

The New Woman: May Fourth Women's Struggle for Self-Liberation

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The Story of Li Chao

Before I start my discussion, I would like to introduce the story of Li Chao. An ordinary Chinese woman whose short life span roughly covered the first two decades of this century, Li was one of the "new women" at the time who had to pay high prices in order to gain independence. Her parents died when she was a young child. She and her two elder sisters had no one to depend on but their father's concubine, who brought them up. Since there was no male child in the

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family, Li Chao's male cousin was adopted to carry on the family name, and on top of that, to inherit the family fortune, quite a copious amount. This was a common practice in China then, the reason behind it being that girls are supposed to marry into other families, while only a male child can guarantee the continuation of the family line. As she grew older Li Chao left home to Guangzhou and then to Beijing to study, but died of tuberculosis at about the age of twenty-three or four in August 1919.

Almost a classic case at the beginning of modern China, it caught the attention of the literary giant Hu Shi, who wrote a brief biography of this young woman in December 1919.^① He read through the young woman's correspondence with her friends and relatives, and discovered facts about her life that could teach old China a lesson. Hu says:

I have read these letters and felt that the life of this unknown woman who died prematurely is worth a detailed biographical study. Not only that her personal aspirations can inspire pity and admiration, but that the difficulties she had gone through may arouse the attention of the people of the whole nation who feel concerned, and thus lead to discussions among them.^②

Some facts about Li Chao's life caused much alarm in Hu Shi. She wanted to leave home to study, but was unable to gain support from her adopted brother, who was reluctant to spend money on her education.

① Hu Shi, "Li Chao zhuan" 李超傳 (Biography of Li Chao). First published in *Xinchao* 新潮 (New tide), 2. 2 (December 1919): 266-75.

② *Ibid.*, 267.

Hu discovered from the letters that the real reason why she was so eager to leave home was very likely that she hoped to escape from the marriage arranged by her adopted brother, who intended to marry her off so that he could enjoy the family property alone. At the end of his study of this young woman's brief life, Hu points out four urgent problems: first, the legitimacy of patriarchal authority; second, the question of women's education; third, women's right to inheritance; and fourth, women's position in carrying on the family line.^③

Hu Shi intentionally used Li Chao's tragic death as an example to highlight the subhuman status of Chinese women at the time. The women's liberation movement was a hotly debated topic around the turn of the century. Several magazines were especially devoted to discussing women's problems, for example, *Nubao* 女報 (Women's journal; Shanghai, first published in 1899), *Nuzi shijie* 女子世界 (Women's world; Shanghai, first published 1904), and *Zhongguo nubao* 中國女報 (Chinese women's journal; Shanghai, first published in 1907). Later journals such as *Nuquan* 女權 (Women's rights; Shanghai, first published in 1912) also enjoyed considerable popularity. Another magazine that exerted a widespread and long-term influence was *Funu zazhi* 婦女雜誌 (Women's magazine), first published by the Commercial Press in January 1915, and continuing publication until December 1931.^④ According to

^③ Ibid. , 274-75.

^④ Cf. *Zhongguo jindai qikan pianmu huilu* 中國近代期刊篇目彙錄 (Collections of article titles in modern Chinese journals; Shanghai Library, 1979), 6 vols. The titles of articles appeared in Chinese journals published between 1857 and 1918 are collected in these volumes.

the record of *Zhonghua jidu jiaohui nianjian* 中華基督教會年鑑 (Annals of Chinese Protestant Churches) in 1918, *Woman's Magazine* "was published monthly, with a circulation of more than four thousand copies for each issue."^⑤ Given the low literacy rate among women at the time, the record was quite remarkable.

A quick browsing of the titles of the articles published in those magazines will suffice to show what topics concerned people most. There were discussions about foot-binding, women's education, woman suffrage, women's right to inheritance, free love and arranged marriages, the problem of chastity, women's participation in social events, and so on. Moreover, people considered women's fate as connected with that of China as a nation. A few lines of the manifesto published in the first issue of *Women's World* read as follows:

Given that twentieth-century China is weak and on the verge of dying out, while men, who constitute half of the population are like sleep-walkers, drunkards and dying invalids, one may ask what hopes one may harbor in women. Even though that seems to be the case, it is not so. Women are mothers of the nation. If we want a new China, we must have new women. A strong China depends on strong women, while the premise a civilized China is based on is civilized womankind. There is no doubt that if one wants to save

⑤ Cf. Yuan Yung, "Zhongguo nujie baozhi zhi xiankuang" 中國女界報紙之現況 (Recent situation of Chinese women's journals), in *Annals of Chinese Protestant Churches*, no. 5 (1918): 167-69. Reprinted in 1983.

