was my neighbor. Both of us are the third children of our respective families, with two elder sisters and one younger one. We paired up as friends based on our ages. And with each other’s parents, we behaved cordially but kept a moderate distance. When we met on the road, we usually smiled in greeting and then ran away immediately.

Every day we commuted together between home and school. Either she came by for me or I for her. At my home, Xiaoman acted like an adult while talking with my parents. If my mother happened to put clothes on the lines to dry in the air, she would take up the little basket of clothes pins, which she passed over one by one while chatting about things in daily life. She was quick-witted and pleasing; at times she told

a small white lie in order to make others happy, which she seemed to feel as her duty.

Xiaoman's big family dwelt in a small house. For dinner, all the members would sit around a table on a heatable brick bed. Sometimes her mother would explode for no reason and kick her simple and honest father off the brick bed. At such times, I could do nothing but study the flower patterns on the door curtain. So, I would rather wait for her in the courtyard.

In her courtyard, there was a birch-leaf pear tree, under which often lay a cat called *Gaoqiu*. Maybe I looked up at the tree more often than down at the cat, for he behaved indifferently towards me. Once I wore a pair of new shoes, of which the cat seemed envious. He kept on putting a paw on my shoes again and again, each time with a daring look up at me. I retreated good tempered, unbothered by his provocation.

We walked along the trail behind the mill to school. Each time after a rain, the bushes on both sides grew wildly and the trail narrowed. We would have to open up the trail by beating about the bushes with a small branch while walking through. We talked about our classmates, boys and girls with no one missing because we did it either following their grades or based on their seats. Xiaoman related the gossips which she overheard from her parents. At such times, she really bore a resemblance to her mother in terms of facial and gestural expressions. We often bent over to pick a dandelion, which must be the softest bloom in the world. Just a light blow, and the seeds would scatter in all directions and then we couldn't help singing the song:

I am a seed from the dandelion,

...

One day, we perched on the stone bridge beside a reservoir, swinging our legs back and forth, and watched the almond yellow sun setting behind the mountain little by little. We could smell the smoke from the far-away field where farmers were burning stalk and straw. A green jeep jolting over the bumpy road passed us slowly. Through the window, we saw the silhouette of the handsome and swarthy face of a soldier.

“Our Principal’s husband,” Xiaoman pointed with her chin towards the jeep.

“Oh-”

Before my eyes flashed the beautiful and graceful figure of the Principal, with porcelain skin and arching eyebrows. Her soft voice made one feel as if lying on a velvet blanket. As my mother’s colleague and friend, my Principal naturally appeared in Mother’s gossip a lot. Her husband was an officer in the army, with a very good ancestry. The only regret was that they had no child after so many years’ marriage, which distressed them greatly.

At this moment, a little uneasiness came to me from nowhere. I jumped off the bridge, brushing the dirt from my clothes. “Let’s go home.”

Xiaoman didn’t move. I knew the reason: she’d be ordered about once she was home.

“The Principal is quite fond of you.”

I sighed, nodding a reluctant yes because of the undeniable truth.

Two

Each time the Principal saw me, she would slow down and cock her head at me, smiling, with a hint of distressing tenderness on her face, which would make me feel awkward and run away with a pounding heart and a reddening face.

One day during dinner, mother said in a half- serious and half joking way, “Aunt Principal likes you! ...Would you like to be her daughter?” I stared at her for a while and then back at my father.

I have never been able to discern the serious words from the joking ones of the elders. Once, a neighboring uncle passed me a stick of green Chinese onion almost as tall as I was telling me to stand side by side with it. “Keep straight with it, don’t move!” With these words, he rolled up his sleeves to get ready for making a huge pie. He made a gesture indicating he would wrap up both of us for dinner. I took his words seriously and, frightened, released hold of the onion, and ran outside with a sharp cry and I almost stumbled over the threshold. Not until I saw all the people rocking backwards and forwards with laughter, did I realize that he was playing a joking on me. So, this time, I wasn’t sure if my mother was making a joke or not.

I looked at my father who laughed noncommittally. . Father is an honest man who believes in convention and experience. I have no doubts about anything he has said.

But at this moment I could not discern his true mind.

One day, Mother came back from school, and she took out a brand-new red skirt from her bag, calling me to her. She told me to try it on. I always had to wear the clothes first worn by my eldest sister and then my second elder sister. What was up this time?

“Partiality!” My two elder sisters showed their dissatisfaction with pouted lips.

“It is from the Principal for the third girl.”

I was dazed for a moment, and then I hastily took off the dress which was just put on, throwing it to Mother. “Anyone who wants can wear it. I won’t anyway.” With these words, I went into my room.

It seemed true that the Principal wanted to have me as her daughter. And since Mother accepted this skirt, the decision to have me adopted by the Principal might as well have already been made. I should have known this, for in my family I was the one least capable, clever, pretty, or beloved; if one had to be sent, it must be me. Thinking of this I felt sorrow stirring in my heart and couldn’t help throwing myself onto my bed and whimpering.

“What are you whimpering for?” Mother stood at the door and sighed, “No one spares my trouble!”

After this, for many days I tried to avoid appearing before Principal. In fact, I had no dislike for her at all. I even felt that she was perfect but for such fondness

she showed to me. However, she didn't realize that this fondness was improper and invasive. I just wanted to keep away from her, so that her desire to adopt me as daughter would fade gradually and be forgotten.

But that day, I couldn't escape from her attention.

Every morning, I would get up early for a walk around the small river, with a book in hand, before the cleanness of a new day was polluted by other human beings. In early summer, the earth remained soaked, the weather moist, and the fragrance of the woods and the river pervaded the air.

In the distance, someone was coming towards my way. Before I could make out the figure, she had appeared before my eyes. The Principal!

There was no way to escape. I mustered my courage and looked at her with a smile.

She took a look at the book in my hand, and inquired what I was up to. "Nothing." I wouldn't let her know I was working hard in case she would like me better.

"I was jogging." She looked backwards at the trail. She didn't need to tell me; I didn't ask. Then she cocked her head, eyed me with that kind of familiar look: tenderness mixed with a slight distress.

"Do you know? Among the four sisters, you are the most good-looking one."

I shook my head at her praise detached from reality. Among the four sisters in my family, I was the one least remarkable. Eldest sister looked dignified and modest,

second sister bright and pretty, younger sister much beloved. Only me, the shy one is opinionated, sometimes blunt, and other times extremely sensitive.

“Your mother is too busy to dress you up.” She looked me up and down at the tight and worn clothes with the lowest button missing. I covered my hand there in order to defend mother’s honor from her criticism and reproach.

“Be my daughter, and I shall dress you up like a little princess.” She gazed into the distance with her eyes narrowed, as if imagining me dressed up like a little princess.

I had no interest in the future she pictured. No possibility. None! I wanted to leave.

I backed a step, waving to her. “Good bye!”

Before she could reply, I turned and escaped. In order to disappear from her sight, I turned into a trail overgrown with daisies and thorns on the sides.

Three

The following afternoon Principal’s husband was back at my home, and Mother presented me a basket covered with a piece of blue calico. “Today is Aunt Principal’s birthday, you, take this to her.”

On hearing this, I stamped my refusal. “Why don’t you ask them to do it?” I glanced over at the two elder sisters doing homework at the table.

“I’d like to, but nobody wants me!” Second Sister said.

Mother gave her a glare, and then said to me gently. “Lovely! My third girl is the

most lovable, most obedient!”

Ah. I could never resist compliments and I gave , “OK, I’ll run the errand.”

I had decided to deliver the basket and retreat without saying a word.

I was about to leave, when mother added. “Put on the new dress Aunt Principal just bought for you.”

The new dress! I had never worn it. I felt that wearing it indicated responding and accepting her fondness for me, as well as admitting its reasonability and justification. Moreover, I didn’t feel like wearing new clothes which make me feel awkward and uneasy.

Reluctantly, I went into the room to put on the new dress. Taking the dress out of the chest, I planned: I might put it over my old clothes, and on the way, take it off when no one was paying attention. This I planned and decided.

At the gate of the yard, I heard Second Sister’s calling from behind. “Behave well and give my regards to your New Papa and New Mama!”

I paused, confounded, and a sharp sorrow struck me. I changed my mind, determined to lay the basket at her gate stealthily and retreat without letting them know.

At this moment, Younger Sister burst into crying suddenly. Throwing down the dolls, she tottered to me from behind, clinging to my clothes. She came to understand Second Sister’s words. I felt ashamed, for I often disliked and avoided her. Each time

I came back from school, she would stick to me. “If you don’t play with me, I’ll tell Mama!” seriously she said, her eyes brimming with tears which never moved me, and I’d open my books to do homework.

Eldest Sister came up, opened her little tightly clutched hands, and whispered. “Come back soon! Don’t stay there for dinner, however hard they try to keep you.”

I nodded ok. Holding the basket, I moved out.

I passed by Xiaoman’s home, and through the fence wall I saw her squatting, playing with *Gaoqiu* in the yard. I slowed down as an idea flashed through my mind.

From that moment, all changed.

I pulled her into the house. Taking off the new dress, I put it on her before she could utter a word.

“Run the errand for me.”

“C...can this...?” Hesitatingly, she looked at me and down at the dress she was now wearing.

“Sure, why not!”

I cocked my head, looking up and down at Xiaoman in the dress. “Very pretty!” I told the truth. She was tall and big boned and the red color was her favorite. The dress fit perfectly on her.

I handed the basket over. “Hurry!”

“Is this Ok?” she still hesitated.

I pressed the basket into her hands like a hot potato. “Ok! Why not? Ok!” I pushed and moved her to the gate, and closed the door behind her.

She moved several steps down, looking backwards at me and down at the red dress on her body, and stroked the silky textures and enjoyed the feel of it. I knew she would, she couldn't bear to part with the dress. Seeing her disappearing at the curve of the trail, I gave a sigh of relief.

How clever I was!

I didn't dare to go home at once; Mother would surely ask about the whole process of me as a guest there and about the dress. I had to wait for Xiaoman's return.

I sat on a rock beside the river where I wouldn't miss her.

Not until the moon rose high did I notice a familiar figure coming near over there. It was Xiaoman! Vivacious, she bounced and capered, humming a tune. I moved up close to her, and in the moon light, I was shocked at the glamour and vitality beaming all over her face. It was the way you may feel once you know you are loved by someone.

Four

I had prepared for a scolding only to find none. Mother eyed me with a different look, with more tenderness and pensiveness. Concerning the basket affair, mother and Principal must have exchanged views in private. I was very glad and thankful

that she didn't mention a word anymore.

Soon after that, Xiaoman also had a red dress, identical to mine. It was from Principal, which surprised me a little. And for a moment, this realization and the understanding that came with it brought me a slight sense of loss. However, I felt happy for Xiaoman as well. Every day, she wore the dress and walked about the campus like a beautiful butterfly flying about. For the short few minutes of break, she'd go to Principal's office to have a little water or a snack. Several times, I saw her coming out of Principal's home with an irresistible radiance beaming on her face.

That red dress of mine has remained tucked in the cabinet, except for the time Xiaoman wore it for me to run the errand. I don't know if the refusal hidden with children's tricks was a hurt to Principal. What is hurt to such a youngster? Even if it hurt, it should be possibly forgiven.

One day while chasing wildly with classmates around the corner of the boiler room, I almost knocked into Principal. I paused, smiled, apologized and asked for her forgiveness. She looked at me, still with the tender distress only that it was mixed with a slight dignity and regret. She sighed and turned away. The sigh made me feel relaxed for I knew from then on I was forgone and I would be happy.

One day, a green jeep stopped at Xiaoman's home. I recognized it at once. The moment Principal and her husband came out of the car with packages of all sizes, Xiaoman's parents greeted them ceremoniously and welcomed them into the yard.

At the end of summer, Principal was transferred back up to the city and, together

with her, my friend Xiaoman went.

Xiaoman left, into a life she did not dare to expect even in her dreams. For a long time, I felt empty. In the past, after school we two idled about in the field; now I buried myself in reading. And reading became my most important companion.

Five

Xiaoman came home to see her parents.

She had grown beautiful, with her hair combed into a long ponytail bound with a nice hair band. She wore a pink chiffon princess dress with decorative ruffles and butterfly ties at the waist. I looked down at myself, still in the clothes I wore when Xiaoman left, worn and frayed, with no style. I tried to wash it as little as possible, for fear of making it threadbare.

She told me about the city: tall buildings piercing into the sky; from the top, men looked like ants and cars like matchboxes. People in the city liked to trim trees into the shapes of monkeys, dogs or mushrooms. If you fed the bus a coin, it would carry you anywhere you wanted...

While talking, Xiaoman twisted her waist twirling her skirts. She grew tall and developed well and through the silky dress her bra appeared faintly. I didn't dare to wear the things that highlighted the existence of my breasts, the developing of which embarrassed me so much that when I went through the campus or classroom, I always held books close to the chest.

“They took me,” she told me, “to a revolving restaurant for dinner. When you start eating a chicken drumstick, you face mountains, however when you finish, you face a piece of sea...last weekend, they took me to ride a roller coaster,” she patted on her chest, in an exaggerated and coy voice, “Oh my god, I got scared!” I recognized the manner of Principal.

“They also sent me to Children’s Palace to learn dancing. We are rehearsing a dance, and probably will dance on TV! ...ah, just a minute.” She went into the room, and came out with a pair of shoes in her hands. “These are my shoes for dancing.” They were a pair of champagne satin shoes with soft soles. She put it on and tiptoed. With a few twirls, the silky dress whirled lightly and fell again.

I looked at her with a feeling of awe. All these dazzling things! Xiaoman, the little companion who had grown up with me, has now sloughed off the uncouthness, and is living a life I could only see in books or on TV.

“Try them on.” She handed over the shoes.

I fondled the smooth and soft toe cap which I had never seen, let alone worn.

“Try them on!” she smiled and ordered.

I took off my cloth shoes with a square opening, and rubbed the bottom of my foot against my other calf. “That’s ok, it doesn’t matter!” Xiaoman urged.

Carefully, I felt my foot into the shoe, looked down at it, exploring the fresh, alien sensation that belonged to another world.

The next time Xiaoman came back, she had become even more fashionable and more beautiful. Lifting up her sleeve, she showed me an exquisite button size watch on her wrist.

“My mama bought it for me.”

I knew that “mama” referred to Principal, amazed at the naturalness with which she uttered the two syllables. I shall never call others Mama. Never! This is betrayal.

Late in the afternoon, Mother came back from school. The moment she entered the gate, I fell into her arms and nestled in her embrace, playing coy with sweet words. Mother’s embrace smelled of warmth, mixed with the fresh fragrance of the river and reed leaves. Mother was happy and puzzled. “What’s wrong, child? Away, go away. I am covered in sweat...” as if expelling a little dog, she cast me away.

That winter, the vacation approached quite late. Before we had the final exam, Xiaoman came back on winter vacation.

A message concerning Xiaoman came from Mother. She heard it from Xiaoman’s mother who had come for help with buttonholing and couldn’t help showing off although she tried to be modest. “We don’t need to make any special purchases for New Year’s. Xiaoman has brought preserved meat and salted fish enough for half a year...ah, the child! Yesterday the moment she entered the gate, she yelled ‘Mama, did you see me on TV?’...”

That day at the table when talking about Xiaoman, Mother suddenly paused; she studied her four daughters one by one for a moment, her face showed envy and

jealousy. For the first time in my life I saw through her: my mother was not different from other mothers. I could feel her disappointment and pity.

Should I regret that decision in the past? Did I miss an important opportunity in life? That night in bed, I kept asking myself and suddenly the answer came: No! I don't envy Xiaoman, let her keep the new life and new identity she longed for, and I will be content with my complete family whose life is ordinary but warm.

During those days, engaged in preparation for the final exams, I didn't go to see Xiaoman, neither did she come to me. On the last day of the year, on the way to invite the divine ancestry back home for the spring festival, I saw Xiaoman standing by the path together with her elder sisters. Now she has grown beautiful, tall, and demure. She wore a scarlet coat fitly cut for her figure, so distinctive and eye-catching in the crowd. I didn't approach to call her; neither did she come to greet me. I couldn't tell the reason for this. Between us, there now existed a tacit alienation caused by disparity or something else.

Once I heard Mother say to Father. "Take a look at Xiaoman, how fortunate she is now!" Mother sighed slightly . "If only our third girl..."

"Hey!" Father interrupted, "It's easy to say, but if she had been adopted over, wouldn't you miss her?!"

Mother fell silent.

I was on the verge of tears, calling at the bottom of my heart. *Pa ! I shall love you and be faithful forever.*

That day during dinner, I kept my eyes on father's bowl. Once it got empty, I would get up and take it over to fetch more food for him, which I'd never done before. The whole family was puzzled with my behavior, all their eyes fixed on me. In the extremely quiet house, their gaze embarrassed me and made me blush so, without saying a word, hastily I lifted the curtain and went into the inner room.

Six

More than a year passed and Xiaoman came back less often. For a long time, I didn't have any news about her. Maybe she had got used to and liked city life, and the poor and crowded home in the country didn't mean much to her any longer.

Then one day when I came back from school, I saw Mother standing dumbfounded in the yard, staring off in the distance.

I stood at the gate, watching her.

"Have you heard the news?" Mother looked up, with horror on her face and said sadly. "Aunt Principal...she...she has been killed in a crash!"

Before this I had never seen an adult crying. But now tears were just flowing down Mother's face. Adults turned out to be like children, and would burst into tears for losing a friend. Oh, the one who liked me, wanted to adopt me as her daughter left the world and was gone forever!

"Xiaoman was also in the car. They are afraid one of her legs can't be saved..."

Shocked, I stood there like a stump. If the sad news of Principal's death seemed

far removed, the shocking news of Xiaoman struck me like flashing thunder because of the shared experience of growing up together. She was the first of my peers who unfortunately encountered the Misfortune Devil.

Thinking that from now on Xiaoman would be trapped in bed, unable to dance, run, or even walk, I felt a vague sting from the past, from the afternoon of that basket errand. I tried to ignore it, to shake off the thought, however the next minute it came haunting again, till I was overwhelmingly captured.

I remembered a sentence from *Anna Karenina* “she fended the aghast fate for me”, which thundered and echoed in my ears.

What if I had not asked Xiaoman to run the errand for me?

Three months later, Xiaoman was brought back. Principal’s husband was drowning in the grief of losing his wife, powerless, and inadequate to take care of the grown up Xiaoman.

Mother went to visit Xiaoman several times. Each time she came back, she had a few sighs. “So, it’s no use to strive for something that is not meant for you. Even if you get it, you will lose it one day.” She forgot her sense of loss when Xiaoman was riding on the crest of success, and had a sense of contentment and gratification.

“Go to see Xiaoman, she needs consolation and help badly now.” Mother urged me again and again.

Whenever mother urged me, I’d fall silent, the reason for which was known only

to myself. I simply didn't have the courage to face her.

For those days, if possible, I'd stay home, not wanting to see any one, especially Xiaoman's family. The summer holiday slipped by day after day, however, the timidity hidden secretly in my heart didn't decrease, but increased every day.

For many afternoons, I strolled on the hillside behind Xiaoman's home, watching the pale yellow light reflected on her windows, calculating the distance between us and the courage with which to knock on her door.

One day, I met Xiaoman's mother on the path. She paused in front a puddle from a recent shower reflecting the blue sky and the flying clouds. In distress, she said, "Come and see Xiaoman please! ... She lies in bed all day long, depressed nearly to sickness." I felt abashed all over my face, daring not to look up at her and accepted it silently.

It was she who chose her own fate. If she were not destined to be Principal's daughter, she could only have blamed herself. I comforted myself this way.

Seven

On a humid and sultry day in August, I followed Mother into Xiaoman's home.

Her mother was feeding the cat in the yard. The cat backed a step at the sight of me, with an expression of recognition. It gave out a cry, exposing the pink throat.

Xiaoman's bed was propped up in the central room, which was dimly lit and poorly ventilated. The air was thick with staleness and moldiness of pickled vegetables, and

above all the despair around Xiaoman.

She lay in bed, face to the wall, cloaked in a half new blanket. After her mother's repeated callings, she turned her face around, which I hardly recognized. It was a pale face, emaciated by traumatic misfortunes. She tried to manage a smile, but in vain.

At this moment, *Gaoqiu* went crazy and jumped onto the bed and lay down at the end, which made me notice the emptiness where the leg should be. In my heart, a sudden fit of deep grieving welled up--*Gaoqiu* was as bright and human as in the past, wanting to hide for its master, only to remind me of the existence of the emptiness.

“Dirty, get out of here!” Xiaoman's mother gave *Gaoqiu* a knock on the head. It released a grieved meow and escaped.

Two mothers talked about the weather, the pepper tree in the yard and finally when the topic fell on Xiaoman's leg, her mother's jaw tensed moodily, and voice raised. “Hit and run, tell me, where to get compensated? ...” Gesticulating with the blue and coarse hands from the cloth dying job she had, she complained gruffly. Now her voice had turned coarse and harsh, as if her vocal cords got impaired by the car accident. And complaining had become a part of her life.

Mother gave a soft sigh, trying to find a soothing word, telling her to cheer up and be thankful for Xiaoman's life. Easier said than done, I grumbled. But except for this, what else could she do?

The lovely Xiaoman, the one who had good luck, has now lost a leg, lost the dreamy city life, the good family and beautiful dresses, and all the good dreams and

future. She had over-drafted her luck account. And now she is trapped in bed, in a state of being useless and helpless.