China, one must save our women first.^⑥

In this manifesto, women's liberation becomes the prerequisite to saving China. It may sound hyperbolic, but in the historical and cultural context of the time, it was not exaggeration at all. In most of the contemporary magazines, even though not those entirely devoted to the woman problem, sporadic rhetorical statements like this were a common phenomenon.

One aspect of the whole woman issue that aroused much concern was woman as a thinking and acting subject. For instance, Hu Shi delivered a speech titled "Meiguo de funü" 美國的婦女 (American women) at Beijing Girls' Normal College in September 1918. In his speech he uses American women as examples to point out that women, traditionally considered only as mothers and wives, should be independent beings who can act and think on their own like men. This topic caused much controversy. For instance, in February of 1919, Ye Shaojun published an article titled "Nüzi rengen wenti" 女子人格問題 (The problem of women's subjectivity) in the magazine *Xin chao* 新潮 (New tide). In this article he points out that for centuries women have been considered men's property, at the mercy of men's disposal. Woman in tradition was only a reproduction machine, replaceable at any time. Shao calls for a re-evaluation of woman as a person, instead of as an enslaved being.^⑦

⑥ Jin Yi, "Nüzi shijie fakanci" 女子世界發刊詞 (A few words on the publication of *Woman's world*), in *Woman's World*, no. 1 (Jan. 17, 1904). Collected in *Zhongguo funu yundong lishi ziliao* 中國婦女運動歷史資料 (Document on the history of Chinese women's movement; Beijing: Zhongguo Funü Chubanshe, 1991), 289.

⑦ Ye Shaojun, "Nüzi rengen wenti," in *New Tide*, 1. 2 (Feb. 1919): 252-259.

Another topic that's worth mentioning is the question of chastity. In May of 1918 Zhou Zuoren published in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (New youth) the translation of an article on chastity written by the Japanese poetess and feminist Yosano Akiko (1878-1942). The article argues that chastity should not be a concept used to control women alone. It has nothing to do with virtue, and it is certainly not confined to marriage.^⑧ This article triggered Hu Shi to write "Zhencao wenti" 貞操問題 (The problem of chastity) in July of the same year, in which he chastises the old Chinese custom of encouraging women to commit suicide for their dead husbands (and even fiancés). He maintains that chastity should be applied to both man and woman; a widow has the right to remarry; and a woman has no obligation to keep her chastity if her husband is unfaithful.^⑨ The problem of chastity continued to be discussed for years to come. During the late twenties the magazine titled *Xin nüxing* 新女性 (The new woman), published from January 1926 to December 1929, still elaborated on the issue. In May 1927 four articles were devoted to the topic, with Yosano Akiko's name and ideas mentioned repeatedly.^⑩

⑧ Zhou Zuoren, trans., "Zhencao lun" 貞操論 (On chastity), in *New youth*, 4.5 (May 1918): 386-394. According to Zhou, Yosano Akiko's article titled "Chastity is Nobler Than and above Virtue" originally appeared in *Man and Being a Woman* in November 1915.

⑨ Hu Shi, "The problem of chastity," in *New Youth*, 5. 1 (July 1918): 5-14.

⑩ See Huang Shi, "Lianai zatan" 戀愛雜談 (Random talks on love); Qian Di, "Lianai zhencao xinlun" 戀愛貞操新論 (New views on the chastity of love); Jian Po, "Bihuan 'Lianai zhencao xinlun zhe' de shengming" 璧還「戀愛貞 (續下頁)

For decades, the concept of “the new woman” was beginning to take shape in people’s mind. *The New Woman* devoted a great deal of its space to discussions of problems about female sexuality and sex education, topics that had been considered taboo for centuries. The issue of January 1927 saw a translation of the famous American anarchist and leader of women’s liberation movement Emma Goldman’s “Marriage and Love,” an article advocating free love at the expense of marriage. The end of the article reads: “If the world is ever to give birth to true companionship and oneness, not marriage, but love will be the parent.”^⑩ In March and April 1927 a translation of her biography was published, which, in Pietro Gori’s words, calls her a “moral power, a woman who, with the vision of a sibyl, prophesies the coming of a new kingdom for the oppressed; a woman who, with logic and deep earnestness, analyses the ills of society, and portrays, with artist touch, the coming dawn of humanity, founded on equality, brotherhood, and liberty.”^⑪

Another magazine that concentrated on similar issues was Zhang

操新論者」的聲明 (A reply to the author of “New Views on the Chastity of Love); Zhang Xichen, “Wuo de lianai zhencao guan” 我的戀愛貞操觀 (My views on the chastity of love), in *The New Woman*, 2. 5 (May 1927): 511-23; 525-31; 531-33; 533-41.

⑩ Jian Po, trans., “Hunin yu lianai” 婚姻與戀愛, in *The New Woman*, 2. 1: (Jan. 1927): 81-92. For the original see Emma Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 1917 (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 227-39.

⑪ Jian Po, trans., “Aima Gaodeman zhuan” 愛瑪高德曼傳, in *The New Woman*, 2. 3-4 (March-April 1927): 269-84; 429-446. For the original, see Hippolyte Havel, “Biographic Sketch,” in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 1-40.

Jingsheng's *Xin wenhua* 新文化 (New culture), with a circulation of more than twenty thousand copies, ^⑬ which was banned after six issues (from January to Oct. 1927) for publishing unduly "erotic" articles. A few samples of the titles found in *New Culture* will show how "advanced" it was about the problem of sexuality:

No. 1, pp. 42-5 (Jan.): "Ruhe dedao xinniāng meimiao de jianshang yu qi huanxin" 如何得到新娘美妙的鑒賞與其歡心 (How to gain the bride's delicious appreciation and delight)

No. 4, pp. 129-30 (May): "Luoti yu mianchi" 裸體與免恥 (Nakedness and shamelessness)

No. 5, pp. 1-7 (July): "Jizhong aiqing de shiyan" 幾種愛情的實驗 (A few experiments with love)

The first and second issues of *New Culture* talked about women's inheritance right. Famous anarchists like Wu Zhihui and Zhang Ji offered their opinions supporting the cause, while the renowned educator Cai Yuanpei also gave his ideas. The sixth issue of *New Culture* saw an article titled "Xin funü yu xin Zhongguo" 新婦女與新中國 (New women and a new China), in which the author maintains that only new women, liberated from traditional bondage of their body, can build a new China. According to him, the premise on which a new China can be built is the demolishing of religion and decorum so that the freedom of woman's body can be recovered. Of course, the freedom of body

^⑬ Cf. Chen Shuyu, "Xing boshi' chuanqi--pingxin lun Zhang Jingsheng" 「性博士」傳奇—平心論張競生 (The legend of "Dr. Sex"—A fair view of Zhang Jingsheng), in *Lianhe wenxue* 聯合文學 (Unitas), 7. 4 (April 1992): 64-79.

implies many things here, such as liberated sexuality, freedom of movement away from the homestead, engagement in social activities, and so on. ⑭

A sensational success in the market, *New Culture* immediately became the target of satire by other similar magazines. It would be interesting to know how *The New Woman* and *New Culture*, two magazines in fact advocating the same cause, carried on heated debates over some of the articles each published. For instance, *New Culture* features a special column called "Sex Education." Zhang Jingsheng wrote most of the articles for that column, inventing terms such as "the third kind of water," ⑮ meaning female fluids released during orgasm, and "stomach-breathing method" to cultivate sexual power. This triggered Zhou Jianren to publish in *The New Woman* an article, titled "The crisis of the sex education movement," to debunk his theories. ⑯ According to Zhou, they are "unscientific," more misleading than illuminating. He foresees a crisis of sex education as a result of self-named experts like Zhang Jingsheng, who uses "daoist" methods to lead people astray. The

⑭ Wei Zhong, "New Women and a New China," in *New Culture*, no. 6 (Oct. 1927), 15-25. Originally a lecture given at Beijing Girls' University.