My mind wandered, checking all my possessions: 30 *yuan*, a big conch from which I can hear the sea when I move it close to my ears, an anthology of Tolstoy...I shall help her, with all I have.

“Didn’t you want Third Sister to come here all along?” Xiaoman’s mother turned around at her.

I sat on the same chair I used to, not saying a word. I didn’t know what to say in such a situation. This was beyond my experience.

Xiaoman turned around; the first time she looked at me since I entered the room. “Why didn’t you come to play?” she looked at me, without a trace of hostility at all. I felt too guilty to say a word, and bit my lips tightly.

She reached one hand to me, and I went over and held it. Her hands were warm and clammy, just like before. I remembered how much I feared to touch her hands, which were always sweaty and sticky. However, now I am willing to hold them forever.

At this moment, I feel a squeeze in my palm, and another, light and full of comfort... that is a secret language and as a companion growing up together, I understood it immediately.

The squeeze pardoned me and relieved my stricken conscience.

Eight

Many years later, once in a phone call, my elder sister mentioned Xiaoman.

Several girls in the two families left hometown one by one, scattered afar from home like the seeds of a dandelion. Only my eldest sister and Xiaoman remained in that small city.

Xiaoman got engaged early in her youth to a widower who made a living by repairing radios. In her mother's words, "I've finally got her off my hands." Probably every mother has this kind of idea. And in this way, Xiaoman fought her way out from being trapped in bed in the damp and dimly lit central house. She propped up a stall selling fruits at the entrance to a hospital in the city. She became shrewd and capable, and for a few cents would bargain for a half day. She hopped with a single crutch, carrying the heavy fruit boxes off the tricycle cart. People witnessed power in her--the power to fight against the adversity of life.

Eldest Sister told me that her daughter Xianzi, as a newcomer, wasn't accepted in a city primary school, for several naughty boys bullied her. One day while bullying Xianzi, they happened to be seen by Xiaoman. She simply left the stall behind, hopping after them, shouting loudly. "Bastard! I'll twist off your neck, if you dare to bully my niece again!" And after that, nobody dared to bully Xianzi anymore.

Listening to this, I saw Xiaoman hopping hastily in my mind, and hot tears welled up. For a long moment, I kept silent. In this matter, these were the people most important in my life for a certain period. One is my peer friend growing up with me,

the other my beloved niece. She did what I should do as an aunt.

“Sister, help her as you can...”

“Set your heart at rest, I will. Who else can she depend on?!”

Eldest Sister said that each time on her way back from work, she’d stop at Xiaoman’s stall, helping with the selling to let her take a break. And those parents who came to fetch their children were quite willing to buy something.

In my childhood, we often heard a rhythmic work song: yo-ho, yo-ho... sounding like the waves clapping the beach, low, deep, rigorous and powerful. Mother told me it was the song for pile driving. When one was building a house, people would come over to help, no matter how busy and tired they were with their work in the day, or whether they were relatives. For my whole childhood, we often fell asleep with this kind of work song.

So, people from there harbor a deep feeling for hometown, no matter where and how far away they travel.

That day, coming out of Xiaoman’s home, I felt as if I were relieved of a heavy load. And I was very conscious that the red dress I took off and put on Xiaoman had obligated me with a lot of responsibility.

I walked hastily ahead, leaving Mother far behind. I didn’t want to hear a word concerning this visit.

“Don’t rush, wait!” Mother called from behind. I took no notice of her and walked

faster, as if my soul had flown ahead and I was catching up to it. Turning around the corner of the house, I raced down the slope of a trail with bushes flapping my legs. I didn't stop till I reached the bottom of the slope and got stuck in a muddy puddle.

Mother approached me and just gave me a look. And in her tender look, I saw understanding, which made me feel irritated rather than appreciated. I pulled my shoes out from the puddle with my back turned against her.

“Wash the shoes yourself! You have but one pair.” With these words, Mother left me behind. What a good mother. She didn't bother me. She knew it took time for a child to restore balance and strength after the experience of events as big as this.



The Red Dragon

Donna Besel

Ben hunched along the street to the library. Although it was only the first week in May, the spring sun overheated his cheeks and forehead. It made him sweat but he did not remove his nylon jacket. As he walked, passing people greeted him. None of them bothered to engage in conversations any longer than a few words.

He had five dollars in his pocket, enough for a coffee and a bagel, and he had made sure to pick up a few books before he entered Flynn's Diner. Every day, no matter what the weather forecast predicted, he visited this twenty-six-seat bar and grill to listen to Biscuit Lake gossip. Holding a paperback made him feel less conspicuous and alone. He rarely had enough money for full meals. Whenever he ordered a plate of French fries and gravy, Gabby, the burly cook, told him he was getting fat.

In truth, he was the opposite of fat.

Katie, the owner, sometimes gave him hardened chicken wings and potato wedges, pizza slices topped with pepperoni and mushrooms, and other leftovers from the previous night's bar food. Ben wolfed them down and thanked her in his quiet stutter.

This afternoon, he went into the diner and sat at a window table overlooking

the Greenwood River. He cracked open the chewed-up paperback on the top of his pile of novels from the library and nodded at the local reporter, Adam Brewster. This younger man glanced up and nodded but kept clacking on his laptop. Adam and Ben were the only customers. The last of the lunch crowd had left an hour ago and the school kids hadn't arrived for afternoon calories. Although it was almost two-thirty, the smell of fried hamburgers, chicken, and potatoes still hung in the air.

By the time Katie wiped her soapy hands, grabbed a carafe of coffee, and came over to take his order, Ben had fallen deep into *The Life of Pi*.

“Hey, Ben. What do you need today?”

His body twitched in surprise but he answered in a steady voice. “I need many things but I will order coffee and a bagel. Katie, you must be working hard. You look exhausted.”

“Yeah, the pub crowd kept me hopping last night. Jam or cream cheese?”

Katie poured coffee into the cup at Ben's table, glanced at Adam, and pointed at the younger man with her chin.

“Well, at least someone notices me. I can't get two words out of Mr. Lonely over there.”

“I am sure he is busy.”

“Yeah, right - downloading dirty movies and updating his social status.”

Ben blushed and ducked his head.

“I heard that.” Adam peered over the top of his laptop. “For your information, Katie, I’m working on an article for next week’s newspaper.”

“I can picture the headlines: Sexy Times on River Road, Shocking Scandals in Biscuit Lake.”

She flicked her wash cloth in his direction, grabbed a dishpan of dirty dishes, and loped back into the kitchen. Then she thumped the swinging door open with her left hip.

“Katie, you don’t really know about ...”

The clatter of pots and whoosh of range fans drowned out the rest of his sentence.

After a long slurp of coffee, Ben raised the book so Adam could see the cover.

“Have you ever read this?”

Adam looked up and then squinted at his screen. “Yeah, a while ago.”

Ben nodded. “I can picture the tiger, crouched in bottom of the boat. I read in a magazine that Martel sent lists of enlightening books to read to our former prime minister. Mr. Harper ignored him.”

He held his fingers in front of his mouth and sucked in a long breath, like he had a cigarette locked in between his index and middle fingers. “I admire someone who can tell a story. Have you ever tried to write fiction, Adam?”

It was Adam’s turn to twitch in his chair. He stared at Ben for a few seconds, as if he were a catch-and-release pickerel he had to weigh before he tossed it back into

the wide river flowing past the window. He snapped his laptop closed.

“Yeah, I took a couple of creative writing classes at university.”

Ben said, “I did too. How did you like them?”

“I never felt inspired enough, or old enough. Nothing I wrote seemed interesting. So I switched to journalism. I thought I wouldn’t need to use my imagination. But now people supply me with lots of crazy stories to write about.”

Ben sighed again, a long drawn-out sound like a tired horse. “Was it Flannery O’Connor who said that anyone who survives childhood has enough material for a lifetime? I think she was telling the truth.”

Their conversation halted when Katie returned with the bagel.

Ben had not eaten all day. He wondered if she might notice his stomach rumbling. He thanked her and took a huge bite. As he chewed, he savoured the gobs of cream-cheese- slathered dough tumbling around in his mouth. He drank a small slurp of steaming coffee to wash it down.

Adam watched Katie’s backside as she hurried to the kitchen and then looked at Ben, as if seeing him for the first time. He had met him the day he moved to Biscuit Lake, in this restaurant, at these same tables. Katie had introduced them.

Adam sipped his coffee and pondered the O’Connor quote. He came into Flynn’s Diner to eat once or twice a week but Ben’s quiet presence hadn’t made much impact. Previously, Adam had seen Ben as a middle-aged man, short and slim,

and his Asian features stood out in a community filled with people descended from French, Ukrainian, Scottish, Métis, or Indigenous backgrounds. He had also noticed that Ben wore long pants and a jacket all the time.

Today, Adam became aware of Ben's slender hands and long fingernails, the untrimmed hair, streaked with gray, winding around his larger-than-usual ears, the long scar underneath the left side of his jaw, the random whiskers sprouting around his mouth. Even Ben's breathing caught his attention: the accented struggle, in and out, the long and forced movement, like a small bellows.

Then Adam noticed the pile of novels on the table. "You must like reading."

Ben grinned and let out a snort of amusement. "Yes, I do. It passes the time, even though it would pass anyway."

He wiped his mouth with a paper napkin, as if to erase his joke.

Awakened from his computer trance and blur of self-focus, Adam admitted to himself how little attention he had paid to the man sitting by the window. But now his interest was piqued; he wanted to know more.

They shared certain traits. Both lived alone in a town filled with couples and families. They were outsiders, albeit for different reasons. Adam knew neither one of them could ever claim Biscuit Lake as home.

He continued to sip his coffee and gaze at Ben in bland and open assessment; the small man could have been a show horse or a child on a performing on a stage.

He said, “How old are you?”

“I am forty-nine.”

Adam pointed his thumb at his chest. “I’m twenty-six. Have you lived here all your life?”

“Yes, since I was three. We came from China.”

“Do you speak Chinese?”

“Mandarin.”

“Interesting. Why did your family come to Biscuit Lake?”

“My parents did not like always looking over their shoulders to see who was watching. They owned a restaurant in Tuen Mun, a middle class section of Hong Kong. But property prices were sky-rocketing. It was hard to pay all their expenses. They wanted a better life for their children. They looked at many places in Canada but real estate in Northeastern Manitoba was cheaper. And there are no other Chinese restaurants in Biscuit Lake. Not like in the big city, where there are dozens. The nearest one is in Easton and not many want to drive that far.”

Adam nodded, but did not speak.

Ben continued “As you know, the economy is suffering here, with all the mines and paper mills closing. It helps one’s chances at getting approved for immigration if you promise to run a business or take a job in more isolated and disadvantaged region.”

Adam nodded. He had also ended up in Biscuit Lake for similar economic reasons; he had couldn't get a permanent position in a city newspaper.

Ben took a long breath. "We owned the Red Dragon Restaurant on Dogwood Street. My brothers, Jack and Thomas, worked there until my parents retired. Now both parents are dead; my father had a heart attack long ago and my mother died from cancer just last year. My brothers live in the city. Jack has a wife, Shirley, and two kids, and runs a real estate business. Tom is an accountant at Summit Motors. He is divorced and has one son. The kids are smart; they all go to university."

Ben's long fingers shielded his lips. It looked like he needed to hold in his breaths, or his words.

"Is the family who run the Red Dragon related to you?"

"No, they came here from the city only three years ago. And they arrived in Canada just a couple of years before that. Like my parents, they left China for similar reasons. I did not know them before they arrived here. They also speak Mandarin; they had to learn their English here."

"Do you chat with them? About ..."

Adam stopped when he realized he had no idea what Ben might say to anyone. During his work days at the local newspaper, Adam had seen Ben at random times and places, eating in restaurants, walking the streets, sitting in the library - always alone.

He regretted that their present conversation had almost taken on the tone of an interview, an occupational hazard in his line of work. He didn't want to grill Ben or make him worry about an unflattering portrayal in the Biscuit Lake News. He held up his right arm in an expansive, welcoming gesture.

“Come and eat with me. We can talk.”

Ben's eyes darted from side-to-side for a few seconds. He watched a float plane drop out of the bright blue sky to land on the river. Then his eyelids drooped, almost closed, and he inhaled from far down in his chest, as if preparing his lungs for a dive off the town dock.

“Yes. I will eat with you. I can bring my mug and plate over to your table. But I will not stay long. I need to go back to my apartment and wash my kitchen floor.”

Adam waited until Ben settled. “Where is your apartment?”

“Above the Red Dragon. My family still owns the building. It is my home and I never left it.” Ben inhaled another long breath. “We also rent small living quarters to the family who run the restaurant.”

“I live on River Road, in Larry Crow's log cabin.”

“Yes, I know.”

“What else do you know?”

“You are educated. You write well, better than any reporter we've ever had in Biscuit Lake.”

“Thanks. You said you took creative writing classes. Which university did you go to?”

“University of Winnipeg. I planned to study law after I got an Honours Degree in English. My parents were proud. They did not like me living so far from home but they had sacrificed so much to get to Canada. They wanted me to get a good education. I am the oldest child in my family. I was the first one, out of all my cousins, to go to university.”

“Congratulations.”

“It did not work out.”

“No?”

“I had to quit after Christmas in my second year.”

Adam sipped his coffee again, furrowed his brow into what he hoped was a sympathetic expression.

“Money problems?”

Ben sucked in another breath with a sound like he had swallowed a long noodle. Then he chewed for a minute on his bagel.

“Mental health problems. At the time, the doctors called it a “nervous breakdown” although, on the outside, nothing looked broken. I slept most of the time and stopped going to classes. I did not write exams. I did not tell anyone, not even my parents. They did not know what was happening to me.”

“Maybe they didn’t want to know.”

“Yes, you are right. A fatal car accident would have been easier for them to bear. From childhood, we are taught to work hard and keep silent about suffering. As the Chinese saying goes – we like to keep our skeletons locked in the cupboard. They wanted to save face. They had boasted about my academic prowess to relatives in China and they refused to admit my mental health problem.”

“Ouch. Hard to take.”

“During Christmas break, I came home, hoping to rest and recover enough to get back at my studies. But I was already far behind. On the Saturday night before I was supposed to go back to Winnipeg, I sat on the snowy steps at the back of the Red Dragon and cut my throat with a broken beer bottle. I could have bled to death in the alley. My brother Jack came home from his ten o’clock hockey game, found me, and took me to the hospital. The doctors stitched up my neck. They told me the thirty below weather saved me. The extreme cold slowed my blood. I lost my voice for a while. I had damaged my vocal chords. I still have trouble talking and breathing. My parents left Biscuit Lake after Jack rescued me. My brothers followed them to the city. I stayed here to look after our rental property. I could not find other suitable work. Every job, even simple ones like stocking shelves in the Big Bin grocery store, made me anxious.”

Adam stared at Ben for about fifteen seconds. He dropped his gaze when he saw lines of wetness trickling down Ben’s cheeks.

“I’m sorry. You don’t have to tell me about all this.”

“I know. Suicide is hard to talk about, but it is also hard to listen to someone talk about it. I do not hide my attempt at suicide even though some cringe and turn away.”

Adam fought to keep his face still and impassive, like the stone carving of the Inuit hunter in the window of the Biscuit Lake News. But the skin below his left eyebrow twitched and perspiration gathered under his lip. He just wanted to finish his eggs and bacon and toast, and walk across the street to his office and immerse himself in his job.

He thought, *why do people tell me this shit? I never asked him to spill his gut-wrenching story.*

Adam took a swig of coffee and banged the mug on the table. He lifted his napkin as if to wipe his lips, snuck a glance at his watch, and then decided not to hide his decision to check the time. But he did not leave. He watched Ben chewing his last bite of bagel, sucking back another heavy gasp of air, and talking about his unemployable status.

Ben noticed Adam’s impatience. He kept chatting even though his breathing jerked along in asthmatic bursts and a halting stutter slowed his speech. Adam continued to watch Ben’s mouth and strained to understand the dragged-out words.

Then Katie appeared from the kitchen to ask if they needed more coffee.

Before Adam had a chance to answer, she said, “What the hell are you doing to my friend here?”

“We were just talking.”

Ben wiped the edge of his eyelids with his napkin. “I told him my problems.”

Katie poured coffee from high above Adam’s cup. It was a trick she used to impress, or intimidate, her customers. “And is he going to write an article about them?”

Adam’s cheeks reddened. “No.”

“Well, you *could* write about suicide as a disturbing trend in this backwoods health district. Did you know we have the highest rate in the province?”

Katie’s anger had loosened her Irish accent - most of the time Adam didn’t notice it.

“No.”

“Well, we do. Three years ago, my former husband drove into an oak tree near the Riverdale Bridge. He was drunk, but I’ve seen him much worse and still driving. He didn’t have to hit that tree. He’d dodged it hundreds of times.”

Ben nodded.

Katie stared hard at Adam, as if challenging him. “And last summer, those four old men dropped into the river. Two fell off their boats and two fell off their docks.

One guy even tied himself to the dock so his family could find him. None of them

bothered to swim or wear their life jackets. All within six weeks of each other.”

Adam picked up his last piece of bacon, dipped it in ketchup, and gnawed it. “The police told me they were accidents.”

Katie thumped the carafe on the table. “For the love of Jesus. Can you remember how many people have drowned since you arrived here?”

“Umm ... now that I think about it, none. A couple of overturned boats, no fatalities.”

“Doesn’t it seem odd? Four sickly old guys? All falling into the water?”

Adam squinted at his bacon. His left eyelid twitched.

“How about a suicide pact? Plenty of folks deduced that, right away.”

“Well, now that you ...”

“If the city media had got a sniff of these multiple tragedies, they would have made headlines across the country. Are you are so gullible that you can be persuaded that such coincidences make sense? Are you scared to piss off the mucky-mucks and the chamber of commerce cheerleaders? Afraid to dig at the dirt around here? Or just too timid to print it?”

Katie’s voice had started out loud and piercing but broke on her final question.

Adam swallowed his mushy bacon. His cheeks felt scorched, and his face turned a darker red than when he had first started his conversation with Ben. He stared at the smaller man. He thought about his ex-girlfriend Valerie, and remembered a similar

burn when she told him she was three months pregnant and would not need him to help raise their baby.

Ben smiled but his jaw looked off-kilter, as if pushed out of shape by tension.

“Please, Katie. He tries. It is hard to please everyone.”

“And what is he good at? Articles on three-legged dogs and lost kittens? Photos of donations with giant cheques? Editorials about new playground slides?”

Adam pushed his plate aside, stood up, and turned away from Ben. He jammed his hand into his jeans’ pocket, yanked out his wallet, tore at the Velcro, and dropped two five-dollar bills on the scuffed tabletop. Katie swung her palm across the wood, to sweep up the money. For a second, it looked as if she might slap Adam; Ben’s eyes widened in alarm.

But Adam was quick, already headed out the door. He slammed it hard. With a sharp crack, the wooden door collided against the wooden frame. The rolled-up blinds clattered.

....

The next night, around seven o’clock, Adam called Ben.

This happened after he had paced for a half an hour and had attempted to watch television and work on his computer. He couldn’t pinpoint his exact motivation but he felt isolated in his cabin, and agitated. He wanted to defend himself from Katie’s accusations, finish the conversation, apologize for walking out, or gather more in-

depth insights into Biscuit Lake's close-knit inner workings from this muted witness who had spent his life in the margins. Aching to tamp down his embarrassment, he had swallowed three shots of Scotch.

After four rings, Ben picked up.

"Hey, buddy." Adam hesitated. This was his first faux-pas. Ben was not his buddy. With feigned casualness, he blurted out his question.

"What are you doin' tonight?"

He heard the now-familiar long intake of air.

"I'm sorry. I did not catch the name." Ben sounded even more precise and guarded on the phone than he did in person.

"Whoops. I forgot." Adam giggled at his own stupidity. "It's me, Adam. I wanted to say sorry for slamming out of Katie's diner like that."

"Pardon?"

"You know. Yesterday. I stomped off in a snit. After she tore into me - for not being a more hard-shitting reporter."

Ben didn't laugh or perhaps he didn't notice Adam's pun. He said, "She can be blunt. She has had to endure much."

"I know. But I felt like a six-year-old, getting scolded by a teacher."

"I could see you were upset."

“Why don’t you come over?” Adam surprised himself with this invitation, but he wanted company. “It’s Friday night. I want to celebrate with someone, for making it through another work week.”

Shit, the second faux-pas. He had forgotten Ben’s admitted unemployable status.

“I do not have a car. I stopped driving after my breakdown. I did not bother to renew my license.”

Another foot in the mouth. And a long pause, while a series of images jogged through Adam’s brain. He had seen Ben walking at all times of the year. He hadn’t figured it out.

“That’s right. You hike around town all the time, winter and summer. I just thought that since you’re slim and trim, you must do it for fitness.”

Ben inhaled, long and loud.

Adam said, “You know. Healthy lifestyle. Watch what you eat. Get lots of exercise.”

“I am sorry I mislead you. I am frail, sickened in both mind and body for a long time. I live on a limited budget. I walk because I do not have a license or a car. My brothers drive out from Winnipeg to pick me up when I need something I cannot get or do in Biscuit Lake. Or I catch the bus to the city.”

“Oh.” Adam swallowed a long burn of scotch.

He grimaced and then glanced around at the dark fir flooring, faded woven red

and blue rug, and dented table and chairs placed around the edges of his kitchen table. Through the large bay window, he could see the flat surface of the Greenwood River, swollen and viscous in gathering twilight. Spruce trees towered around the boundaries of his rented property, like an over-sized, opaque green wall. *Would the silence and solitude of this cabin ever feel like home?* He longed for sirens, screeching cars, the thrum of traffic, and angry shouts from the street.

“Hey, I know what. I’ll come and get you.”

If he could only persuade Ben to visit, he might learn how to unlock the secrets of this town’s rigid etiquette, learn how to decipher the unspoken code of deference and denial. Katie was right. He had forgotten how to act like a trained journalist. Lulled into compliance by smiling faces and earnest tales, content to report fluff, and now he feared he’d never find his way back. *I cannot float along any longer. I must return to the core of my integrity; I must fight this tide of banality. I am a professional.*

“You sound drunk,” said Ben. “It is not wise for you to drive. You could not do your job if you lost your license. That happened to my neighbour, Steve Wilco. He is an apprentice plumber. He will have to apply for a limited driving permit for work.”

“Yeah, I saw that in the weekly police report.”

Adam continued in a baritone, mock-officious voice. “During a midnight traffic stop, police noted the driver to be showing signs of impairment. Driver arrested and charged with DUI and faulty taillights.” His voice went back to normal. “What was Steve thinking?”

“He believed he could get away with it, just as you are thinking right now.”

Adam resented Ben’s lecturing tone - too similar to Katie’s rebuke. But he knew he could not afford to lose his license. He decided to drop it. “Well, maybe another time.”

What is wrong with me? I’ve lived in this dump for six months and I still don’t know anyone well enough to invite them to come to my cabin and drink beer: no neighbours, no work mates, no woman of appropriate age or marital status. Not even the loneliest guy in town.

“Perhaps we arrange that. But, just so you know, I do not go out much at night.”

Ben pulled in his breath and then asked, “Did you know Katie’s dog had puppies?”

“No, I didn’t even know she had one.”

Given such an obvious change of topic, Adam accepted that Ben had endured enough of his slurred pleading. “How old are they?”

“I do not know exactly but she said they are ready to leave their mother.”

“So, about eight to ten weeks. They must be super cute. My mother got a cocker spaniel pup when I was eight years old. She adored that little mutt but he never stopped growling at me. For months, whenever I came near her, he’d snarl. After the dog bit my dad’s wrist when he tried to move the food bowl, the old man insisted she get rid of him. That was his ultimatum. Big cocker or big cock.”

Adam snorted at his pun, but halted when he noticed Ben had ignored it again

and had not laughed. “In retrospect, she might have regretted her choice. He divorced her three years later.”

Ben sighed in sympathy. “Katie said I can have a male pup. She will not charge me and she will help me train it.”

“Oh, that’s nice.” Adam started to think about his parent’s long and bitter divorce. He could not summon any enthusiasm for puppies. Or any interest in continuing this conversation.

“Well, I’ve got to go. Maybe I’ll catch the last of the hockey game. Bye now.”

He had lied; he did not like violence and he did not care the slightest about the playoffs.

Another reason I have no friends. Everyone in Biscuit Lake is hockey-obsessed.

By midnight, he had drained the bottle of scotch. He fell asleep on his couch and awoke the next morning with red eyes, dry mouth, upset stomach, and throbbing head. For the rest of the weekend, he did not leave his cabin, except for a short run along the block road and a half-hour of sitting on his dock, staring at the rising river. It surged past, with clumps of random logs and branches swept along by the growing current. He did not see any of his neighbours walking past and no one called or visited. He worked on an article for the upcoming week’s newspaper, glad for the lack of interruptions, and determined to look online for a job closer to Winnipeg, right after he finished the articles. He omitted stories about anyone’s pets.

Adam did not see Ben until a cool morning in the third week of May.

A north wind blew strong and hard down the Greenwood River. It had rained almost every day for two weeks. Adam parked his Toyota Corolla at the Biscuit Lake News office and looked across the wide expanse of water and muttered. A ceiling of dark slate-grey clouds hung, heavy and threatening, in all directions. He got out of his car and hurried from the parking lot to the front door, but he did not make it; the sky released its sullen load, drilling into his denim jacket and stinging his cheeks.

While he stood by the front door and fumbled with wet keys in wet fingers, he watched Ben shuffle around the nearest corner, on Pine Street, opposite the town dock. In an over-sized rain poncho, with his skinny legs and arms, Ben looked like a large yellow beetle.

Underneath the left side of the billowing plastic, Adam spotted a small golden dog with a dark saddle-shaped patch on its back, huddled so tightly against Ben's leg that he couldn't move without tripping. The pup lifted his legs one at a time, as if reluctant to walk on the wet cement. It shivered and whined. Ben turned around, picked it up, stuffed it under his poncho, and headed back in the direction of his apartment. Adam smiled at the idea of Ben raising a pup, and laughed out loud when he remembered how snarly his mother's beloved dog had turned out.

Over the next two weeks, Adam saw Ben out walking the puppy at least three times a day. One morning, in Flynn's diner, as Adam slurped at his scalding morning coffee and shoveled up scrambled eggs doused with ketchup, he looked out the

window.

Then he asked Katie, “Is Ben taking his dog for a walk? Or is the dog taking Ben?”

Katie had been stand-offish for a couple of weeks and then she seemed to forget her outburst. Adam suspected she often chose to overlook the stupidity of her customers, in order to survive as a business owner.

She sprayed a thin layer of vinegar over the table, then wiped it off with a large cloth, and smiled at the sight of Ben with his dog straining hard against its blue leash, stretching its nose after ground smell, trying to drag the small man along the sidewalk. “It’s hard to tell. That pup has some definite ideas about where he wants to go.”

“What kind of dog is it?”

“A Yorkshire terrier.”

“Does it like pudding?”

“Ha! So original.”

“And what’s its name? Old Puller?”

“You are such a twit. I mean wit. His name is Rufus.”

Adam chuckled. “And Ben takes it for a walk, several times a day, in spite of crappy weather. He must love that dog. Maybe I should write a front page article.”

“Cynic. Haven’t you ever loved a dog? Or anything else, for that matter?”

Adam thought of his mother's spaniel, and grinned. Then he thought about the son he never knew much about and tears formed along the edges of his eyes. He ducked his head and rubbed at them, hoping Katie wouldn't notice, swallowed a large mouthful of coffee, and wagged his cup at her.

“What does person have to do to get a refill? I'm so parched I could die in this little red booth and slide under the table. And you wouldn't discover my corpse until I started to stink up the place.”

“As if no one notices you.”

Katie grabbed his cup and poured, but turned away from his table, so she could keep watching Ben. Rufus had stopped pulling and was now squatted on the grass boulevard, shuddering as he squeezed out a tiny feces sausage. Ben waited, with a calm expression, white plastic grocery bag clutched in his left hand. When Rufus finished, Ben clapped his hands and then scooped up the small pile of waste.

Katie swung Adam's full cup back to his table.

He smirked up at her. “Yeah, right.”

“You stick out like a bandaged thumb.”

“Who? Me?”

“You have stud earrings, Blundstone boots, hipster jeans and tattoos. Everyone knows you.”

“What can I say? I'm a city boy.”

“And why do you change your headshot at the top of the editorial page every second week?”

“What?”

“Since I met you, you’ve had hockey mullet, shaved head, and buzz cut. Sideburns, full beard, clean shaven. And now three-day stubble. You remind me of a big walleye thrown down in the bottom of a boat. Flip flop, flip flop.”

Katie put down her carafe and waved her hand back and forth in front of her.

“Why, Katie, I never suspected. Are interested in me?”

“Don’t flatter yourself. Every day, when you drop by for a meal, my kitchen staff wants to rush out and see what you’ve done to your hair.”

“Surely you jest.”

Katie picked up the carafe and opened her mouth to reply but the roar of a passing vehicle and a screech of tires halted her. She and Adam looked out the street-side windows. They saw that a Ford Ranger pickup, cherry red, with four wheel drive and jacked-up body had stopped, opposite the restaurant. Long black skid marks were etched along the street behind its tires and a long-haired teenager sat in the driver’s seat, gripping the steering wheel, wide-eyed and immobilized. From their perspective in the diner, it looked as if the passenger side of the truck had run over a skinny adolescent, dressed in long dark pants and tan windbreaker.

“That looks like Ben!” Katie slammed her coffee pot on Adam’s table. He jumped to his feet and followed her. They scrambled out the door.

Ben was not caught under the truck but his terrier’s body was spread out behind its rear wheels. From what they could see, it looked as if the young driver had swerved but not far enough, and the back wheels had run over Rufus. His hind legs were splayed wide apart, and his hind quarters looked like a giant boot had stomped on them.

Ben sprawled face down, flat on the ground beside the dog, looking as if the same giant boot had stomped on him. He moaned and sobbed into the pavement; his face hidden from Adam and Katie. His thin arms were wrapped around his head. Rufus growled and writhed and squeaked at Ben, without strength or malice.

Katie knelt beside him. “Don’t move. Can you tell us if you’re hurt?”

Adam squatted by Katie, searching for signs of injury, trembling at the sounds coming from Ben. He had never heard cries of such pure unadulterated pain. He wanted to scoop up the dog and run with it back to his office but feared some parts might drop out if he lifted it. For the next few minutes, while he watched the dog twisting and yelping, Katie somehow convinced Ben to stop wailing and answer her.

After the howls, his voice sounded weak, clogged, as if he might faint. Or vomit. “Rufus is hurt. The truck did not hit me.”

“Good. But don’t turn over unless you feel like it. We’ll take care of him.”

“Yes, please.” Ben rolled over and stared up at them. His eyes could not focus, most of the blood had drained from his face, and his inhalations, usually so long and laboured, now came in quick pants. Katie took hold of his wrist to check his pulse. Although Adam still could not see any signs that Ben might have had contact with the truck, it looked like he was going into shock.

Katie turned to Adam. “Give me your jacket. His skin feels clammy, like a block of wet ice.”

He tore off his fleece and handed it to her. She wrapped it around Ben’s upper body.

“Now call the ambulance.”

Right after Adam dialed 911, the blonde teenager appeared beside them, staggering around on the sidewalk, mumbling about how his parents would kill him, using “Fuck” every second word.

Adam glanced up at the boy. He remembered his name, Jay Prentice, from an interview he did last winter. The boy was the captain of the Biscuit Lake Bears, the local senior hockey team. They had won a tournament in the much bigger community of Easton, an event so unusual

it earned the hockey players a two week flurry of public adulation. Jay looked almost as white as Ben. When he finally noticed the squashed dog, his legs buckled, and he slumped against the bumper of his small truck. Then he leaned over Katie’s shoulder and hovered so unsteadily over her that Adam told him to sit down on the grass

boulevard.

When Ben turned his head and vomited on the pavement, Jay turned his head and vomited on the grass. Still squatted beside Katie, Adam smelled the stench of half-digested food, and choked back his own sudden surge of bile. He looked over and noted how the teenager's puke did not resemble Ben's in colour or volume. It was a stew of mushroom, green peppers, pepperoni, floating in a foamy, yellow-brown broth. Ben's vomit looked like a thin spurt of mango juice.

Then Jay started repeating "I didn't mean to do it," gasping, sobbing, mashing into his fists into his face, and Adam longed to stand up and punch him. From the looks and smell of the pizza puke, Jay had spent most of the previous night drinking beer and eating take-out from the twenty-four drive-through window at Chicken Chest.

Although Adam did not want to look at the dog again, he glanced around the back tire and noticed that Rufus had stopped writhing and whimpering and now lay still, jaws silently opening and closing, as if chewing a cud. Trickle of blood from his mouth had formed a pool under the left side of his face; whiskers and facial tufts had clotted, sticky, stiff, dark red. A bone protruded from the dog's hip.

Adam stood up and snarled at Jay, "How old are you, fuckhead?"

Jay pulled his hands away from his face. "Sixteen. And I'm screwed. I just got my license. I'm still on probation."

"Is that why you're blubbering, you dumb piece of shit? Take a good look at this guy on the ground, waiting for an ambulance. And don't forget that dog over there."

Ben's eyes were now closed and he lay still and white on the pavement, in the same shape as his dog - no longer gasping or twitching. He looked like an anemic twelve-year-old, slender, ashen, peacefully sleeping, dwarfed by denim folds of Adam's jacket. Katie placed her hand on Ben's forehead and murmured, pleading with him to stay awake.

Out loud, she said, "Don't bother even talking to him. Little Jaybird is too young and too stupid and too sloshed. We need to call the cops. So he can be a jailbird."

Just as she croaked out the last word, ambulance sirens silenced her. Like a startled animal, Jay bounded up off the grass. His pale eyes widened and his jaw hung loose for a few seconds, revealing a full set of braces, new-looking and shiny in the rain-dulled light. Then he swiped at his nose with his fingers, spat on the ground, pivoted, and sprinted up Pine Street.

The cops didn't bother to chase him. Biscuit Lake's population of less than eight hundred people meant he couldn't hide for long, unless he left town. And his truck was still parked at the accident site. It wouldn't be long before at least four hundred people knew who ran over the dog. Already, about a dozen curious residents had started to wander up Pine Street, exiting houses and stores, slowly and but with intent, like pulpwood drifting on the river.

After the paramedics loaded Ben on the gurney, Katie offered to ride with him to the hospital. As she climbed up the rear steps, she turned and shouted at Adam.

"Close up my restaurant. Maria is the only one in the kitchen. Tell her to go

home. Flip over the “Closed” sign in the window and shut the door. Then see what the hell you can do about the dog.”

Adam did not want to deal with Rufus. He knew where the veterinary clinic was located; only last month he had written a story about the new animal doctor who had moved to town and set up a well-equipped, full-time practice. Up until then, people drove their wounded and sick pets to Hawk River, a distance of almost thirty kilometres.

He did not want to touch the dog.

....

A week later, the weather had warmed up enough that a dozen teenage boys, with sucker-belly-white skin glistening in the midday sun, dressed in cutoff jeans, jumped off the town dock into the Greenwood River, screaming with pleasure at the bone-shattering cold. Adam sat at his desk, looking out his office window, watching for Jay Prentice to join them.

But he knew that the boy wouldn't.

On Monday, when Adam showed up for breakfast at the diner, Katie had said, “I heard that little puke’s grandma drives him into town every morning. So he can finish grade eleven. His dad arranged for him to hide out at her place. This is her busy season. She runs a fishing camp on Cedar Lake, twenty kilometres north of town. I guess Jay’s old man wanted to get him out of sight. In case our local donut-eaters wake up and decide to do their job. That boy should have been charged and lost his

license.”

Then Katie stared at Adam. Hard and accusing, as if he might do something about it.

He just shrugged and turned his attention back to his scrambled eggs. But he could not stop thinking about Rufus.

That afternoon, he got an unexpected call.

“Hello, this Dr. Elaine Spence, from the vet clinic. Is this Adam Brewster?”

“Yes.”

“I believe you brought the Yorkie into the clinic. You said his owner was taken to the hospital in Hawk River after the dog was injured.”

“Yes, but the dog’s owner, is back home now. Hasn’t he called or visited you?”

After Adam said this, he remembered the vet clinic was located two kilometres outside of town, on the intersection of highways 15 and 22, where the vet had built small corrals and ramps to handle the few livestock people on the outskirts of Biscuit Lake kept in their back yards. Ben might not have felt well enough to walk that far but Adam could have offered to drive him out to see his dog.

“Yes, he phoned once to approve the treatment. He said to do whatever it takes to save Rufus. And ...”

“Yes?”

“And we did. Removed shattered bones, extracted broken teeth, set both hind legs. Treated for concussion, stitched all open wounds.”

“Yes, I understand. So why are you calling me?”

“The dog got a bad infection. Due to trauma and loss of blood, and his small size, we weren’t able to do much more for him.”

Adam sighed and waited, tapping his pen against the edge of his laptop.

“I phoned Mr. Lee to get permission to euthanize the dog. He did not answer so I left a message for him to phone me. I wanted to let him know that dog was not going to survive.”

“And?”

“He hasn’t called back and it’s been three days now. I didn’t want to keep pestering him but Rufus is suffering. I can’t, in good conscience, keep him alive much ...”

When Adam heard the word “alive,” something snapped into place inside his chest, hard and wrenching. For moment, he could not hear what the rest of what the vet said, and believed he could not breathe.

Then he shouted, “Ah, shit, he wouldn’t do that!” and hung up.

....

On the second Saturday in June, Adam and Katie met Ben’s brothers, Jack and Tom, on the town dock at ten o’clock in the morning. Jack’s wife, Shirley, was not there at first but five minutes later, she exited from the passenger seat of their Lexus

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SUV and walked down the hill to join them. After Jack introduced Katie and Adam, Shirley swatted at mosquitoes and walked around on the edges of the wide wooden deck to look down into the dark, green-tinted water.

“Are there lots of fish?” she asked, of no one in particular.

Adam resented her cheery attitude but answered anyway. “Yes, plenty. We have five fishing camps upriver from here. Two are fly-in and the other three are accessible by boat.”

Jack’s children, Grace and James, and Tom’s son, Graham, had gone for coffee at Flynn’s diner. After a few more minutes, the teenagers appeared, chatting quietly amongst themselves, and pointed at the planes landing and taking off along the Greenwood River. It had rained the night before. The early sun had burnt off the river mist, holding promise of a hotter and dryer day. The river lay flat and calm, but surged with muscular currents underneath its surface.

Ben’s neighbour, Steve the plumber, had borrowed a wide pontoon boat with a hundred and fifty horsepower Yamaha motor, large enough to carry all of them. He had offered to drive them upriver to Tamarack Island where Ben had instructed that his ashes be spread.

He had been there once, five years earlier when Steve had taken him on a day-long fishing expedition. In his suicide note, Ben had asked that his dog’s ashes be spread at the same time and place. Jack, the eldest brother, sat down on the front bench seat with the larger urn cradled in his arms while Tom sat beside him, holding

the smaller one. After everyone was loaded, Adam nodded at Steve and they started the long trip up the river, against the current. By noon, they were back at Flynn's Diner, eating chicken, salad, and mashed potatoes, prepared and served by Gabby, Katie's long-time chef and current boyfriend.

Adam had never seen the grouchy cook so attentive and thoughtful. No one spoke much during the meal.



Notes from China, A Writer's Baedeker

Sally Ito

Xiamen is a port city on China's southeast coast, across the strait from Taiwan. It encompasses two main islands and a region on the mainland. Formerly known as Amoy, it was a British-run treaty port from 1842 to 1912. Many Europeans and Japanese lived on Gulangyu, today a vehicle-free island with beaches and meandering streets lined with old colonial villas.

A Story: *The Piano Museum*

There was at the edge of a prosperous harbor city, an island inhabited by rich merchants who made their profits in overseas trade. The island had beautiful colonial style residences with garden estates filled with statuary and gazeboes, servants' quarters and stable houses.

Like most rich people, the families of these residences were entranced by the arts, most notably, music. Each house had a grand piano of the sort most fashionable for the era. The pianos were frequently played for entertainment at parties.

The rich are not evil, but enjoy the pleasures of life, and music is a pleasure. And music can be enjoyed by all. It is not poverty and deprivation that create misery in the poor. Rather, it is envy of, and greed for, what the rich possess. These feelings of misery in the poor, after a time, become the wellsprings of an anger that leads to

revolution, and so it was, the poor and those rich who understood the nature of the poor's envy and greed, rebelled against the rich, and changed their society.

Now, the word 'revolution' can also mean the turning of a circle.

Because of the revolution, the rich fled the island and a new class of worker began to govern the affairs of the people. They took over the homes of the rich. Now, the revolutionaries were not averse to the playing of music. Indeed, some of them had grown up in such homes and knew of the value of the pianos, but who among them could play? So, the pianos were gathered together and stored into a great building that was an armory for the revolution, and there, they lay dormant for many years.

Almost a generation passed before the pianos were discovered. Because they were of such beauty and grandeur, the children of the revolutionaries, now grown and raised on the principles of their revolutionary forefathers, saw their value as objects of craftsmanship created by the best of the skilled labor of their kind, the worker.

Now the envy and greed of this generation of the revolutionary class was of a worshipful and nostalgic kind so they created a museum for the piano which was open for visiting everyday and for which you had to purchase a ticket to see what was once owned and played by the rich and powerful for their amusement and entertainment.

But the pianos in this museum are silent. For music itself is not a possession, but a bidding of the time by those whose craft is invisible -- those weavers of the air whose ephemeral thread of sound makes eternal the tapestry of music.

Yangsuo, a county and resort town in southern China's Guangxi region, is known for its dramatic karst mountain landscape and outdoor recreation.

A Conversation: *Tourist Talk*

- What do you think it would cost me to buy some of that fruit?
- Oh, that fruit is for tourists.
- I *am* a tourist.
- It will be overpriced. You can get it at the supermarket.
- But this one looks ripe and they are selling it right in front of me. I can pay for such fruit. Is this the season for this fruit?
- Yes. This is the season for this fruit.
- So, I will not be able to buy it ever again if I don't come back here again at the same time of year.
- True.
- Who knows when I will be in this place again, if ever, before I die?
- Yes, I see. Then buy the fruit, even if it is overpriced and can be gotten at a supermarket for much less. Buy the fruit. Eat it now while you are here. Enjoy it and be satisfied.

Zhaoqing is a prefectural city in Guangdong Province, China. The prefectural seat is

a fairly flat area, but thickly forested mountains lie just outside its limits. Formerly one of the most important cities in southern China, Zhaoqing lost importance during the Qing and is now primarily known for tourism and as a provincial "college town." It is also a growing manufacturing center.