⑮ See Zhang Jingsheng, "Di san zhong shuei yu luanzhu ji shengji de dian he youzhong de guanxi" 第三種水與卵珠及生機的電和優種的關係 (The relationship between the third kind of water and ova, vital electricity, and eugenics), in *New Culture*, 1. 2 (Feb. 1927): 23-48. For a discussion of Zhang's theory of "the third kind of water" see Peng Hsiao-yen, *Chaoyue xiehi* 超越寫實 (Beyond realism; Taipei: Lianjing Chuban Gongsu, 1993), 126-9.

⑯ Zhou Jianren, "Xingjiaoyu yundong de weiwei" 性教育運動的危機, in *Xin Nüxing*, 2. 2 (Feb. 1927): 135-39.

editor-in-chief of *The New Woman* Zhang Xichen also wrote articles to ridicule Zhang Jingsheng's "daoist concoctions" and encouraging "carnal pleasures."¹⁷ Zhang Jingsheng, furious, retaliated by calling Zhou Jianren a "literary gangster," and told Zhang Xichen to mind his own business.¹⁸

The above quick summary is only a sampling of the dynamic scene created by the great varieties of discourse on women's liberation and sexuality at the time. If one just thumbs through magazines concerning these issues, one may be surprised to find how vehemently contemporaries debated such problems. Emerging in such a cultural milieu, modern Chinese women writers no doubt developed in their writings characteristics that reflected the imprint of their times: the outcry for emancipation, female sexual awakening, the longing for self-improvement, economic independence, and so on. In the following I will try to show how three women writers in the twenties managed to voice all these desires in their works: Bai Wei, Lu Yin, and Feng Yuanjun. At the peak of their writing careers they aroused as much attention as Bing

¹⁷ Zhang Xichen, "Xinnüxing yu xing de yanjiu" 新女性與性的研究 (*The new woman and the study of sexuality*), in *The New Woman*, 2. 3 (March 1927): 237-41.

¹⁸ See Zhang Jingsheng, "Kan bujin de shanghai wenmangtou yu lubao ji Zhou Jianren" 砍不盡的上海文棍頭與濾胞及周建人 (A Shanghai literary gangster's heads that cannot be completely chopped off, follicles, and Zhou Jianren), and "mian Xin nüxing bianzhe Zhang xichen jun" 勉新女性編者章錫琛君 (Exhorting Mr. Zhang Xichen, the editor-in-chief of *The new woman*), in *New culture*, 1. 4 (May 1927): 123-25; 135-36. Actually Zhang Jingsheng himself invited the attacks by publishing in the first issue of *New Culture* an article by Ms. Lina, "Meikuang yuxia de Xin nüxing" 每況愈下的「新女性」 (*The new woman that is getting worse and worse*), 116-17.

Xin and Ding Ling. Yet somehow for some reason or other, they were forgotten with the lapse of time. After more than half a century, it is time to resurrect these three writers who were among the pioneers of women's liberation movement. The narrative modes they chose to write in, the themes they were concerned about, and the language they used manifest that they were eager to break the bondage that had suppressed women's voices as well as their bodies for ages. Although I by no means pretend to be their biographer, some facts in their lives will be discussed, because their lives, like their writings, did exemplify a generation of women who were fighting for self-liberation.

Women and Self-Narration: A Struggle for Liberation

The critic Chen Pingyuan points out that May Fourth writers' main achievements lie in the first-person narrative technique that they learned from the West. Starting with Lu Xun's "kuangren riji" 狂人日記 (The diary of a madman, 1918), many an imitation followed, while May Fourth generation, writers and readers alike, considered the diary and the epistolary story as the two narrative forms that were most congenial to their temperament.^⑩ That the emergence of first-person narrative marked the beginning of May Fourth fiction can be accepted as a given. But what kind of temperament are we referring to which triggered the flowering of this narrative form in modern China? Chen says in his

^⑩ Chen Pingyuan, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo xushi moshi de zhuanbian* 中國小說敘事模式的轉變 (The Metamorphosis of narrative forms in Chinese fiction; Taipei: Jiuda Wenhua Co. Limited, 1990), chapter 3.

illuminating book:

Even though the diary and the epistolary story were no longer popular after the thirties, it cannot be denied that those two narrative forms prevailed during the May Fourth period, and that they are still attractive to today's reader. It is not because of the artistic excellence they demonstrate, but due to the burning emotions and sincere pains naturally revealed in the stories.^⑳

Chen's statement is certainly true to some extent. It may explain why readers have loved those stories. But why did so many May Fourth writers choose to write in first-person narrative, especially during the beginning of their careers? It is due to not only "the burning emotions and sincere pains naturally revealed in the stories," but, according to Chen, the liberation of "selfhood" set off by the May Fourth Movement. He says that first-person narrative "broke down the old artistic paradigms and provided the best artistic means of fully revealing personality and expressing selfhood."^㉑

If male writers like Yu Dafu embraced first-person narrative as an effective way of self-expression, female writers at that time, whose selfhood and identity as independent persons as women as well as narrating subjects had been consistently denied up to pre-modern times, had more reasons to do so. Female writers, in Susan Suleiman's terms, "had to discover and reappropriate themselves as subjects" in order to transform their traditional status as "the objects of male theorizing,

^⑳ Ibid., 89.

^㉑ Ibid., 96.

male fears and male representation.”²² It is no surprise that most female writers who emerged in China during the first three or four decades of this century deliberately asserted themselves as the narrators of their own stories.

The case of Bai Wei (1894–198?), a woman writer who wrote more than twenty plays before 1949, is an illuminating example. She explains in an autobiographical story why she chose to become a writer in her early twenties.²³ As a child her parents deny her the chance of learning to read and write, while her mother teaches her nothing but sewing and embroidery, chores that are considered fit for women to do. It is after her strong protest and petition that the girl, at the age of thirteen, is allowed to enter the school run by her father. But her school education has to stop when she is forced to marry a man of her father’s choice. Frequently beaten up and almost tortured to death at her husband’s home, she is unable to gain her father’s permission for a divorce. To save her own life, she runs away and leaves for Japan to

²² See Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, 1986). Although Suleiman is discussing the status of women in the West, her insight is applicable to that of women in China. For a discussion of the “the emergence of women as speaking subjects” in modern China, see Lydia He Liu, “Saying ‘I’ as a woman” in her “The Poetics of First-Person Narrative in Modern Chinese Fiction,” Harvard University diss., 1990, 119–22.

²³ See Bai Wei, “Wuo toudao wenxuequan li de chuzhong” 我投到文學圈裡的初衷 (My original intention of entering the literary circle), in *Bai Wei zuopin xuan* 白薇作品選 (Selected works of Bai Wei; Hunan: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1985), 1–12. The story was originally published in 1934 by Shenghuo Chubanshe in Shanghai.

study. Suffering from poverty in a foreign land, she is in extreme pain when she thinks of her father's cruelty in denying her any assistance. While narrating her story, she questions her own fate and the patriarchal society that in her mind is the cause of her suffering. She remembers how in a moment of anger she cries out for the need of "a weapon" to attack human society:

I needed a weapon such as a scalpel or a microscope, but one that dissects and examines human society! I wanted that weapon to carve out all my pains, all human sufferings, especially the sorrows of the oppressed! At the same time I wanted to use that weapon to expose the sins of the oppressors, and to challenge to some degree the powerful noble class. ②④

The "weapon" she has in mind turns out to be literature. She cries out in her heart, "I want a weapon to declare war! I want to learn literature, to study literature!" ②⑤ In her narration, she shifts back and forth between retrospection on her past experiences and the analysis of those experiences at the narrating moment. When telling her past story and trying to find meaning in it at the same time, light begins to shine upon the dark side of her memories, and she is able to attribute the cause of her fate to two factors: the evil of the old patriarchal system and the sin of the monetary power. The following statement deliberately separates her narrating self from her experiencing self: "From the poor weakling of the past that I recall I have become my present self, ready to declare

②④ Ibid., 5.