Personal Reflection: *Four Seas, brother sister, you me.*

The city tourism officials of Zhaoqing are doing their best by inviting us foreign writers to experience the city's natural beauty and cultural splendor by exposing us to their artists, their cuisine, and their music. The city is hoping its new class of citizen entrepreneurs – designers, artisans, performers -- can entice visitors. On this lakeside strip of hotels, coffee shops, galleries and restaurants where we are in residence, I feel their charm offensive working.

But twice during our visit, a writer and a folksinger, have expressed nostalgia for the rural, bucolic past of their childhood neighborhoods or grandparents' villages. These have all but disappeared in the wake of China's massive development and expansion of its cities and industries. Zhaoqing, I discover later, is a city built on the manufacturing of hardware for stores like Canadian Tire and Home Depot. The city's artists – those children of the middle class who are well-educated and cosmopolitan, are trying their best to recover a past that is half fantasy and reality; they long for a world that is almost gone and that was also perhaps cruder than they can imagine.

I grew up in Edmonton. My earliest memories of the city are of the quiet suburban Lynwood neighborhood in west Edmonton where I first went to school. My early school years were traumatic because I didn't speak English. My mother tongue

was Japanese. But as children do, I quickly learned the new language, so quickly in fact, that when some other children in our neighborhood, sang the ditty “Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees, look at these!” to me, I happily recited it back to my mother. Horrified, she told me that they were not singing this rhyme *to* me, but *at* me. Thus was my initiation into the English language in the Edmonton of the early seventies.

That kind of name-calling racism quickly disappeared, and not long after, our family moved away from Edmonton, first to Hay River in the northwest Territories, and then back to Alberta to settle in Sherwood Park. Sherwood Park was a satellite community of Edmonton, so our family often traveled into Edmonton to shop or visit friends. One weekly activity that began in my junior high school years was driving to Edmonton on Friday after school to attend the Metro Edmonton Japanese Community School that was started in 1977. The school ran for three hours on Friday nights, staffed by volunteers dedicated to transmitting the language to their children. For almost a decade, my parents drove my siblings and I to Edmonton every Friday night to attend that school.

Frankly, I hated Japanese school. I felt that my parents were forcing me to go. Learning Japanese was tedious; so much was rote memorization, especially learning the *kanji*, or Chinese characters. The only joy in going to Japanese school was commiserating about it with my other Japanese Canadian classmates. But grudgingly, I *did* learn the written language there with enough facility to recognize the importance of *kanji* to represent concepts and ideas as ‘words’ in that language.

Flash forward to Zhaoqing, I am walking down the broad stone walkway along

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the lake when I see some men wielding calligraphy brushes made of sponge tips. They are writing characters using lake water on the flagstone pavement. I watch, mesmerized. One of the men hands me the brush. Hesitantly, I write my name, and who I am –*Nipponjin*. The old man looks at the writing and nods. Then he takes the brush and writes out. *Four Seas, brother sister, you me*. He looks at me, and I nod. Mutual recognition. The characters acknowledge our communion in language.

A Chinese translator tells me the man is 83 years old, the same age as my mother. Did she ever say that I'd be grateful someday for having been forced to go to language school in Edmonton? Probably, she did. However, I would never have expected a community language school in the northern most capital city in Canada to have borne fruit like this in a southern Chinese city millions of miles away.



Hakka Round House, Fujian Province

Jian Tang

Away from the Root

Qian Wu

If I have to make a list for three things that I hate most, one thing will surely be on the list—going back to “Lao Jia”, which literally means Old Home (Hometown in English) and usually refers to the place where our grandparents lived. I don’t think the word sounds very attractive to most of Chinese young generation, as it is almost a synonym for boring, underdeveloped and no Wi-Fi zone.

I felt out of place each time I went back to the village. There was nothing I could talk about with my grandmother. Our conversation usually came to its end right after some small talks.

“Grandma, how are things going with you?”

“Oh, just same as usual.”

A moment of silence.

“How’s your study? Don’t you have a lot of homework?”

“Quite a lot, but I can still handle it.”

Another moment of silence.

“That’s good, then.”

After that, Grandma would absorb herself into the TV series again, while I could simply stare at my cellphone. Every minute dragged through like an hour as I was nearly bored to death.

Going out for a walk would not make me feel better. Muddy road would mess up my shoes and the cloud of dust rose as some roaring motorbikes stifled me. What was even more stifling to me was the loneliness. I knew no one there, and I had no one to talk to. When my father was chatting with others, I couldn't even get a single word in. The awkwardness that I failed to figure out what to say when I met some relatives always haunted me. My life is not there.

On the contrary, my dad showed his elation even the night before we left for the village. He would wake me up very early in the morning as if he couldn't wait another minute, and he would drive an hour in a particularly high spirit, humming and whistling jubilantly, on his way to get to the village. There was a buoyant air with him all the time when he was back there, where he spent his childhood and adolescence.

Dad was born and grew up in the village. Even though he has succeeded in settling in a nearby town for a better living, there is always a bond between him, the small village, and people there. There is a community that consists of his parents, his aunts and uncles, his cousins and his classmates. He could call somebody's nickname with intimacy on the street; he could spend the whole afternoon dropping in on his friends; he could go fishing with his cousins on a sunny day. The village is imbued with his youth as well as his memories. His world is there and Dad keeps going back.

I also spent some time in the village with my grandparents before I was four years old, when I was not old enough to go to kindergarten. My parents were both too busy to take care of me, so they sent me to live with my grandparents. In 1990s, the industry of China was booming because of the economic reform. Young people left their villages and thronged into towns and cities, and my parents were among them. They managed to find two positions in a sugar refinery in town and began to establish their career and family from scratch. Both of my parents were put on a night shift and got totally drained at the end of a workday. What to do with their child? They made a decision that many parents at that time would make—to send their children to Old Home where the grandparents lived there. As soon as I was old enough for school, I was taken back to the town. I was too young to remember everything about my childhood spent with my grandparents there, and my memories about those years are simply blurring.

Dad once introduced a cousin to me, referring to him as “the old brother who caught fish in the brook with you, who stole bird’s eggs on the tree for you.” And I, who was totally lost, studied the quiet young man in front of me, trying my best to link his tanned rough face with the hazy outline in my memory. I failed to recall anything about him. By then he had married a girl from a neighbor village and they had had an adorable daughter. The coy little girl hiding behind her father cast a timid look toward me from time to time. No matter how her father coaxed her, she just wouldn’t call me aunt. For her, I was no more than a stranger. I was fading away from those people’s life as much as they were from my life. The whole process of alienation just

developed quietly, secretly and inevitably.

As I came to the town for primary school, a third-tier city for high school and Beijing for college, the village in my memory faded away. As always, I have to look forward. There seemed to be an invisible force that keeps pulling me away from the village. But Grandma was the only link that could bring me back to the village occasionally.

When I was in senior high school, Grandma was diagnosed with cancer. It was quite a strike for my dad when he realized his mother was dying at Old Home but his only daughter was walking away from the village. He needed to do something. Thus every week or every other week, whenever I was coming back home from school, he would take me in his car to the village to stay with Grandma even if I was obviously unwilling to do this. I seemed to feel it obligated to go back to Old Home, visit my grandmother until one night I thought about what would put an end to this unpleasant obligation.

That was a late night. We got a phone call that informed us Grandma was in a critical condition and Dad decided to drive back at once. On our way to the village, Dad was driving in a sullen silence. His eyes was glazing straight ahead, his jaw clenched in the dark. I didn't know what to say but looked out of the window, my mind wandering aimlessly. Some questions just popped in my mind:

What if Grandma died? Do we have to go back there for regular visits after Grandma passes away? I was shocked by my unintended disrespect to Grandma. How

could I have thought of this? Without thinking any further about my grandmother's death, I had my own answer. The answer was NO—I would not go there anymore. It was at that very moment that I truly felt my separation from the village. I realized that the bond between me and the village had been cut off long ago, and all efforts to repair it would be in vain.

Ironically, Grandma made it through that night, and I had to keep going back to the village only for visiting her in winter or summer vacation especially when she was growing weaker and weaker at Old Home.

One usual night of my sophomore year, I got a phone call from Dad.

“Your grandma has just gone.”

I gasped, lost my speech for quite a while.

Dad repeated that sentence, in a most vulnerable voice I had ever heard, “Your grandma has gone this afternoon.”

I managed to stutter a reply somehow, “What should I do, Dad?”

“Nothing,” I heard a trembling sigh on the phone, “There is nothing you can do. You don't have to come back. It's too far.”

“But I have to *do* something.”

“Just bow to the south then, saying goodbye to your grandma.” Dad said so at the end of the phone conversation.

I remember I put down the phone and I tried to located the south. As our tradition

to honor the death, I bowed to the south in my dormitory for three times towards that remote small village of Guangxi Province.

From then on, I have never returned to the village. The last imprint Grandma has left in my life seems to be the washing machine she just bought several months before she died. Dad took the brand new washing machine from Grandma's house to replace the old washing machine at our home which always vibrated madly during the washing. However, after Grandma's death, he goes back the village from time to time, but much less often. Even nowadays he still keeps going back there alone, either for a wedding or for a burial of some relatives that I know not. We did not talk about this issue for quite a long time. Only on one occasion, I broached this issue to him.

We were on the phone, prattling about some unimportant trivialities in life. There was one moment of silence when neither of us figured out what to say, and that question I have felt curious about for such a long time just slipped out of my mouth.

“Dad, why do you keep going back to the village?”

My dad floundered for a while and said, “Why? Why this question?”

“I am just being curious.”

“Well, because it's my home.”

I waited for a few seconds, conceiving that he had not finished his answer. But Dad did not go on.

That's his answer.

I was a little bit disappointed, “As simple as that?”

“As simple as that.”

“Then why do you keep driving me back there? My home is not there.”

“But that’s your root. I don’t want you to forget where you are from.”

Yes, that’s Dad’s root, that’s also my root because my ancestor settled since Qing Dynasty. Since then community of Wu has been established. But now, I am running away from my root as many people do today. We want to run away from the village because some of us view it as a burden and an obstacle to their progress to make an urban life. Sometimes, we feel the importance of the root especially when find lost in urban life. But we do not want to go back. Or to be exactly, we are not able to go back as we are both physically and psychologically alienated from the root.

It is like a pattern. The process of economic development is actually the process of running away from the root. Dad runs away from the village to the town, I run away from the town to the city. I could almost foresee the future: the unwelcome Old Home would probably never appeal to my children while they would be born in a big city. They don’t want to go back for visits and they don’t even care about it. It feels like we are all walking through a tunnel, from one’s Old Home hastening our way toward the distant brightness, to a promising future. But what will happen to one’s Old Home, to one’s root? Where is the future leading us? Is it in the right direction or the wrong? No answer.

At the end of my junior year, I had a cup of coffee with my uncle, one of the cousins of my dad. He went to a college in Beijing twenty years ago as the second place of the town in the College Entrance Examination. He has married a Beijing woman, they have had a son and a house in the central part of Beijing. He is like a legend, always being talked about by other family members with great respect—they call him “the Beijinger”.

When I first came to Beijing, he offered me two genuine suggestions, which was to learn Beijing dialect and to find a Beijing boyfriend. Most unfortunately, I have failed in both of his expectations. And now I needed his new advice, as I cannot make up my mind whether to stay in Beijing or go back to Guangxi Province after graduation.

“Of course in Beijing,” my uncle answered without any hesitation, “You’ve made such an effort to get out of that small town. Now you are in Beijing, how can you go back there?”

He sucked his American coffee, frowned. Then he beckoned to the waiter and asked for some ice, with a distinguishing Beijing accent. To speak like a Beijinger is not easy for southerners as it is difficult for us to pronounce the nasal sounds or to imitate the unique rising tone of Beijing dialect. But Uncle has done quite well. Now no one could tell that he is a southerner from his speech. Unlike my dad, Uncle is more determined. Determined enough to get rid of his southern accent, determined enough to run away from the root without harking back to it.

I once asked my dad what he thought of Uncle's choice.

“There is no right or wrong, good or bad.” Dad said, “One just makes his own choice. That's it.”

Dad has made his own choice, Uncle has made his. I have made mine.

At the end of that meeting I asked my uncle casually, “Uncle, have you ever thought about going back? I mean, perhaps when you are old.”

“Where else can I go back?” he quickly cast me a bewildered look, with eyes opening wide as if what I had just asked was something incomprehensible.

“Beijing is my home!”

He said so, dumping the ice into his coffee and stirring it with the little spoon. Those transparent squares whirled in the coffee for a while until they completely melted and disappeared in that brown liquid.



View of Qiong Long San Dao, Jiangsu Province

Jian Tang

Little brother

Jianmei Li

“*Jie*,” I heard Xinyu called me from the phone. *Jie* means sister in Chinese. Even Xinyu and I are cousins, she calls me *Jie*.

“His...and my birthday party will start at 4:00 this afternoon. Don’t come late....”
The murmurs floated into my ear.

Xinyu’s parents always yearned for a second child, and six years ago, her mother was found to be pregnant again. When she was examined her pregnancy, she was five months already: it was a girl. They abandoned her before she was born, “The huge fine of One-Child Policy make us do this.”

Last year, Xinyu’s mother was found pregnant again and she gave birth to a boy. They were so happy to have a boy that they appreciated the new family planning by the government, “Two-Child Policy allow us to do this.”

The baby was born on August 1st, People’s Liberation Army Day, and the new family member got his nickname: “Junjun”, which means army. There is a huge age gap between Xinyu and her little brother: fifteen years and one day’s age gap! Xinyu’s birthday is one day before her brother: July 31st. And the day when his brother was born, the celebration of her birthday has been delayed for one day to Junjun’s birthday

It's not so bad, for at least she can get a share of the birthday cake decorated with her brother's name.

My parents and I got to the party at three to help with birthday party preparation. Because of the scorching weather, the door was left open, and the aroma of stew ribs and fried pork cutlet lingered in the corridor, guiding us to Aunt and Uncle's house. I peeped into the house, and saw Grandpa and Grandma busy preparing for dinner in the kitchen, beads of sweat sliding down their foreheads. The snores of Uncle penetrated out of his bedroom door, making my hair bristle and bringing me shivers; Aunt was sinking into the soft sofa, watching TV with her son Junjun in between on her crossed legs; and in the small bedroom, my cousin Xinyu was frozen in front of the table, staring at a pile of paper.

“Good afternoon!” Mum yelled at the door. When we were taking off our shoes to put on slippers, Aunt carried Junjun with her arms and struggled up to welcome us. My grandparents also heard us and rushed out. Smiling but not looking at us, they took the presents from our hands and hurried back to the kitchen. Aunt held her son's buttocks with her right hand and straightened her back, making the little boy stand out, as if an Oscar Award winner standing on the stage with her dazzling statuette. Being exhibited in his mother's arms, Junjun was scared to see the three unfamiliar faces and cried shrilly. So, Mum narrowed her eyes with eyebrows drawn together, and pressed close to the little guy with a greasy smile: “Oh my honey, why do you burst into tears? You don't remember me? Please don't cry, my sweetheart, I have brought you a lot of presents...”

Dad took a bowl of strawberries out of the kitchen, and handed over one to the little boy: “Don’t be afraid, Junjun, the sweet strawberries are all for you!” The little boy quieted down in front of the big, bright red strawberries. He rubbed away the streaming and sparkling snot on his mum’s shoulder, grasped the biggest one and stuffed it into his mouth, which made us, the three “strangers” sigh with relief.

Then I entered into Xinyu’s room and fished out a blue velvet box. She was still motionless, keeping the pose of “The Thinker” statue.

“Happy birthday, Xinyu! Here is your belated present!” I put the box on her table, and noticed the test paper in front of her which was filled with bloody red crosses, “Are you OK? Has something happened?”

“Nothing serious. Thanks for your present, *Jie*.” She kept silent for a while and then asked me, “By the way, do you know how to get a bus card?”

“Yeah, but why? I thought your dad always drove you to school in his car.”

She lowered her eyes, pretending to examine her fingernails: “He said that it takes too much time and money to pick me up.” Then she raised one eyebrow and cast a glance at her little brother who was surrounded by his “middle-aged fans. Well, you know the reason.”

Xinyu’s gloomy face reminded me of our childhood, when I still took her as my perfect enemy. As a daughter of my grandparents’ son, she stole away almost all families’ attentions and affections from me, as I had been given birth by my grandparents’ daughter. I hated her: I still remember the day when grandpa kicked

her ass heavily because she poured water on the TV, and I just gazed at her with a smile, enjoying listening to her shriek and cry. She also hated me, especially when I blandished the families again and again to beg for some love. But now, when Junjun broke into our life, the roles of Xinyu and me gradually paralleled, so we began to understand each other better.

“Emm... don’t worry about the card, just leave it to me. Actually, the bus is better than...”

BANG!

Our conversation was interrupted by the thundering sound of a door opening. Uncle swaggered out of his bedroom and roared: “Oh, you have already come, I am so sorry to get up so late!”

The floor shook stronger and stronger until Uncle stopped in our room: “Hey, you two girls, why are you cooped up in here? Just go to the sitting room and play with your little brother!” He leaned on the shelf with his head up and arms crossing in front of his chest, just like a general who was checking the appearance of soldiers, although his hair was like a magpie’s nest. Therefore, I pulled Xinyu out of her room and we sat on the couch beside Aunt. Mum had been in kitchen to help with some housework, and my dad was still indulged in interacting with Junjun. The little birthday boy threw off all the shyness and fear, jumping up and down everywhere. Holding a big bowl of strawberries, Junjun seemed to make himself as a fruit magnate and want to hand out his “property” to all of us. When he pushed a strawberry to Xinyu’s lower

lip, she refused it expressionlessly, but this little boy mumbled and stamped his feet, with his hands keeping squeezing the strawberry into her mouth. She finally gripped it with her teeth, and Junjun cheered in a high voice and sprang to another room. Aunt was still switching channels and just like getting an electric shock, she stopped at a movie—Jackie Chan’s *Police Force*. She bounced up and pointed at the screen: “Xinyu, look at Jackie Chan’s nose! You see, it is really big and wide! What’s more, the tip of the nose is very fat! That is exactly the symbol of good fortune and great treasure, and you must marry a guy with a nose like this!”

Xinyu was busy chewing the strawberry and she nodded speechlessly. Aunt appeared to be kindled by her theory of marriage, so she took my hand and patted it gently, teaching me in a whisper:

“Jiamei, earning money is not our duty. As a woman, the first important thing is choosing an excellent husband. But if you fail on it, then focus on the second important thing—giving birth to a boy.”

“Oh, I got it. That does make sense.” I took all my strength to unwrinkled my brows and compelled my facial muscles to design a perfect smile.

However, Aunt had actually proved her own beliefs: before having a son. She was thrown to a small apartment with Uncle and their daughter Xinyu; though all the housework was loaded on her back, she was still unable to satisfy my grandparents, who complained about her laziness all the time; even Uncle’s love for her seemed to be gradually taken back, and he stayed less and less time at home. But now with

son by her side, she exchanged the small room for my grandparents' big house; she got rid of all the household duties, turning them over to her parents-in-law without hearing any grumbles; more importantly, she won back Uncle's love and care because of her outstanding contribution to carrying on the family line...

...

“Dinner is ready!” Mum went out of the kitchen, calling out of breath.

Junjun was arranged in the central seat, like the moon circled by the stars. Mum took out a bundle of chopsticks and a pagoda of bowls; Grandma arranged the tableware; I poured drinks into all the cups; Dad buckled up the seat belt in front of Junjun; Aunt inserted a blue candle in the cake; Xinyu lit the candle. Then the room quieted down and all of us sat around the cake with our eyes fixed on the little boy, waiting for him patiently to blow the candle. Almost all of us were repeating the blowing movement, expecting him to imitate us and end this ceremonious event. It looked like that Junjun had comprehended what he ought to do, but he used an unusual way to finish his mission—he attacked the faint candle flame with spittle. After several rounds of saliva bombing, the candlelight was finally put out, with white foam interspersing throughout the cake. The piece of carrot dropped down from Mum's chopsticks. Aunt froze her clapping hands. Grandpa and Uncle turned their eyes to the wall. Xinyu fixed her eyes to the dead candle.

“Wow... Wha...What a...What a clever boy! Junjun is so ingenious and creative in blowing the candle! He will grow up to a successful man in the future!” Dad broke

the embarrassing silence.

“And I believe that my grandson’s saliva will give all of us good luck!” Grandma left her seat and kissed the boy’s face for more than half a minute.

I got a piece of cake stained with Junjun’s “good luck”. With a plastic fork, I secretly broke the tiny, huddling bubbles one by one, which were like the transparent eyes of dragonflies.

After enjoying the lucky cake, Mum pinched Junjun’s nose gently: “This little guy didn’t recognize us at the beginning. He must inherit his dad’s poor memory. Hahaha...” Then she turned to Uncle: “By the way, Tao, have you forgotten the money I lent you two years ago? Actually, I need it to renovate my house.”

“I’m so sorry, Sister, but I am still on a tight budget these days. I promise you that I will give you the money at the end of this year!” Uncle widened his mouth to his ears.

“But you have told me to...”

“That’s enough!” Grandpa said in a low voice, “Your brother has already got a big burden to take care of our Junjun, but you just make his burden heavier! If he can’t pay back your money, I will sell my house to repay you!”

Mum balled up her fists tightly, and she bit the lower lip so hard that it almost bled.

...

“Hey, Ha, Wa!”

Junjun grasped his spoon and waved it in rhythm, trying to regain our attentions.

And the harmonious atmosphere resumed in a flash. Again, we put our focus on this little boy's talents and intelligence. Mum turned around to take a deep breath and put on a smile again. To make up for her awkward situation, Mum threw out the topic she would never abandon: "My *son* recently got the title of 'Excellent Student Leader'. The price was an exquisite watch and she just gave it to me." She lifted her wrist, and the metal watchband reflected the lamplight to everyone's face.

Mum was talking about me when she said her "son". I really need to thank the fortune teller who asserted that their unborn baby was bound to be a boy. I came to them as a girl and they cried. Now they still stubbornly believe that I am a boy. I was given the nickname "Son". Strangely enough, I have just to accept my fate to be a son: When I was a little girl, Dad taught me to play basketball and Chinese chess; Mum took me to the barbershop to cut off my long hair. At dinner table, they always talk about good news of their colleagues' sons and look at me with overwhelming hope. For nearly twenty years, I have struggled to live up to their expectancy, because only in this way can I shape myself from a "Pinocchio" to their real child.

"Sweetie, you are so outstanding! Junjun should learn from you, but not his useless sister." Aunt put a pork trotter in my bowl. I hated pork trotter. Some hairs weren't completely pulled out, standing on the pigskin, which was just like the jaw of an untidy man. I tore down the sticky skin from the trotter with my teeth and sent it into my throat. When I swallowed it, my gut just seemed to be scratched by a sparrow's paw.

Aunt gave an oblique look at Xinyu and continued: "Xinyu failed in physics exam

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again.”

“There isn’t a quiet learning environment for me to focus on my study.” Xinyu raised her head, and her face was flushed, “And I really need a tutor to solve my doubts on physics.”

Grandma put down the chopsticks heavily on the table: “Oh my dear Xinyu, you think Junjun has influenced your study? Indeed, he makes a little bit noise sometimes, but he is just an innocent kid, so why can’t you love your little brother as we do?”

“And why other students can just get high marks without any help? Why wasting money on tutors when you can solve the problem by your own efforts?” Uncle glared at her.

Xinyu’s voice was trembling and weakened: “Bu...but I just can’t understand the key points by myself...”

“So you should have chosen liberal arts as I have told you before. Now you face difficulties in study, and it’s your problem, not ours. Don’t attribute your failure to Junjun and your lack of tutor.” Uncle shrugged and invited Grandpa to join in a toast.

When it was the time to decide whether Xinyu should go to arts or science after the first term of the senior high school, Aunt and Uncle had ordered Xinyu to study liberal arts because they were convinced that a girl studying science wouldn’t be attractive to successful men. But she loved science so much that she had finally followed her heart. Because of her “immature decision”, Aunt hadn’t talked to her for two weeks.

Lowering her head, Xinyu put down her chopsticks quietly and left the table. Her favorite candied sweet potatoes were still untouched in the bowl.

...

“Look! Our little guy is reaching the glass!”

“No, it’s so dangerous!”

“Oh, you little naughty boy!”

...

As soon as the tortuous dinner was over, I tiptoed to Xinyu’s bedroom and checked if she was OK. Her body seemed to be melting on the bed, with her right forearm withering on her forehead. The sun set and the hue of her room turned from orange to gloomy blue. She was being nibbled by the darkness. On her face, the bloodshot and swollen eyes seemed like the pulp of overripe peach filled with red fibers.

I put the bowl on her table: “Xinyu, I’ve brought your favorite food. Take some or you will be hungry at night.”

There’s no reply. She just gazed at the grey ceiling as if she could look through it.

“Don’t be mad at them. They didn’t intend to hurt you.” I sat beside her closely, hoping to absorb her pain like a sponge. “I can find a tutor for you, just as my investment on your study.”

“No, I’m good. I can handle it myself. Now please leave me alone.” She closed her eyes slowly, and a tear drop slid over her temple.

I left the room and closed the door gingerly, for fear of shattering her cracked heart. When I dragged my feet to the sitting room, the strong light pierced my eyes. Everything was in harmony—For Grandpa, Grandma, Dad, Mum, Uncle and Aunt, their hearts and souls were all immersed in the happiness of the new hope, and all of them maintained so cheerful that they chose to forget the conflicts and unpleasure of each other. Therefore, it was Junjun who reunited that family, while at the same time, it was Junjun who isolated Xinyu out of the family...

...

On the way home, Mum, Dad and I stopped in front of a red light. Lowering my head casually in the drizzle, I saw an earthworm desperately twisting her body, trying to wriggle back to her safe and warm earth. But what she headed for was the tough and muddy road, with streams of traffic rushing to and fro. I bent down and tried to help this helpless creature, but the traffic light suddenly turned green and Mum dragged me to cross the road. I looked back again and again and the stubborn, vulnerable shadow was still struggling at the edge of death, fading away little by little from my sight.



Ancient Town of Tang Kou, Wuxi, Jiangsu Province

Jiang Tian

Joining a tour with mother: Generational differences

Writing • Mothers is an ongoing collaborative writing project initiated by artist and writer Huang Jing Yuan in 2017. She organized it with Nanjing based curator Wang Yamin who joined the team in 2018. Focusing on writing as a drive for the meeting of minds and lives, understanding situations, and responsible action, the project seeks to discover narrative-based and critically focused alternatives to political quietism/cynicism in today's China. Three episodes have been published: with the first one comprised of more than 28,000 Chinese characters by eight participating writers, the second episode consisting of more than 27,000 Chinese characters by seven participating writers, and the third one around 82,000 Chinese characters by 33 participating writers. *Writing • Mothers* aims to produce at least one episode every year, and it is published by Feng Junhua's self-run publishing unit, Instance.

The text was translated by Henry Zhang and proofread by Anna Metcalfe.

Note: "Joining a tour with mother" is an excerpt from the second episode of *Writing • Mothers*. It is led by letter written by Qianting Ke, and followed by texts of discussion. The second episode of *Writing • Mothers* as a completed book is made of seven letters, with each letter followed by a discussion among the

contributors and moderator (similar to the above excerpt). This format is an editorial result based on the documentation of months of discussion and exchange of texts among the contributor on Wechat (the equivalent of WhatsApp, but the only social media instant app used in China).

One day, I walked past a tour company and was handed a flier for a vacation deal for Xi'an, a place I love. I thought, why not go to Xi'an with my mother? Give her a taste of the grand old imperial capital of China? I had forgotten that my mother hates vacations and that we had never truly taken a trip together. I thought to myself: people change, mothers change. When life's good and you've got time off, you go on vacation, right?

“Ma, why don't we go to Xi'an during the holiday?” I said to her after dinner one night.

“No, I don't want to go,” Ma said, collecting plates, not even lifting her head.

“You've watched so many of those palace intrigue shows on TV¹, why not go to the actual capital— of six different dynasties?”

“I don't want to die,” she barked at me.

“What?” I said, confused. Then I realized she was worried about the plane falling

1. Palace intrigue dramas have become a wildly popular genre in China—perhaps because of the prohibition on discussing power and politics in more obvious ways. These shows, usually loosely based on history, focus on concubines scheming and fighting for the emperor's attention.

out of the sky. This fear was ridiculous and made me say back in anger, “I won’t go either.”

“I can’t tell you how to live your life.” Ma said.

“Then I’ll go myself with the kids. I’ll go, even if you curse our plane down from the sky.” I lashed out.

My mother started crying and ran to her room.

A couple of days later, on an afternoon when she and I were the only people in the house, she said, “I wasn’t cursing you.”

“I know. Of course you don’t want us to die, you just want to spoil our trip.” I thought I’d made a good joke and secretly hoped I could still convince her to come. She didn’t respond. We both sat in silence for a moment, then looked for other things to busy ourselves with.

Ten years later, traveling is still a taboo topic of discussion for us. There are still wounds there. My mother sees “vacations” as her biggest enemy, for a reason I don’t completely understand. She says she’s worried it’s not safe; there are car accidents, disappearances, homicides, all kinds of potential scams. Her cousin went on a trip to Yunnan once. As soon as she got off the plane she had a stroke. What better example was there of how fatal vacations could be for older people? Besides, going on vacation was an absurdity of modern life. You might have to drive ten hours to go on vacation, and bearing in mind that even grocery shopping could be torture, really it was just a way to spend a fortune on having a bad time.

But these reasons didn't adequately explain why she'd been so quick to mention her own death, or why she'd broken down crying. I suspect my mother thinks there are other reasons for members of the family wanting to go on vacation: perhaps they are avoiding having to meet with their relatives from the countryside; or getting sick of her food; or fleeing her nagging and bossiness. Simply put, she thinks her children don't want to live with her and look down on her. Her kids going on vacation, one after the other, reinforced her sense that they wanted to avoid her and eventually to abandon her—and this was something she couldn't bear.

When the five of us were grown up, we all tried to solve the riddle of what it was that our mother wanted. After so many years, we still know so little. Her hatred for travel meant that she really wanted the opposite: for us to return to her side. But we couldn't do it. At risk of injury, we went on our vacations, regretful that we had not been able to take her with us. I knew that she didn't want to go, but I still stubbornly imagined that, one day, mother and daughter could hold hands and see the world together. I still wanted to win, to prove that my own ideas were better. But maybe she was right: we were just running away.

Qianting Ke

August, 2017, Manitoba University.

Ning Li: After my grandmother died, my mother developed morbid preoccupations: everything to do with death interested her, immensely. If she saw the funeral of some actor she didn't know on the television, she would become incredibly enthusiastic; if someone fell over or closed their eyes on TV, she would ask if they had died—even though that was rarely the case.

Ms. Xie: My grandmother invests all of her energy, her confidence, into culinary invention. For her, eating has become a political issue: when and what to eat, at home or at a restaurant, whether or not something tastes good, these have become sensitive topics, contested by different family members. In the context of my mother's relationship with my grandmother, "travel" is also politically charged. For her part, my mother loves to travel; she thinks that grandmother's problem is that her horizons are too narrow, that she has a "field of vision no larger than the house she lived in." She is always encouraging grandmother to "see more of the world." So travel (looking outwards) is the opposite of cooking (within the home). Yet to grandmother, we are only going through the motions. We aren't putting any thought into what it is she really wants.

Qianting Ke: Right—people who say they like traveling see themselves as progressive and active, and view domesticity as conservative, complacent, masochistic even. When we were encouraging our mother to go out and travel, we were really thinking "expand your horizons to keep the gloom away." We didn't really think of what our mother wanted. What to eat has always been political! There are numerous power struggles contained within the question itself. Food is the principal means by which

my mother expresses love, and it's impossible for her not to be overbearing; every meal, she tells us to have some more, to keep eating.

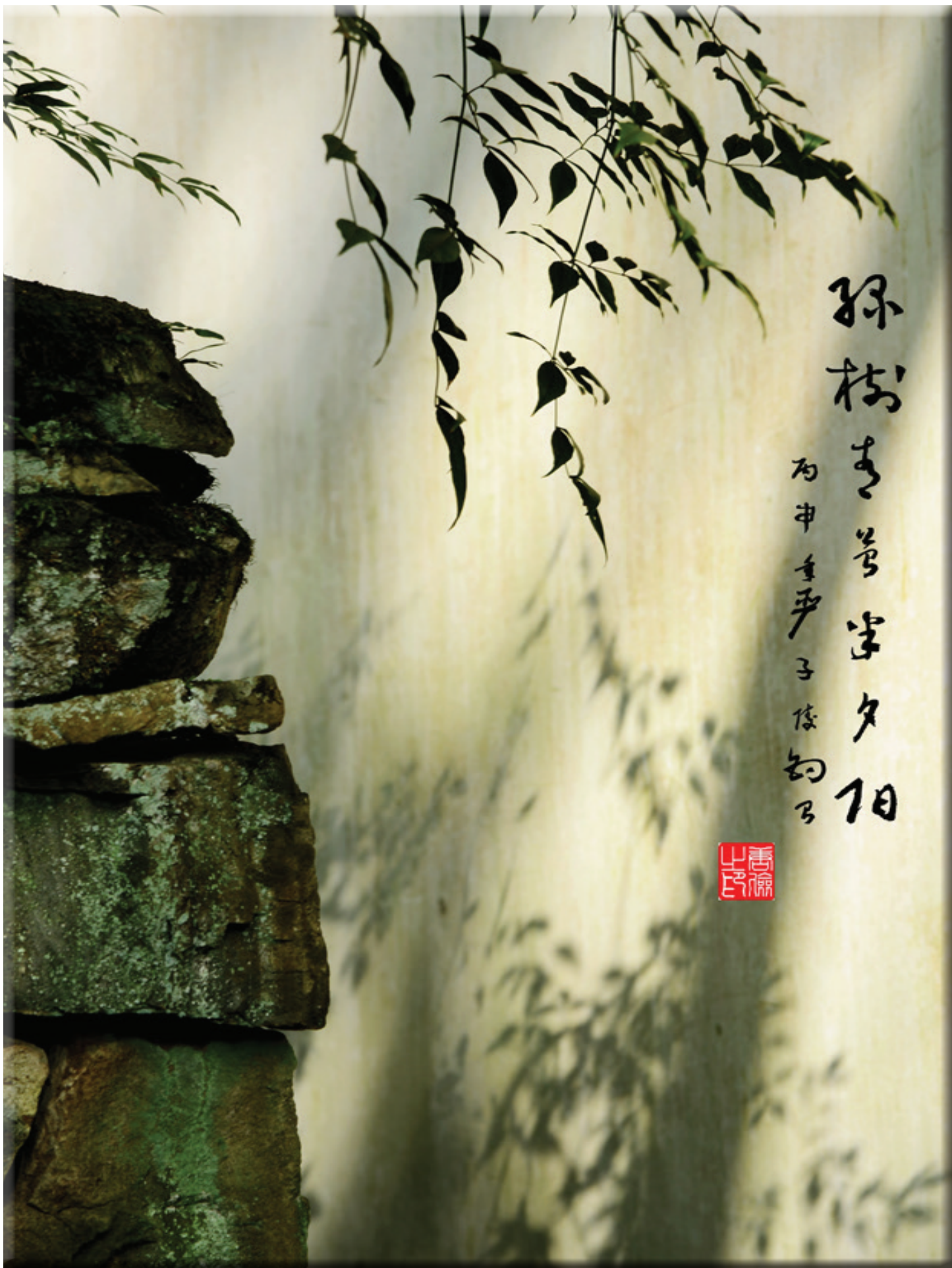
Jing Yuan: When they think of traveling, my parents seem to have a “when you should do what” chart in their minds; it is the same as the timelines they have for dating, marriage, career progression. When she travels, my mother is most interested in buying health care products. My parents seem to reserve a particular disdain for certain travel destinations. Europe, for example, is more interesting than Southeast Asia; and Egypt is not safe, etc. If they were to hear that I was planning to fly somewhere for a residency, their first reaction would be: it's too hard on girls to be always on the move.

Qianting Ke: The desire to move has historical and social reasons—to people like my mother, who are “unwilling” to travel, who don't want to go on long, protracted trips, it isn't that they actually don't want to go, or are afraid, but that they have never had the chance to find pleasure in it. It was poverty at an early age, and the lack of resources, that deprived them of this chance—as well as the labors of motherhood they've been given to shoulder. Their opportunities are limited by the fact of their being confined to motherhood. My mother's situation was this: first she had to raise her own five children, and then she had to take care of nine grandkids.

Jing Yuan: Qianting's way of writing stories reminds me of the precision of a certain kind of monologue in films: if it's not a series of unrelated events, then it's the fatality of stepping on a land mine. Both styles of storytelling deliver a kind of necessity. The words have a certain finality. I like some of the questions that have been raised: What

does my mother want? How can we act so as to make her feel truly appreciated?

Qianting Ke: Only when I'm with my mother, do I experience such psychic turmoil. The conflict comes very suddenly, and rarely spirals out of control, but it's very, very intense. I wanted to convey this kind of experience, and to make sense of why things happened this way.



I Am Lao Yang

Ying Kong

Somewhere I read the story of “Lao Yang”. That Lao Yang seems to be like me, but the way in which Lao Yang is treated there is unfair, I think, because the author seems to know Lao Yang as an outsider from his life. Today I want to defend Lao Yang by telling his story in his own voice.

I call myself Lao Yang. *Lao* in Chinese means “old, “or “senior,” and Yang is my last name. I decided to be called Lao Yang only when I started living in Canada in the early years of 21st centuries although I didn’t look as old as the connotation of the Chinese character (老), Lao, carries. At that time, I was in my late forties, but I felt the sunset in my life, which means I had passed the time of “full of wise saws and modern instances” in China and came to the envisioning part of my new life in Canada.

Thirty years ago back into the Cultural Revolution, I was a sent down educated youth on a collective farm where I was idling away of my life for five years and when I fell in love with Mei, my ex-wife. Luckily, I passed the national exam for university entrance and was admitted to the Northeast Petroleum Engineering University. After graduation, I was assigned to work as a petroleum engineer for a state-owned

company for ten years, living separately with Mei, who didn't want to join me in the oil city. When our daughter was two years old, I joined my wife and daughter in my home city. Starting a new profession, I had to go back to university for more learning and training. After another ten years of working as an electric engineer, I thought I deserved a comfortable life living with my wife and daughter, waiting for retirement. However, I couldn't resist the temptation of "going out to broad," and came to Canada to start a new life at such a late age.

A new life seems to require a new identity. I used to be addressed as Engineer Yang at work and Yang Gang at home. No luck in Canada, I was never hired as an engineer here, not even as a technician. Engineer Yang was out of the question for my professional identity. So Yang Gang had to be my identity. Besides, I like my name in Chinese. There is not much meaning in Yang except its indication of my last name. But my first name, Gang, simplifies my personality: unyielding and strong. I appreciate my father who gave me this name. I guess he really wanted me to be a man when he named me. But the first day I came to Canada, my wife told me, "You'll have a problem with your first name, Gang".

"Why?"

"Because gang, in English, means an organized group of criminals," Mei explained to me.

This was not a good omen for me, I thought.

I was not pleased with Mei's interpretation of my first name in English. The issue of how I would be called by Canadians shouldn't have been a problem for me if I just came for a visit. Why do I have to care about how I would be addressed by

those people whom I haven't even met yet? But it bothered Mei. Ever since I came to Canada, she told me again and again, "When you are in Rome be a Roman."

How could I be a Roman if I don't even like Rome? Canada is good only to people who speak English and who could understand everything in English. I didn't speak much English and how could I enjoy the life offered here most in English? Mei had told me long before I decided to join her in Canada, "You must practice your spoken English." She would never understand how difficult for people like me, who have no aptitude for language skills, to learn a new language in a short period of time. The English I learnt during my university days is dumb English, or mute English. I remembered lots of grammar rules and I had a good vocabulary, so I managed to pass English courses required for my university degree. After working for so many years, I only picked up English when I needed to pass the exam for my engineer certificate. English was of not much use for me if I just came to Canada for a visit. But Mei still bothered me with my name in English.

"How about Gung?"

"We don't have gung in Chinese," I resisted.

"There are lots of words that we don't have in Chinese. You have to create some here to adapt yourself to Canadian culture," she started teaching me again.

"Look, I just came here for a visit. Why do I need to adopt a name that we don't have in our language? Why don't *you* have a foreign name?"

"My name is easy for Canadians to pronounce. If not, I would think of another name," said Mei.

I was silent. Frankly, I liked the way that she still kept her Chinese given name,

Mei, even though Canadians spell her name as May. “I don’t care about whether it’s easy for Canadians to pronounce my name, but I care about what it means to me. Some Chinese are cheap. They wanted to be assimilated to into a foreign culture at the cost of losing their own identity: John, Bob, Mary, those are the names meaningful to them but not to us. My name was given by my parents and that’s what they want me to be. It’s just a bad luck for me that the connotation of my given name, gang, is not good for a name. Who cares about the English meaning for a Chinese name? I don’t want to have an English name for me just for the sake of Canadians. I’ll feel odd to be called David, or Bill. I’ll go with Lao Yang,” I blasted these with determination.

Mei shrugged her shoulder and pursed her mouth. She then changed the subject, “You’d better practice your English with the English speakers while you stay here. I’ll see whether I can find you an English tutor.”

“If we need to pay for a tutor, I’d better stay at home watching the local TV with subtitles,” I said to her.

The second week, Mei found me an English tutor, Elaine, who looks like Chinese but speaks not even a word of Chinese. From Mei, I know that her parents were from Hong Kong and she was born in Vancouver. She married a Canadian, and her kids and grandkids don’t bear much Chinese features. I felt sorry for the banana-like lady, who looked yellow from the outside but she is white from the inside. At our first meeting, I introduced myself as Lao Yang and explained its literary meaning.

“You are not old enough to be called Lao Yang. How about Sam or Bob? Those are easy names for us to remember,” said Elaine.

Why do I have to take an English name for your sake? Instantly, my anger came back, “I don’t like me called by an English name,” I said, probably, loudly to Elaine in my poor English. Mei reminded me of this before this meeting. Canadians don’t understand us at all. We talk loud because we want to be heard in busy streets or among the crowds. Also talking loud is more cheerful and confident. If you speak too quietly, people might think that you are strange or you have something else behind the back of your mind. Seeing Elaine’s surprised look, I deliberately asked in a low voice, “Is there an English name that sounds like my Chinese name, *Gang*?”

“Not any that I know of. The only English word I can think of is ‘gong,’ which is a musical instrument.” She demonstrated what a gong would be like, using her two hands to form a disc shape, and then moving one hand to hit the other.

“Oh, I see.” I immediately understood what that means. “That word doesn’t have no sense for my name. *Gang* has a special meaning to me. I’ll keep it. Just call me Lao Yang.” I imagined I would be totally lost if someone called me Sam or Bob. I told Elaine that I came here just for a visit and that Mei would go back to China once she finished her degree.

I already made the decision to live nowhere else except for my home city, Harbin, after I had worked a year in Japan as a trainee engineer in late 1990s. That was a horrible year when I lived by myself without family, friends or familiar surroundings. Japanese men are workaholics, working longer hours than they are required to. They are rarely seen in superstores with the shopping cart full of groceries as Canadian men do. I was invited to the manager’s home for dinner once. I felt so bad for his wife when

he was fully served by his wife during the dinner. I was a family man. My colleagues in China mocked me as “a model husband.” I made decent money as an electronic engineer for a large manufacturing company producing power generating equipment. Due to the open door policy, my company imported many advanced machines and equipment from Japan, the United States and Germany and my major responsibility was to help install the equipment, to maintain and repair all the imported machines and equipment. If all the machines ran well, I seldom had anything to do at work. But if the machines were out of order, I would receive calls to be back at worksite even though at night. During that time, power industry was booming. Those imported machines would work 24 hours, 7 days a week with three shifts of workers to meet the market demand. At that time, we didn't have the awareness of labor law. I never received extra pay for my work during the off-work time. I hated to be called back especially during bed time. Each time I received a wanted call from the workers on duty at my off-work time, I would be hesitating to go until my boss called me from his home. My boss didn't like my working attitude but he had to be nice with me especially at my promotions because no one could be better than me to diagnose and solve the problem of those foreign machines. I was proud of myself as a trouble shooter for those foreign machines and equipment. I got promoted and had the salary that fit for my position. What else did I expect to have? I had nothing to hope or fear. I enjoyed cooking, and whenever Mei came back from work, dinner would be ready at the table.

I didn't have any other desires. Unlike Mei, a professor in China, who always came home late for many excuses, I would go home at regular hours and take care of the

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housework: grocery shopping, cooking, and housekeeping. She always had ambitions: when she worked as an English teacher, she strived to be an English interpreter; when she became an interpreter, she wanted to be an English professor. There seemed to be no end for her ambitions. But she was content with her marriage and appreciated for my contribution to the family income, my meticulous maintenance of our condo, and my good care of our beautiful daughter. She used to say to her friends, “I always want a change in my life but not change of a husband!”

However, Mei changed a lot after a year in Canada as a visiting professor. She became obsessed about doing doctoral studies in Canadian Literature. She told her plan to her Master’s supervisor, Professor Wang, who was an expert in American Literature. “Canadian literature? We don’t even have a course of Canadian Lit. What would you do with a Ph.D specialized in Canadian Lit?”

I was glad that Professor Wang pointed out that Canadian Literature had no market in Chinese universities. If I had said that, Mei would have retorted, “You know nothing about humanities courses at university! Engineers like you only know how to make the market value ...”

Mei would go on campaigning for her doctoral study plan anyway. She talked Professor Wang into writing a reference letter for her application for doctoral program, “I would like to continue with American Lit but it would be hard for me to look for funding in Canadian universities.”

Mei’s mother was strongly against her idea of going back to university in another country. “Your life is good enough already, a professor in a prestige university, a good family and a nice apartment. Your daughter is going to university soon and you

will retire in less than ten years. After that, you could enjoy all the good things life offers. I will have grandchildren... What else could be better than this? But you study in another country; you will feel lonely with no family there. What's worse, even after you come back with a degree, it would be close to your retirement. No university wants to hire you when you are fifty years old."

My teenage daughter said to her mother, "Four years is too long. Last year when you were in Canada, Dad and I felt like ten years."

Her Dean was straightforward, "You'll be promoted to a full professor this year. If you leave your teaching for that long time, you will miss the promotion opportunity. When you come back in four or five years, I have no idea we will be able to keep your position by then. Your Ph.D doesn't guarantee a position for you. You will lose your job and probably your marriage won't stay. You know all those stories of men or women who stay at home while their spouses abroad. Sorrow would be equally strong on both sides. Think of it carefully before you make the decision."

Family and friends all discouraged Mei. However, with her mind made up already, she asked me seriously, "Have you thought of moving to Canada in the future?"

"What do you mean? Do want me to live there for the rest of my life? No way! I would like to visit you during your studies." Even though I was familiar with the sad stories of those who stayed at home while their partners were abroad, I still agreed that she should seize this once-in-a- life time opportunity. "You go by your self and I'll stay, waiting for you to come back. Keeping your promise is a matter of *your* conscience," I said half-jokingly.

Mei was grateful for my understanding and promised to come back once she

finished her studies. A year after she started her program, she invited me and my daughter, Lida to visit her. When she registered for the last year of her high school there, the admission office incidentally inserted the letter “n” into Lida to make it Linda. Actually, my naïve daughter went ahead with the mistake and called herself Linda since then.

Lida was 17 years old that year. Mei wanted to put her in high school to see whether she would like to complete high school and go to university there. Back home in China, under the pressure of a competitive national entrance exam for university, Lida was compelled to study at school twelve hours a day. She had heard that in Canada there was no entrance exams for university and most of the high school students could go to university with no sweat. She loved the relaxing and pleasant learning environments. I knew Lida wouldn't go back to China with me. My three month stay passed quickly and I had to return to China by the end of that year. We had come here in late fall and now it was mid winter. My stay here was not pleasant. Mei and Lida were at school most of the time. Only at weekend, we spent time together. I saw Elaine twice a week to practice my English, which helped kill my time as well. Quite often Mei and I quarrelled over issues such as cultural assimilation and immigration.

I felt very sad the day I left for China by myself. We all got up early. I had to be at the airport by 6:30 am. Mei prepared *tangyuan*, glutinous rice balls, which ironically symbolized a family reunion. I didn't have appetite for anything. On our way to the airport, looking out of the window, I saw no people on the street. Even on Route 90, which was supposed to be one of the busiest highways, there were only a couple of big, long trucks with smoke coming out from their exhaust pipes. Mei had

to drive fast enough to pass a truck running ahead of our car on the surpassing lane. Smog produced by the cold air blocked our sights. I looked at the thermometer on the dash board: it says -31°C . Since we came at the fall, the weather become colder and colder and relationship between Mei and Lida seemed to follow the weather as well.

When we got to the airport, I ran for a luggage cart, put my luggage on it and pushed it to the terminal building. Altogether it was less than five minutes, but I felt the dry cold cutting through my clothes. “When will you ever leave this bone-chilling place?” I asked Mei.

She didn’t answer my question directly, but instead she put a positive spin on things. “Despite the cold weather, everything here is good. Don’t you find there more sunny days in winter than back home in China?”

Mei helped print out the boarding pass and check in the luggage. She walked me to the elevator that leads to the security gate. I noticed tears in her eyes, walking silently behind her. At the gate, she wanted to give me a hug, but I wasn’t used to that kind of thing. I took her hands tightly into mine, holding back my tears. Quickly I released her hands and walked towards to the gate. After I had all the carry-on things checked, I turned back and waved to her. She stood there, waving at me until I moved out her sight.

Back home alone in Harbin, I looked at the map of the world on the wall. Harbin and Winnipeg are almost at the same latitude on the North. Oh, no. Harbin is 45.8°N and Winnipeg 49.9°N . But I didn’t feel any warmer in Harbin. Two places on the opposite sides of the world now were intimately connected in my life. “Where do your wife and daughter live in Canada?” My colleagues asked me out of curiosity.

“In Winnipeg.”

“Where is it? I have never heard of the place. How does it look like?”

“Nothing to see there except bunnies and squirrels running on the lawns and alone the trees. The bunnies are tough. Even in winter, cold and barren, you can still see them running in the snow. Seldom do you see people on the street. It’s a place that even a rabbit won’t take a shit in.” I said, using the old Chinese saying to describe a desolate locale.

“Oh, really? I’ve heard that Canada is one of the best countries in the world.”

“Best in a sense of low population and large territory of land. Wide space encourages everything to be big: people are bigger, squirrels are fatter.”

“How big?”

“You see that chair? Well, some people have to squeeze into it to fit on it.... When I bought clothes there, I had to go the petite section. Even the field mice are bigger than ours. Old people there like to drive those big American cars. Most houses are big, some huge, even with three car garages.”

“Did you live in a big house?”

“No, my wife rented a one-bedroom basement apartment.”

“Basement? What does it look like? Is that like the underground cellars we have here?”

I nodded, but added, “It looks better than what we have here.”

“Are you going to move there?”

“No way!”

“How about if your wife and daughter won’t come back?”

“They will be back, I’m sure. I am here and all our families are here too. Besides, we have a more comfortable and easier life here.”

No matter how bad an impression I had of Winnipeg, my heart was with my family there. I emailed Mei or Lida almost everyday. After work I didn’t like to go home as early as I used to before because I had nothing to do and no one was waiting for me. At weekend, I got up early in the morning so that I could chat with them on MSN in their evening time. I felt lonely, very lonely. Thinking of three more years of loneliness without them, I felt my heart aching. Time passed very slowly each day.

A month after I came back from Winnipeg, Mei asked me to prepare documents for an application for permanent residency. *Permanent residency?* I almost shouted out, “Won’t you come back when you complete your doctoral degree?”

She was evasive in responding, “It’s hard to tell now. If I can get a university job here, I might not go back to China.”

I was shocked. “What?! If I knew this, I wouldn’t have supported your going there.” Calming down a little bit, I decided to change strategy. “How about your job at your university in Harbin? You have worked there for almost twenty years, and you will lose all your university benefits.”

“What benefits?”

“How about your pension, for example?” Thinking this might be a consideration for her to return, I reminded her of this.

“You’re right.” Mei seemed to agree, adding, “If I can get a university position, I will have pension. University pension here is almost as ”

I interrupted her, continuing, “Listen, if you don’t return and continue your teaching here, your university won’t return the pension you’ve contributed to for twenty years.”

Mei, however, replied without an ounce of regret. “I don’t care about that. If I get a Canadian university job, I would get more than that. I taught there for almost twenty years, and never have sabbatical leave. Here professors can have ...”

I was at the end of my rope and raised my voice. “Don’t talk gibberish! I don’t care about sabbatical leave. I only know that you should come back to China when you complete your degree. Otherwise you will lose your job in Harbin. You will be on leave forever!”

Mei didn’t give up her plan. “Even if I go back to China later, permanent residency status has more benefits than my current status as an international student. If Lida goes to university next year, we don’t have to pay twice the tuition a Canadian pays. In addition, with permanent residency, there are more chances for me to find a job...”

“But, you already have a job in China!”

“Yes, I *had* a job.” Probably sensing my anger, she changed tactics. “But think of Lida. What if she wants to stay in Canada for university? You know, international students have to leave Canada if they don’t have jobs immediately after graduation. Also, permanent status will do you good, too. It can help you find a job here easier, too. ”

Mei was known for her silver tongue. She didn’t have to say more about the benefits of having permanent status. By then I was convinced of her arguments. First, we didn’t have to use all our savings to pay for her tuition as well as Lida’s; second, I

didn't have to apply for a visa each time I visited them in Canada. I had never thought that Mei and Lida could become Canadians. Considering all the benefits permanent residency (PR) could offer, I decided to support her to apply PR status. "All right, I see what you are saying. I'll help you do whatever you need to do for this application."

One day while waiting in the notary's office to pick up the documents necessary for Mei's application, a woman sitting beside me and I conversed about immigration to Canada. She wore heavy make-up and was dressed in luxurious clothing; her curly hair was dyed burgundy auburn; her arched eyebrows were too long to be real; and there was no telling how old she was because her thick make-up covered all her wrinkles. She wore a shiny and soft fur coat that looked so tempting to touch. "What city are you going to stay in Canada?" She asked me. With her big colourful Louis Vuitton bag on her lap, I saw two diamond rings glittering on the middle and ring fingers of her right hand.

"Winnipeg." I replied in a low voice, looking her up and down.

"Winnipeg?!" She almost jumped to her feet, her two long ear-rings dangling fiercely. "My husband is applying for business immigration under the Manitoba Nominee program. We have to live in Winnipeg to meet the program requirements but we will move to Vancouver or Toronto in the end. We were told, Winnipeg is the capital city of Manitoba and it is the largest city in the province. Besides, houses there are very beautiful but much cheaper than here."

I wanted to laugh at her ignorance of the other aspects of Winnipeg: the mosquito capital in summer, and the coldest capital in winter, the higher murder rate all year

around, and the endless and boring landscape. I didn't want to say more to discourage her, instead asked her, "What else do you know about Winnipeg?"

"I don't know much, but the immigration agent suggested we lived in Winnipeg rather than any other places in Manitoba. If we pay CND \$400,000, we can easily get business immigration status in Manitoba." Suddenly, she stopped talking about herself and asked me, "Why did you choose Winnipeg?"

"My wife and daughter are studying there. I visited them last fall and came back two months ago." I responded and then asked out of curiosity, "How much did you pay the agent for your case?"

"CND \$40,000."

I couldn't believe my ears! I calculated it all in my head: CND\$ 400,000 for investment plus \$40,000 for the agent fee totalled \$440,000. If this sum was converted into Chinese currency, it would be over ¥2,200,000. I blurted out, "For that amount of money, I would go nowhere and just live a comfortable life in Harbin."

"Harbin is too cold in winter," said she.

I laughed out, "winter in Winnipeg is colder than Harbin. I call it 'Winterpeg'. Luckily, people there are nicer than in Harbin. So the human warmth counteracts the physical coldness of winter." I regretted being negative about Winnipeg since this woman had put so much money into immigrating there. I restrained myself from telling her more bad things about the city.

"Actually," the woman said, "the real purpose for us to go there is for my daughter and for us to have a son in the future."

"So how old is your daughter?"

“She is ten and we want to have another child in Canada, hopefully a son.” With these words, she smiled. “My husband inherited a business from his father. He is the only son. If we don’t have a son, his family line will stop at his generation.” Then she sighed. “The one child policy is no good for our family because there will be no heir to the family business if we stay here and can’t have a son.”

I never thought of that. So getting a permanent status in Canada could also help one carry on the Chinese tradition of continuing the family line through the male! If I were ten years younger, Mei might bear me a son to carry my family line, which would have made my father very happy in the next world. But oh no, I am too old for that, now. Besides, Mei is not a traditional wife who listens to me and does anything I wish her to do.

The woman seemed to want to continue conversing with me, “Do you have a son or daughter?”

“A daughter.”

“You can have a son after your immigration,” she seemed to give me a suggestion.

“No, we are too old to think of it.” Then I threw the question to her, “Wouldn’t it be too expensive for you to bear your husband’s family a son? Why not immigrate as a skilled worker?”

“Skilled worker?” shrugging her shoulders, the woman continued, “neither my husband nor I have a university degree. My husband is the only son of the family. He is made the legal person for the business. Actually, his father is still in charge of everything in the company. His family will support us once we get there. We have nothing to be proud of except for our money. Neither of us speaks English.

Luckily, business immigration doesn't require English. This is the only way we can get Canadian permanent status. As long as we have a son for the family, it will be worth all the money." The woman's face was full of cheers and hopes.

So *this* was the benefit of the Canadian business immigration—for a Chinese family to have a son who will keep the family line. Thinking that we didn't have to spend that kind of money for immigrating, I felt lucky. I didn't have to pay an immigration agent. Mei prepared all the documents herself. However, something this cheerful woman told me lingered in my head for a few weeks, "Once you get the permanent residence, you can stay with your wife and daughter anytime you want to. Otherwise you will be one of those grass widowers."

A grass widower, originally, referred to a man whose wife was frequently away on business. But in China, it referred to a man who was left at home by his wife who had gone abroad and never returned. *No, I didn't want to be a grass widower!*

A year after Mei submitted the application for permanent residency; we got our maple leave cards, same as the green cards in the States. I became both excited and sad: I was excited because I could go and join them immediately without all the hassles of applying for a visa, which was not an easy thing for any person from Mainland China during that time; I was sad because I was told by the HR department that I would have to resign from my job. Resigning meant losing pension. No way! I told Mei about the result of resigning from my job.

Mei didn't want me to give up my job as she knew that I would be employed professionally with my poor English. She knew my aptitude in acquiring language

skills. Honestly speaking, I am not even eloquent in my own language. I could write well and my poems were once published in the local newspaper. Talking, especially to the public, I stutter. It's funny I communicate better with animals than with people. When I was a little boy, I had two rabbits, and I talked to them always. On the collective farms, we raised pigs. I talked to them with no problem. At work back home in China, I could read all the English manuals of the imported equipment, but I couldn't speak a damn word of it to the English engineers. Last year in Winnipeg, with Elaine's tutoring, I had picked up very basic conversational skills, but that was far from being employed there. Mei suggested that instead of quitting my job, I should take an early retirement option. So I made enquiries to the HR department.

I started inquiring for the early retirement requirements. I was told that a doctor's certificate was required to approve my disability for working. I went to several of Mei's doctor friends and no one would grant me one.

I was in a dilemma of making the decision of to go or not to go: to go to Canada, I couldn't lose my job in China; to stay in China, I would lose my marriage. My mother, who remarried ten years ago after my father passed away, strongly urged me to join Mei and Lida, "Nothing could be better than the whole family living together. Nowadays women are not as faithful to their men as they were in the old days. Even if they sleep in the same bed with their men, they have different dreams. If you don't sleep in the same bed for a long time, who knows what would happen to you in the long run?"

I was my mother's only child. She didn't get along well with her second husband's children. In case of an emergency, I would not be available for her once I stay in

Canada. Thinking of this, my heart ached with sorrow for her: “If I stay there, who would take care of you when you are sick? I think it’s better for me to stay”

“Don’t worry about me,” she interrupted, “Your Uncle Wang will take care of me.”

Both Mei and I called my mother’s second husband Uncle Wang, who used to be the cadre of the collective farm where Mei and I worked in the early 1970s. Not long after my father died of a heart attack, Mei introduced my mother to Uncle Wang whose wife passed away long before my father. They were married shortly thereafter. Mei and I had been so familiar with Uncle Wang on the collective farm that we couldn’t call him “father” even after he married my mother. But Lida called him Grandpa.

Knowing that Mei insisted me on keeping the job in China, I trotted out an excuse, “I have no doubts that Uncle Wang would take a good care of you. But it’s always better to have me around when you are old.”

“Don’t be silly, my son,” my mother raised her tone, “nothing is more important to keep your marriage! You’ve been together since you were on the farm and you have gone through so many setbacks in your life and career. Now she is in Canada. You don’t want to live by yourself in the rest of your life, don’t you?”

“No one does. But Mei doesn’t want me to quit this job. She is worried that I won’t be able to get a professional job there.”

Although my mother claimed that she treated Mei as her own daughter, she was always a little suspicious of her. “If you can’t get a good job, you’ll at least find a decent one to survive on. She should stick by your side through thick and thin.”

When I talked about Mei's worries to her mother, she stood on her daughter's side, "Mei is worried about you. She doesn't want you to be a *dagongzai*, doing laborious and low paid jobs. In the end, you will feel beaten down. A man always has to have his dignity."

Speaking of dignity, I felt that I was losing face when my colleagues said to me, "Your wife probably already has someone over there. That's why she doesn't want you to be there."

"No." I said, staunchly. "She is as faithful to me as I am to her. Besides, my daughter keeps an eye out for me."

After thinking it over again and again, finally I decided to quit my job if our immigration application got approved.

Soon after we became permanent residents, Mei started talking about buying a house. "Now we are eligible for a mortgage if you have a job."

By instinct I retorted, "Why do we need a house?" We have just bought a new condo in China and we haven't enjoyed it much yet. Mentally I never planned to live here for all my life.

Mei, however, was persuasive. "No body could afford to have a house in Harbin even if he was a millionaire. Why shouldn't we enjoy the opportunity to own a house here? If we really have to return to China, we could sell it. By that time, we might make money out of it."

It was true that houses were too luxury to own for people in Harbin, whose territory is almost the same as Winnipeg but its population is 5,000,000. The city was

packed by high-rising buildings. My condo complex is an eight-floor building with no elevator, one of many residential buildings at the corners of a big square close to my company. To keep the condo price low, my company built all the residential buildings eight floors because buildings *over* eight floors must have elevators. Our one-bed room apartment was given for free when Lida started her teaching job at the company college. We had to return the one-bedroom apartment before we bought the new condos. We chose to buy a three-bedroom flat on the top floor for well-considered reasons: the condo complexes were of precast concrete, so the noises were bad. Living on the top floor, you wouldn't be bothered by the noise from above. There was also the problem of electric power shortages. When the power went off, the water stopped. More than often, people would forget to turn the taps off. When the power was restored, the running water flooded the neighbour's flat downstairs. There was no house insurance back then. The victims had to fight for the compensation of the damage done to their flats. Mei said, "It's better to climb the stairs rather than to fight with the neighbours."

Another reason we chose the eighth floor was the access to the roof of the building. Mei had developed a hobby of gardening from the days when we were on the collective farm. Around our dormitory on the farm, she and other youths opened up a piece of land where they grew onions, turnips and potatoes. With the extra outdoor space on top of the building, Mei had her own garden with pots of tomatoes and peppers in summer. She also shared her harvests with our neighbours.

Living on the top floor, we enjoyed more private space. Two other neighbours had their garbage bags and big jars for pickled sauerkraut moved to the stairways. All

smelt badly. Mei talked to the neighbours, asking them to keep the public space clean and tidy. At the very beginning, she was thought to poke her nose into others' business. She always kept the stairways tidy and clean. After she left for a year, garbage bags and the pickled sauerkraut jar were lined along the stairways.

When we first came to Winnipeg, we lived in an apartment building. I could tell the big difference immediately especially in the public space. There was no garbage bag beside the door; neither shoe shelves in the hall way. Back home in China, you would always see those things in the hall way near one's door. Worst of all, the cooking smell permeated the whole building. We hated to have neighbours from Sichuan. They always let their door open when they cooked spicy food. You could tell that they were cooking by the loud coughing in the hall way.

We would never dream of owning a house back home in Harbin. Here in Winnipeg could easily buy a house, enjoying the space. Mei listed good reasons for buying a house, "It will be a good investment to buy a house rather than to rent an apartment," Taking out our rent agreement, she said, "Look, we have to pay more than \$10,000 a year for rent. If we have a house of our own, we could save that amount of money every year. And with the increase in real estate, we might make good money out of the house if we sell it."

Winnipeg had one of the most affordable housing markets in Canada. Still house prices had increased 15% since Mei first came in 1998. I brought all of our savings from China, which would be more than enough to pay the down payment for a house. The money probably would appreciate more if it were invested in housing in Canada.

The last reason Mei gave to me, "Believe it or not, if we have our own house,

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you will feel really at home. You're a handyman and you would truly make this place as home of your own." *Making this place as my own home* struck me as being true. Looking around the one-bedroom apartment we were living in, I felt very depressed, staying in it most of the time by myself when Mei and Lida were at school. The apartment was in the basement: the window faced north and there was never sunshine in the room; outside the window was the parking lot. The window curtains had to be closed during the daytime for privacy. The small kitchen with all the outdated appliances was open to the living room where Lida's bed was. The refrigerator, for an example, was an old model, older than the one we had in China; and the microwave was even older still with a knob for dialling instead of a push-button one.

The noise in the apartment was bad. Our next door neighbours were a gay couple and you could hear them having sex at any time, early morning, late night and sometimes even during daytime. I couldn't imagine how they did it, but their movements were so loud and violent that we could feel our bed shaking by the wall. I never experienced the sense of being at home in this apartment. Instead, I felt I was living in a hostel! Maybe when we bought a house, I would experience the feeling of being at home and truly belonging to this new land. But to hold a mortgage, I needed a job. With my limited English, how could I find one that could pay the mortgage? I might become a slave, working desperately to pay the mortgage, which was my fear. But I held it back, trying not to show it; otherwise Mei would say, "Many immigrants can afford to own a house, why can't we?"

So I had to find a job to get our mortgage. Mei had a friend, Lyudmila, who
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worked as an international liaison officer at the university. Lyudmila introduced me to Freda, the manager of the faculty club, to give me something to do there. Freda asked me to start as a kitchen helper there immediately. I was wondering how she could offer me a job even without an interview. I guess *guanxi* work everywhere no matter if you are in the East or the West. Mei went with me to see Freda, and told me how to remember the manager's name, "Just think Freda, which sounds like friend."

"How do you do? I'm Lao Yang." I said on meeting Freda in her office, reaching out my right hand to shake her hand.

Freda shook my hand, "Hello, Lao Yang. I'm Freda." She also reached out her hand to Mei.

"Hello, Freda, I'm Mei, Lao Yang's wife. I'm here to help my husband with his English." Freda showed her surprise and then she started talking to Mei. They talked fast but I could figure out what they were talking about. Then Mei told me my responsibilities: set the table before events and clean up the dishes after, take garbage to the dumping area, clean the floors, windows, doors, entrances and finally, help the chef. I felt that I was an odd man rather than a kitchen helper. Treating me like one of her students, Mei then said to me, "If you understand your responsibilities, I have to leave now. Your common sense will tell you what to do."

My common sense? I lost my common sense now. I even didn't know where I was there.

After Mei left, Freda took me to the kitchen to meet the chef and the dishwasher, a Chinese guy who called himself, Fang. Fang replaced Mei as my interpreter. It was

much easier to work in the kitchen with Fang there. I couldn't imagine how I could communicate with the chef and Freda if he weren't there.

I felt embarrassed first day at work because of my dependence on Mei. The job didn't require much English but you needed common sense to know what to do and when to do it. The first two weeks, I was unable to understand what I was supposed to do in what order. The chef asked me to peel and cut potatoes, onions, and carrots. Before I finished the work the chef asked me to do, Freda came in and told me to clean the floor and set the tables for the lunch buffet. While I was doing that I saw that all the garbage bins were full and needed to be emptied. After lunch was served, the dirty dishes were piled on the counters. I loaded all the dirty dishes into the dishwasher. Finally, I could sit down myself for lunch. There were very few things there I liked to eat and there was a large variety of food there that I even didn't see before, mostly were Western foods that my Chinese stomach didn't digest well. I liked pork but there was none. More than often, I ended up eating chicken breast and some vegetables. In the afternoon, I repeated the same chores as in the morning. No skills were required for this job but it was demanding. I managed to do most of the things properly. After a whole day's work, I became so exhausted that I didn't want to do anything at home.

My Chinese friends in Canada admired me because I could find a job in *Lao Wai*'s food enterprise. Ironically in Canada, we still called Canadians *Lao Wai*, which means a foreigner, or an outsider. "Crows are black all the world over," I told them.

"You should see how we were working in a Chinese restaurant," a Chinese friend told me, "You don't have any benefits. Even if you work there all your life, you won't

have any penny for your pension. They lay you off if they are not happy with you, and you can't apply for unemployment insurance."

In the faculty club, I often saw Lyudmila entertaining her international guests. I came to realize that she was a big client of Freda's and that was why I could work there with no resume or interview. It was a boring job but at least one with a regular income. With this job, I could co-sign a mortgage contract with Mei who relied on her scholarship as regular income.

Three months after I started working in the faculty club, we bought a house in an area with the word "lake" in all the street names. Two blocks away from where we lived, there was a man-made lake over which there was an arched bridge for pedestrians and an overpass for traffic. Our two-storey house was at 166 Blue Lake Bay. Mei was pleased with this number because 66 was auspicious one in Chinese. She said, "We will have a good fortune with this number." Then she melodically chanted, "One-six-six, bad things will be fixed, and soon comes enchanting sights."

Mei was right. When we moved in, it was late spring. Trees on both sides of the street started meeting each other with new foliage through which a fine view of the park at the end of the street could be seen. The park had a children's playground and an off-leash dog area. The sight of my tidy white-stuccoed house in this setting was pleasant. In front of it, there was a pine tree in the middle of the lawn. The previous owner had put up a golden plaque with the house number on it right in the middle of the tree with a border of neon lights around it that glowed at night. The plaque looked very handsome and I liked it. In the back of the house, there was a two-car

garage with fences on both sides encircling a large backyard. On the deck there was a barbecue and a porch swing with a sunshade cover. For us who came from a crowded city, this was a house in the paradise.

We had three bedrooms on the second floor; the living room and kitchen were on the main floor, separated by the stairs. In the living room, there was a fireplace with two big windows on each side. The first night we moved in, Mei suggested we sleep on the hardwood floor in front of the fireplace to enjoy a romantic night together. My heart was full of happiness and with fire crackling in the fireplace; we made love on the floor as Lida slept quietly in her bedroom upstairs. We had not enjoyed such a blissful privacy for a long time.

However, a good time never lasted long. One day, Freda called me into her office. The moment I entered, she asked me to close the door behind me. Looking at her sullen face, I wondered what mistake I had made.

“Lao Yang, I have to let you go,” she said seriously.

“What’s wrong?” I was shocked by this sudden dismissal.

Speaking very slowly, she said, “For last week’s social, I bought many kinds of expensive cheese. But now they are missing. Yesterday I saw you talking on the phone. Soon after that, I saw you talking with a Chinese guy outside the faculty club, handing him a big bag.”

Hearing this, I almost lost control, “You think I’m a thief?” I blurted out. My spoken English was not good enough to reason with her at the best of times. And now my anger was making me almost speechless. I shouted at her in broken English,

pointing at her with my right hand, index finger stretched out. “We, Chinese, never, never like cheese. It is smelly. Only you people eat it. I, Lao Yang, poor, but I have my self-esteem. Here, I am strong,” I pointed to my head.

Seeing me in a rage, Freda became upset. “Lao Yang, please calm down!” She pulled open her desk drawer and began rattling through it. “Can I talk to your wife about this?”

“No, it’s none of her business. You don’t have to call her. This is my problem, not hers.” I walked out, closing the door behind me, not wanting to say any more.

I left the faculty club that day. As usual, I went to a nearby computer lab to read online Chinese news. I liked surfing the web. I read everything about China: good or bad. It was fascinating that some of the news about China was never revealed to the Chinese at our homeland as the government had powerful firewalls to screen out sensitive topics. Meanwhile I also felt sorry for the government for its inability to stop anti-government news from spreading all over the world, especially the news reported on in dajiyuan.com, which was an anti-government news source based in the United States. If I could read English websites, I would know more about China from Lao Wais’ point of view. But I didn’t care about their opinions. I didn’t want to read or hear any English after labouring for a whole day in the damn place that day. After I read the latest news about China, I went home exhaustedly on my bike, which I had picked up from a garbage bin and repaired with parts from another salvaged bike. My bike worked very well for me but it looked so shabby that nobody wanted to steal it. When I got home around 7:00 pm, Lida was preparing the dinner. Mei was going to

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have her candidacy exams soon and she sometime even didn't come home for dinner. I lay on the couch, Mei came in shortly thereafter with two bags of groceries in her hands. Seeing me on the couch, she started complaining, "You're home early, why aren't you help Lida preparing dinner?"

I sat up at once, my anger from the earlier day surging back into me. I almost yelled at her, "It's all because of this damn house that I've become a slave to it, working like a mad dog only to be humiliated by a *Lao Wai* woman. And now at home, you are bossy and demanding. I become like the third grandson here!" (In China, the third grandson receives the least respect at home).

"What are you talking about? Which *Lao Wai* woman humiliated you? And what have I demanded of you?" she got angry too.

"It's this demon Freda. She said that I was a thief, stealing her cheese. You're no better than her, always complaining about me. I want to eat raw garlic with dumplings; you don't allow me to have it, saying the garlic smell is too strong to talk to *Lao Wai*. I drink soup and porridge from the bowl, you ask me to drink it with a spoon. When I chew my food with my mouth open, you say it's not good table manners.... And then Freda, she bosses me around, telling me to do one thing after another. You command me not to do this and that. Really, what's the difference between you and her? You two women are robbing me of my dignity." I spewed forth all these words, pacing back and forth in the living room while Mei was just standing there by the door with her two grocery bags in her hands.

She dropped the bags, saying defensively, "Everything I tell you to do is to help you gain your dignity, not to lose it in front of *Lao Wai*."

“Screw their mothers! Who cares about them? We’re Chinese. I am not going to change myself based on their likes or dislikes.” With this, I sat down on the couch in the living room.

“Listen,” Mei said calmly, “let’s not talk about what happened to you today. Tell me why Freda said you were a thief.”

I explained, “Last week, she bought lots of cheese. The chef used half of it, and he asked me to put the rest in the refrigerator in the storage room. Freda said it was missing after I met Zhang Hai in the club to return all the manuals and stools for installing the digital satellite receiver we’d ordered for our house. I put all of them in a paper bag. I called him to meet me in the faculty club. When I passed the bag to him, the demon Freda saw us.”

Mei paused and then said, “I see, maybe Freda thought you put the missing cheese in that bag you gave to Zhang Hai. I’ll call her tomorrow and explain it.”

“You don’t have to. I’m not going to be bullied by that woman anymore.”

“What?” Mei asked in a worried tone. “Have you quit your job? How are we going to pay our mortgage?”

“Mortgage, mortgage again!” I yelled, “I can’t work there, I told you. She fired me today, the bitch.”

“She can’t fire you just because of that,” Mei shot back. “And she should give you two weeks notice. Otherwise she should pay you the wages for those two weeks.”

I said nothing and gazed out the living room window. Birds were eating the food in the bird feeder, chirping and flying back and forth. An old woman was watching her dog peeing against the fence of the parking lot. The dog wagged its tail after the

pee. *Animals live a happier life in Canada*, I thought to myself. *At least, happier than me.*

Suddenly Mei remembered something, asking, “Was there a party last night there?”

“Yes,” I responded sullenly, “it was a reception for someone’s retirement. I saw Lyudmila there.”

“Oh, Lyudmila mentioned that *she* was going to retire soon when I talked with her some time ago. It must have been her own retirement party.”

“See it’s the same trick everywhere,” I shrugged. “Now that Lyudmila is retired, Freda doesn’t give a damn about her friendship with Lyudmila. It’s just like the Chinese saying goes, the tea cools down as soon as the person is gone.”

Mei said seriously, “It doesn’t matter whether she still keeps her friendship with my friend. But I must help you to find the missing cheese.”

“I don’t care about the missing cheese any more. I even don’t want to think of the faculty club,” I told Mei.

A week after I left the faculty club, I started working for Zhang Hai. He was a short and small guy with a heavy Cantonese accent, who installed digital satellite receivers for Chinese free channels. I didn’t like him much. He was one of those money grubbing southerners who had a knack for business ventures. Zhang Hai had the receivers shipped from China: each of them cost about CND \$40. Then he would buy local cable and hardware and charged each customer \$ 240 for the installation of the receiver. He paid me \$50 for each installation and \$100 if I found a client. I

received cash immediately after each installation. When Zhang Hai gave me \$50 for my first installation, he said slyly, “You know you can claim unemployment insurance on your previous job since I’ll be paying you cash.”

I didn’t tell Zhang Hai what had happened to me after we met in the faculty club.

Mei checked my eligibility for unemployment insurance. “You are not eligible, because you became unemployed through your own fault.”

Hearing this, I became raged, “What fault? It’s all because of a story that bloody Freda made up. Screw her mother.”

“Can I talk to Freda about this?” Mei asked. “Maybe we just need to clear this misunderstanding up.”

“No, I won’t go back to work for her, even if it’s cleared up,” I said firmly.

“But you can’t apply for unemployment benefits with that attitude. And besides, you will need her for a reference if you go look for another job.”

“I’m not going to look for any jobs,” I said angrily.

Mei stopped the conversation. I could tell that she was angry with my stubbornness.

For a short while I was alright working on call for Zhang Hai doing the installation job. Whenever he had customers, he called me. I’d go to his place to get the receivers, go to the customers’ homes and install the receivers. All the customers were Chinese and I enjoyed talking with them. But earnings from this job were not enough to pay the mortgage. I decided to also deliver newspapers and fliers. Mei and Lida helped do the routes near my home. For apartment buildings, the newspapers had to be delivered door to door to each subscribing tenant. Mei and Lida handled these deliveries. I did

house deliveries on my bike starting at 5:00 in the morning. I had some generous subscribers, who gave me tips when I collected money for their subscriptions and some even gave me \$50 for Christmas. They liked me because I was never late with their papers even in bad weather. With money earned from installing digital receivers and delivering newspapers and fliers, we managed to live a life at subsistence level.

I was surprised that Mei, who used to spend money on brand name clothes, cosmetics and beauty salons in China, now had no complaining about her simple life at all. Lida, who claimed to be a pampered princess, complained that she had no pocket money in the beginning. Since she entered university, she was more or less financially independent except for free accommodation at home. She worked as a home care worker three hours a day for a handicapped couple in our neighbourhood. In summer time, she worked full time at the lab for professors and earned her own pocket money. Her student loan paid her tuition. Seeing Lida more and more independent and considerate of our circumstances, I appreciated living in Canada, which made independent. Had we lived in China, we would have had to pay everything for her: tuition, food and accommodation. After she graduated, we would have to help her with job and even family.

Since our move into our house, time flew. After leaving the faculty club, I had more time to stay at home. I cooked dinner more often--Chinese dishes, of course. I liked stir fries in hot oil. I loved the sizzling sound that vegetables made on the hot pad when I put them into the oil. Greasy oil and cooking smell spread all over the kitchen and permeated the whole house. Mei complained that the smell of onions,

ginger, garlic, and hot oil stayed in the house. Whenever she saw me deep frying, she would say, “I would rather keep my house free of cooking smells than have this stir fries.” Whatever I did in the kitchen, she was unhappy with. But I continued any way.

In summer, I liked to grow vegetables such as green onions, lettuce and Chinese cabbage in our small yard; but Mei spent at least \$100 on flowers, putting them in the front and at the back of the house, using up valuable space that could have been used for growing vegetables. I tried to keep our hydro bills as low as possible, keeping an eye on our use of electric appliances. Mei and Lida had a habit of leaving the lights on, which I would always turn them off immediately after they leave the kitchen or bathrooms. They were annoyed by my efficiency. But I wanted to save money. At Christmas, Mei put up holiday lights on the house and kept them up until Chinese Spring Festival in February. In our area, there were no Chinese families. So why we had to keep the lights on until Chinese Spring Festival, I couldn't understand her pride. I hated to hear when she said, “We must keep up with the Joneses.” There was no Chinese in our neighbourhood and I didn't watch to keep up with those Lao Wais. We quarrelled over these cultural things. My stand was firm: no cultural assimilation for me. Despite our arguments, I was contented with our simple life in Canada.

I had been doing my two jobs for a year when I had an accident. That morning after I finished newspaper deliveries, I was supposed to go to a house in St. James to install the TV receiver. The weather channel showed the temperature at Winnipeg Airport to be -28°C with a wind chill that made it feel like -35°C . So I decided to wait for the weather to warm up before heading out. I took a nap and overslept. When I

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woke up, it was 11:00 am already! I had an appointment at 2:00 pm. After a simple lunch, I put the receivers, plates and tools into the trunk and drove to St. James. After I set up everything inside the house, I went to the backyard to connect the cable to the plate. Working outside was very hard even for a short period of time; I tried to unscrew the rack so that I could install it on the post in the yard. This was difficult to do with gloves: I tried many times, and the screws did not move. So I took off my gloves and tried with my bare hands. Cold and haste made my hands numb and I accidentally pushed the screw driver into my left palm. Immediately, blood gushed out. I went back into the house and the woman there got me a bandage on my palm. Looking at my injured hand, she gasped in surprise, “Oh, your hand looks like a young lady’s! It’s slim and your fingers are very long, good for playing piano. It’s the kind of hand that catches treasure.”

I knew, she said this to release my pain. I didn’t believe any of those baloneys such as the old Chinese belief that those with soft hands were likely to have good fortune. I never abused my hands until I came to Canada.

Pretending to be polite, I said to the Chinese woman, “That’s not true for me. I never had that fortune. Since I came to Canada, I’ve always had bad luck.”

After she treated my hand, I asked her to help me unscrew the frame on the plate outside. She came out and finished the job for me.

“Thank you very much.” I felt ashamed that I couldn’t complete the job myself.

Because of my injury, I called to cancel the second appointment. In the evening, Zhang Hai came to see me with a \$50 bill to pay me for the installation I had done at St. James. He looked at my bandaged hand and asked me how I felt about the wound.

I said, “It’s a minor wound and I can go back to work once it’s healed.”

“Good,” said Zhang Hai, obviously relieved by my answer. “Have a good rest. If you need to see a doctor, don’t tell him you got injured at work. I don’t have workman’s compensation for you. Anyhow you’re covered by Manitoba health.”

Zhang Hai never called me back to work again.

In my last year in Winnipeg, Xinlan, Mei’s classmate from university days, moved to Winnipeg from Vancouver. After they had graduated, Xinlan worked for a state-owned import and export company. During those years, manufacturers had to do international trade through agents. The agents were state-owned import and export companies. Xinlan was in charge of textiles such as cotton, yarns and semi-finished products. As an import and export agent, she collected commissions both from buyers and sellers. Because all transactions were confined to the state-owned import and export companies, an agent’s job was very lucrative. Xinlan became one of the first millionaires in Harbin during the early 1980s. Xinlan was said to have a reputation of getting herself into the beds of her male bosses. When free trade came to China, her agent position was no longer as lucrative, so Xinlan immigrated to Canada to have her money laundered.

Xinlan arrived in Vancouver and bought a mansion with ten bedrooms in cash and rented rooms out to those she helped come to Canada. Basically, she ran an illegal immigration agency. Her tenants were all Chinese with various kinds of visas: study permits, work permits, visitors and landing permits. When she heard that Manitoba had a provincial nominee program for new immigrants, she thought moving here

might enhance her immigration business. She sold her mansion in Vancouver and moved to Winnipeg with her four years old son which was born out of wedlock.

In Winnipeg, Xinlan bought a big house with a three car garage in rich people's area. Again, she made the purchase in cash, which surprised the local real estate agent. Mei, with her good English, helped with the transaction. She was surprised at her friend's financial prowess. How could Xinlan have paid for the whole house in cash?

"That's a piece of cake," Xinlan said with a complacent smile on her face. "I just used the profit I made from selling my house in Vancouver. Houses here are much cheaper than there. My house in Vancouver sold for three times as much as this one."

I always thought Mei was wise because she always had solutions to problems when we were on the farm. But Xinlan was much more clever in making money.

Xinlan soon became our family friend. She called Mei "sister" and me "brother-in-law," and we felt as close to each other as family members. When she knew I had no full time job, she talked to me about setting up a business in Winnipeg. "Brother-in-law, let's do something together. If you work with me, you will soon pay off your mortgage."

I said to Xinlan, "I don't want to do anything. It's the last year for us to be here. Mei will complete her degree in less than a year. We'll go back to China and we'll sell this house."

"Are you kidding?" Xinlan doesn't believe it. "Sister Mei and Lida are here now. You already have a house and a car. Why are you thinking about going back to China?"

“I’m worried about my mother.” Just mentioning my mother made me worry about her. “When I was back in China last time, she had her right breast after her left breast removed because of the cancer. Her left one was sheared off fifteen years ago. I was glad that I could stay with her for the second surgery. The first one occurred when I was in Japan. At that time, I felt ashamed about not being with her. Mei, however, could be with her in hospital for about two weeks, which was a good thing because it was at her insistence that my mother get the best surgeon for the operation.”

“Oh, I see. Why don’t you have your mother come here to live with you?” Xinlan suggested.

“She’s already remarried.”

“Then have them both come here.”

“They are too old to travel such far. Besides, it’s only one more year before Mei and I go back.”

“I don’t think they are older than my parents,” Xinlan said. “You know, my parents are veteran cadres and they are over eighty years old. Ten years ago, I brought them to Canada as immigrants. Now they’re enjoying both the Chinese government pensions for veteran cadres *and* the Canadian senior’s pensions.” Xinlan seemed to be very proud of herself.

“Where are they now?” I asked, not believing what Xinlan said.

“They are back in China now, but I plan to call them over here when I get settled in Winnipeg.” Then she started complimenting me, “Brother-in-law, I know you have lots of talents. You can make good money if we do something together. Then you can have your parents come here to live with you as immigrants. By then you

won't want to go back to China even if Sister Mei wants to."

There was something in the way Xinlan spoke that attracted me. For a long time, I felt depressed about my situation and hadn't received any encouragement from anybody. Xinlan was very positive and upbeat in her outlook. *Yes, if I had a job I liked, and if my mother could live with us, why should I go back to China?* I thought. I asked Xinlan. "Tell me what business you have in mind."

"I'm thinking of setting up a Chinese frozen food company. We'll make all kinds of Chinese food: dumplings, wantons, noodles, meat buns, spring rolls, you name it."

"A frozen food company here in Winnipeg?" I was shocked. Xinlan obviously didn't know how small the Asian community was in Winnipeg. Winnipeg didn't have as many Chinese immigrants as Vancouver. "Where do you think the market is for this Chinese frozen food?"

"Here, in Winnipeg," she said utterly confident. "I'm going to look for a business property where we can have our store in the front and a factory in the back."

I had never dealt with business people before except for Zhang Hai. My university degree was in engineering and my jobs in China were with equipment and machines. I had little customer service experience. I had no confidence for managing the kind of business Xinlan wanted. I told Xinlan honestly, "I have no idea how to manage such an enterprise."

"You don't have to manage the business, I'll do it. You are just the legal person for the business."

"Legal person?" I said, surprised. "It's YOUR company. How could I be the legal person for it?" I asked Xinlan with a doubt.

“It’s OUR company, Brother-in-law,” Xinlan said with a smile. “Don’t you see? We will both be shareholders of the company.”

“But I don’t have money to invest in this business. You know that Mei and I barely manage to pay our mortgage.”

“You don’t have to invest to become a shareholder, Brother-in-law. I’ll just make you a shareholder without any investment.” Xinlan smiled while making her offers, which sounded too good to be true. “You see, I have just moved here. To register a local company, I need someone who has been a resident in Manitoba for at least a year. I need YOU to be the legal person for the company now. I need your signature on all the company documents.”

“Let me think about it,” I said to Xinlan. “I know nothing about the business, but I like your idea of having my mother come for a visit first to see whether she would like to move here or not.”

“I’m sure, she will like it here. Please talk to your mother about this as soon as possible. Before we start our business, I’ll have time to accompany her and show her around,” Xinlan made another offer with a smile. It seemed as if she had made the decision for me already.

In the evening, I told Mei about all the offers Xinlan made to me.

“It’s not a bad idea,” Mei replied, but added, “But you are no match with her when it comes to business.”

“She told me that she would do all the business stuff and I would be in charge of food production.”

“Do you think you can stay permanently in Canada with a job as a manager of a food production company?” Mei asked skeptically.

“As long as it’s honest and decent work that preserves my dignity, I’ll be OK.”

Hearing this, Mei said seriously, “Speaking of honesty and dignity, I have to remind you that Xinlan wasn’t exactly honest with her first husband. She had a love affair with her boss during her first marriage while working for the export company.”

I knew about Xinlan’s love affairs from overhearing Mei’s phone conversations with her, and I also knew that Xinlan had divorced her first husband and brought her two sons to Canada. But that was all I knew about her personal life by then.

“You know she has a son with her former husband. He’s 21 now and he’s studying Business at Waterloo University in Ontario. She has a second son who is only three years old. He’s in China staying with Xinlan’s sister at the moment. I guess when she is settled in Winnipeg, she will have her parents and that son back here.” Mei said, seeming to suggest something without coming out and saying it.

“I see,” I said, calculating the age difference of the two sons. Meanwhile I also admired Xinlan’s effort in bringing up a baby son all by herself in such a middle age. I asked Mei if the baby’s father was Xinlan’s former boss.

“Yes.” Mei confirmed.

“Then why doesn’t she sponsor the baby’s father to come to Canada?”

“Xinlan would like to do that,” Mei continued. “She has to wait until his wife dies. He is a ‘red capitalist’ with the state export company, but also a politician. If the public finds out he has a son out of wedlock, he will be dismissed from his official post as a deputy to the National People’s Congress. He has to stay in his marriage for

political reasons.”

“Oh,” I said, wondering how Xinlan could afford to raise her son alone in Canada.

“Fortunately, Xinlan has more than enough money for her stay in Canada without doing anything, because she still has a private business in China supported by the boy’s father. You know that kind of thing in China where government officials are not allowed to do business but do it under the table.” Mei was reluctant to continue with that topic, “Anyhow, Xinlan is a very capable business woman, but as for being honest, I’m not so sure.”

“Do you think her idea of setting up a Chinese food company here is tenable?” I asked.

“According to her record with the state export company, setting up this business shouldn’t be a problem. If you want to take up her offer, you can. It’s up to you.” But Mei added, “I haven’t seen her for so long and I don’t know what kind of business she has been doing here aside from her rental business in Vancouver with her big house.”

Since Mei didn’t think Xinlan’s business idea bad, I made up my mind. “If you think it’s a good idea, I’ll take her up on it.” I thought this was a good time for me to bring up the topic of inviting my mother for a visit here. “Mei, if the food company idea works out for me, I might want to stay in Canada after you graduate. The only concern I have is that my mother needs me to look after when she is old.”

“If you have a job here, we can go back often to visit her,” Mei responded.

“Of course, I can do that. But what if she becomes sick and can’t live by herself?”

I tried to lead the conversation towards the topic of my mother's possibly immigrating here.

"I'm sure Uncle Wang will take care of her."

"You know that Uncle Wang is much older than my mum. If he dies before her..."

"Why do you want to talk about your mother right now?" Mei retorted. Obviously, she wasn't keen on this topic. "We don't even know whether we will be staying permanently in Canada."

"Xinlan suggested I have my mother here for a visit so that...." I hesitated, gauging Mei's response to the invitation for my mother's visit.

She didn't follow my train of thought. "Yes, of course we can have her for a visit. But I'm very busy now and have to finish my dissertation by the end of this year."

"Xinlan offered to accompany my mother and show her around." I said immediately, thinking her offer might help to persuade Mei's invitation for my parents.

"Oh, well, that would be great," she replied positively. "Yes, if she could help during weekdays, I can then make time for your mother on the weekends."

"Xinlan also suggested that if we choose to stay in Canada, we should have my mother immigrate here so I can look after her." I looked at Mei. She was frowning.

"I have never thought about living with your mother." She replied firmly. "And quite frankly, I don't think she wants to live with us either."

"But I'm the only son. I can't leave her in China if we decide to stay in Canada."

"What?" Mei looked startled, "What do you mean STAY in Canada? Are you seriously thinking that you actually want to stay permanently in Canada if she moves here?"

“It’s possible,” I said. “But only if I have a job that I like.” I didn’t want to let on to Mei too much how appealing Xinlan’s job offer was to me. It was the first time anyone had said something to me that made me really want to stay in Canada permanently.

After Xinlan and I started doing the paper work for our business, Mei agreed to have my mother come for a visit. I called my mother, “Mei and I want you to come to Canada for a visit.” I almost shouted, leaving the phone on the speaker.

“You don’t even have a regular job there. I don’t want to add to your financial worries.”

“I do have a job.”

“Really? What kind of job?”

“Mei’s friend is going to make me a shareholder in a food company and I’ll be in charge of the food processing.”

“Oh, I see. Good for you!” My mother said on the other side of the line. “Actually, I really miss Mei and Lida. I haven’t seen them for more than three years. I know they are both busy with school. If I could visit you, I might help you with cooking. But how about Uncle Wang? I can’t leave him here for so long.”

“Tell Uncle Wang to come, too.” Mei said beside me.

In less than three months, my mother and Uncle Wang got a visa. By the time they arrived in Winnipeg, Xinlan and I had already registered our Chinese food processing business, Xin-Yang Ltd. Although it was a limited company, I didn’t own any shares.

I was listed as the company president and Xinlan the general manager. Mei was not happy about this arrangement

because it made me susceptible to liability in case any legal action was taken against the company. But I thought there was little risk of any legal problems if we undertook to do business abiding the law. According to the rules, Xinlan was not eligible to be listed as the president for a company registered in Manitoba unless she had been a resident in the province for a full year.

Our next step was to hire a skilled worker who specialized in the frozen food industry. Xinlan posted a job recruitment advertisement online: “Xin-Yang Ltd. needs a specialist in Chinese frozen food processing. Salary \$2000 per month. Anyone interested please call (204) 544-6444.”

Three weeks passed; Xinlan told me that no one suitable had applied for the position. She then took down the posting and went to an immigration law firm to help her apply a work visa for her nephew who was in China and was said to be qualified for the position. In the meantime, she also looked for a location for the company. It seemed she knew how to set up a business very well in Canada.

Xinlan came to my home often. My mother, who was now visiting, was very happy that Xinlan could take her and Uncle Wang to church, to the Chinese community centre, to visit Chinese friends, and take them to her home as well. My mother also treated Xinlan as her own daughter, “I like girls but God gave me a son. You could be my daughter.” Whenever she made dumplings and meat buns, she would call Xinlan over for dinner right away. At the very beginning, Mei felt uncomfortable having to observe this relationship with my mother and Xinlan. She was busy and Xinlan was

available, so what was wrong with that?

One day Xinlan told me that her other nephew in Vancouver would also come to Winnipeg to help with the business. I was surprised at this news. I didn't know she had relatives in Canada, asking, "How many nephews do you have in the country?"

"Two of my own, and several who I helped to come to Canada," she said.

I realized now that Xinlan had a habit of referring to people she had helped as relatives.

"When my nephew comes, we have to start our business immediately," Xinlan continued.

"But we haven't got our food specialist yet nor any equipment or even a company site. How are we going to start our business?"

"I'm going to buy a convenience store and we'll start our business from there probably in two weeks."

"A convenience store?" I was totally surprised, "What does a convenience store have to do with our frozen food business?"

"Don't worry it, Brother-in-law," Xinlan said. "We have to start small. I want to buy the convenience store as a retail outlet where we can also locate our company."

Later Xinlan showed me the site she had found and it seemed like a good location for our business. It was on one of the busy streets, near a bus stop. The convenience store was owned previously by a Korean family who lived behind the shop in an extended section of the building. Xinlan told me she would convert the extension into the food processing company. Without really consulting with me, she went ahead and

bought the property with a business together.

Two weeks after the property and business was taken over by Xinlan, a Chinese man, came to look after the business. She introduced him as Lao Lu. It seemed that Xinlan didn't know Lao Lu well because she always asked him questions such as, "What did you do before you came to Canada? What are you going to do with your daughter when she goes to university?" This seemed odd to me.

One day, Xinlan asked Lao Lu and me to go a lawyer's office to sign several documents. The lawyer didn't speak Chinese, and so Xinlan interpreted what the lawyer said to Lao Lu and me. From Xinlan's interpretation, I knew that I would have to sign all the documents as the legal person of the company. Xinlan was the manager and Lao Lu was one of the "hired staff." The following week, Xinlan told me she had completed all the legal paper work for our frozen food company. She also ordered a sign board with the company name, "Xin-Yang Ltd." We three worked for a week to get everything ready for the business to open. On the opening day, my mother, Uncle Wang, Xinlan, Lao Lu and I were all in the store. We put pictures of the God of wealth on all the doors; we also set off electronic fireworks to drive away bad luck. After all, I found we carried the same groceries as the previous owner had. There was no indication to show that this was Chinese frozen food business.

In two weeks I received a check of \$ 1,100 issued by Xinlan in the name of Xin-Yang Ltd. I was very happy and even showed the check to my mother. Now that I was making money with this company, Mei and Lida suggested that we quit delivering newspapers. So we stopped. For more than a year, I had gotten up at 5:00 o'clock to

deliver papers. Now I didn't have to get up that early any more. While my mother was visiting us and enjoying her time, I gradually started to feel that living in Canada wasn't so bad.

I expected our food processing business to begin soon. But Xinlan never mentioned anything about it. One day she showed me a written letter and asked me to sign it. I looked at it and saw that it was a job offer to Mr. Wang Liang for a position as a food industry specialist.

“Who is this Wang Liang?” I asked.

“My nephew in China, the former manager of Maomao Dumpling Company,” she handed me the pen for signing the letter.

I hesitated, “Do you actually think that with this job offer he can get a work permit in Canada?” I asked with doubt.

“Why not?” she said confidently. “Brother-in-law, we have done everything according to the immigration law: we posted the job and there was no qualified candidate for this position. With three local people in our business—you, me and Lao Lu, it's legal for us to hire one from China.”

Suddenly I realized Xinlan's motives in setting up this company, “Are you using my name as a legal person to front an immigration business?”

Xinlan said with a sly smile, “Brother-in-law, don't get excited. You helped my nephew to immigrate to Canada and I helped you with a good job. So we are even.”

I was so angry that I became speechless. My guts were churning with regrets at ever having met Xinlan.

When I talked to Mei about the false business, she said, “I had my suspicions

about Xinlan. However, as long as you stay aware of what she is doing and don't sign anything you are uncomfortable with, I think you should be alright." Then she added, "I guess that Lao Lu isn't really her nephew."

"Obviously not," I said in anger. "She just used him as a local person in our company for legal reasons. Xinlan always called him by his name, Lao Lu. I don't think they knew before. But she's hosting him as a relative because he's living with her." I added, "And I bet you that Wang Liang is not her nephew either."

One day, my mother was asked to baby sit Xinlan's son, Jason, who had a fever, and couldn't go to daycare. It was winter time. Xinlan asked my mother to stay overnight at her place so that she didn't have to pick her up for the next morning. When my mother came home the second evening, she told Mei that in the early morning, a police car came to Xinlan's door and two policemen came into the house and asked for some documents.

When Xinlan came over for dinner that night, I pointedly asked her, "My mother said policemen came over to your house last night. What was that about?"

"Brother-in-law, it was nothing," Xinlan laughed it off. "All they wanted was to confirm my relationship with Lao Lu and his status."

"Does Lao Lu have legal status in Canada?" Mei pursued.

"Yes, he does," Xinlan said indifferently.

"What did the policemen come for?"

"The policemen said that they received a call from Vancouver saying that Lao Lu had no legal status in Canada. Nothing was serious." Xinlan obviously didn't want to

talk more about it.

The rest of the evening Xinlan was subdued. When she was about to leave, Mei asked her, “Are you OK?”

She sighed and said, “There are a lot of things on my mind. Jason’s father might come at the end of this month. He’s in the States on business and visiting his children. He will go to the Canadian embassy in Washington D.C. for a Canadian visa.”

“That’s good!” Mei said. “How long has it been since you saw him last time?”

“About half a year. Before I moved to Winnipeg, I went back to China and we stayed in Yantai for about a month without his wife knowing about it. Of course, she was looking for him everywhere. She called the company, his parents, and their children in the States. Anyhow we managed to stay together during the time I was in China. Jason called him dad and he was very happy.” Saying this, Xinlan smiled. She didn’t feel shameful talking about her clandestine love affair with Jason’s father. Then she added, “The timing is bad for Jason’s father to come here for a visit. I’m worried about the implications on Lao Lu.”

“Lao Lu? What does Jason’s father’s visit have to do with him?” Mei asked.

“I helped Lao Lu to immigrate to Canada as my husband.” Xinlan confessed in a low voice.

“How silly!” Mei was angry. “So is Lao Lu your true lover? Do you really want him to be Jason’s step father?”

“No.” Xinlan replied at once. “This was strictly done for immigration purposes.”

“What? You are not even in a lover relationship with him?” Mei got further shocked. “That is sickening and moreover illegal! I hate to think how much you

charged him. No wonder the police came to investigate.” Mei paused. I could tell by the look on her face that she felt confused and frustrated with Xinlan. She said in a softer voice, “If Lao Lu isn’t your husband, then, why don’t you send him away if Jason’s father comes for a visit?”

“I can’t have him leave now,” Xinlan admitted. “The police already had their suspicions and might check again to see if we are living together as a married couple. But If Jason’s father really comes, can I have Lao Lu stay at your place temporarily?”

“I’m afraid not,” Mei responded immediately.

With Xinlan’s machinations, Wang Liang came to Canada with a work permit. He worked in the store, too. Lao Lu was asked to leave Winnipeg after Wang Liang came because he completed performing his role as a local partner in the business. He also passed the police’s investigation for his legal status in Canada. Neither Mei or I knew how much Xinlan charged Lao Lu for having his immigrant status.

The second month after Wang Liang’s arrival, Xinlan still gave me two checks, each for \$ 1,100. But she wanted me to return \$1,000 of the payment in cash. “Why?” I asked in anger. “Lao Yang, you are silly!” Xinlan no longer called me brother-in-law. “How could I afford to pay you that much for the little work you have done?” There was no smile on her face at all.

“What?” I was surprised to hear this. Since we started the business, I worked day and night. In the early morning, I had to be there getting things ready for the day; during the day I worked as a shelf stocker and cashier; twice a week Lao Lu and I had to drive to the wholesaler and bought things for the store; we worked as porters,

loading and unloading a full van each time; the store opened at 7:00 am and closed at 10:00 pm. Most of the time, I was working by myself in the store.

“Xinlan, how can you say I’ve done little work? I have done a lot.” I tried to reason with her. “You told me I wouldn’t be responsible for any of the business part of this operation. But I’ve worked in that store every day since it opened. You’re dishonest and you don’t keep your promises. In fact, you deceived me.”

“I am a deceiver. Hah! How about you? Who signed all those fake documents? If you are a decent and capable person, you wouldn’t have signed all these documents and would have found a regular job in a Canadian company. But you couldn’t. You were a loser.” She said and smiled coldly.

I was so angry I became speechless again. Mei and I had helped Xinlan buy a house in Winnipeg. She lived in our place for almost a month before she moved to her new house. And now not only had she deceived me, she was also treating me like a useless dishrag.

“Lao Yang, I came to Winnipeg to set up my business and I could have found people smarter than you to work for me that will take less pay than you. But I hired you to help you out.” She then paused to think of something. “If you want to continue to work for me, your pay is \$1,100 per month. That’s final. If you don’t like the amount, you can leave anytime.”

“I want to leave now!” I shouted. “And get me out of this fucking legal person. I don’t want to have anything with this company.”

“Alright,” she said coolly, “I’m more than happy to get you out of my company. I can take over the legal person from now on.”

I mentally calculated the date of her arrival in Winnipeg. It had been exactly one year.

The next day, we went to the lawyer to remove me as the legal person of the company. I felt released and relieved. However, I was sad that this venture had turned out so badly for me, because my hope to stay broke again. I wanted to leave Canada immediately.

Mei was going to have her defence next month. I had to calm down. Once she got her degree, we'd sell our house and take the money back home to China. Thinking about this, I felt better. When I finished all my paperwork to get out of the evil company, I felt much released. Stepping out of the lawyer's office, on my way home, I was humming an old Chinese song, "Go back home often to visit your parents."

When I got back to my place, Mei announced with excitement, "Guess what, Lao Yang, I've been offered a teaching position at the university here. And I've taken it. I am starting this position this fall. Isn't that wonderful?"

I was stunned. What could I say to that? Xinlan had cheated me; Mei had been looking for jobs behind my back; Lida wouldn't come back to China. I was a loser in Canada. I, Lao Yang, vowed I would return to China at any cost. Canada was the fairyland for children and the paradise for women. I had had enough of Canada.



The Bund, Shanghai

Jian Tang

contributors

Donna Besel loves writing of all kinds and leads workshops for students of all ages. Her work has garnered recognition from CBC Literary Awards, Great Canadian Literary Hunt, Prairie Fire, Canada Council for the Arts, Manitoba Arts Council, and Canada ReLit Awards. Her collection of short stories, *Lessons from a Nude Man*, captured fourth place spot on McNally Robinson Bookstore's 2015 bestsellers list, and nominations for Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction and Most Promising Manitoba Writer. Recently, University of Manitoba featured her in their alumni magazine and Caitlin Press published her 2018 essay in *Love Me True*, an anthology about marriage.

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Qian Wu is a postgraduate of English literature from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China. She loved writing when she was a little girl and learnt creative writing in English during her undergraduate studies in Beijing Normal University. She thinks that writing in English instead of Chinese allows her to think in a different way. She participated in the Sun Yat-sen University Writers' Residency Program in October 2018. This program invited eight international writers to share their works with Chinese students. It also offered students like her a chance to interview these excellent writers, translate their works and make friends with them. The meeting with writers such as Sally Ito from Canada, James Scudamore from Great Britain, has inspired her in creative writing and encouraged her to write her own story. This non-fiction piece, "Away from the Root" is what she wrote during the International Writers' Residence Program.

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Mosaic

an interdisciplinary critical journal

51.4 (December 2018): Living On

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