②⑤ Ibid., 9.

war against the old system and the monetary power!"²⁶ The first book that initiates her into the world of literature is Ibsen's *Nora, ein Puppenheim* (1890), a play that inspired numerous May Fourth writers.

Lu Xun wrote an article entitled "What Happens after Nora Leaves."²⁷ He envisions all kinds of problems that Nora may run into, especially economic problems, after she leaves her husband's home and ends her unhappy married life. Bai Wei, in a like mind, wrote a novel entitled "Beiju shengya" 悲劇生涯 (*A tragic life*, 1936) to describe a Chinese Nora's struggle for existence after she leaves her husband's house. Written in the third person, the story is autobiographical to a great degree. Bai Wei declares in the preface to the story, "In this old, dying society, an evil society which is deep-rootedly male-centered, women have no identity." Picking up the pen to write a story, she is asserting her own identity in a sense. The "Nora" in her story, a mirror of herself, "has a blood-red, burning heart that keeps her moving upward. She fights against all the obstacles that bog her down as well as impede social development. She will fight to the last moment!"²⁸

As a new woman in China's revolutionary period, Bai Wai was

²⁶ Ibid. For the distinction between "the narrating self" and "the experiencing self," see Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (New Jersey: Princeton U. P., 1978), chapter 4.

²⁷ "Nora zouhou zenyang" 娜拉走後怎樣 (What happens after Nora leaves). Originally a talk delivered at Beijing Girls' Normal College on December 26, 1923. Published in *Woman's Magazine* in August 1924. Collected in *Lu Xun Quanjī*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1989), 158-65.

²⁸ *Selected Works of Bai Wei*, 16.

certainly aware of the call of the times and actively participated, by way of writing, in the revolutionary discourse. Her novel *Zhadan yu zhengniao* 炸彈與征鳥 (Bombs and fighter-bombers, 1929) describes revolutionary women who struggle to break the traditional bondage and pursue free love. The combination of love, sex, and revolution in the story does not distinguish it from the numerous similar works produced in the May Fourth period. One play written by Bai Wei deserves our special attention, though. *Dachu yiuling ta* 打出幽靈塔 (Breaking out of the dead souls' tower, 1928) is about a woman who rebels against her capitalist husband and feels incestuous love towards her step-son, who is in love with his adopted sister. Not only is the capitalist a tyrant towards the workers, but he is a rapist. At least three women in the play are the victims of his sexual violence: his wife, who is seeking a divorce through the help of a woman social worker; his adopted daughter, whose identity as his illegitimate daughter is disclosed to him before she kills him in the end; and the woman social worker, who is his illegitimate daughter's mother. Incestuous relationships, the insanity of the adopted daughter, and parricide, in addition to the numerous deaths on the stage, contribute to make the tragedy one of the most Senecan thrillers in the May Fourth period. The ending scene of the play, in which the mother reveals her identity to the dying daughter in her arms, highlights the revolutionary message of the play: women share the same destiny, and their only chance of independence is getting rid of the tyrannical patriarch. What is more disconcerting is the daughter's temporary insanity as a result of her trauma. When Cao

Yu wrote *Leiyu* 雷雨 (Thunderstorm, 1933-4), a much more famous play, *Breaking out of the Dead Souls' Tower* must have been a source of influence. Why the latter has long been neglected is an issue worth looking into in literary history.

For Bai Wei, being able to write her own story is equal to finding a new existence; her "present self," though suffering from illness and poverty, triumphs, so to speak, because with her pen she has boldly declared war against the society that has long prevented women to consider themselves as independent individuals. Another woman writer Lu Yin (1899-1934) also uses the autobiography form to tell the story of how she became an author.²⁹ It is likewise an unhappy life and the suffering from suppressed personality that drive her to resort to writing. Born on the same day her maternal grandmother dies, she is considered a bad omen by her superstitious mother. Her mother sends her away to be raised by a nurse, and does not allow her to be brought back to her parents' house until she is three years old. A whimpering child, she is disliked by her parents. Once when the family are traveling aboard a ship, her father, preoccupied with some business, is angered by her ceaseless crying and makes a move to throw her into the river. Fortunately a servant who happens to be on the spot catches her in his arms and saves her.³⁰

One may wonder how it is possible for a person to remember

²⁹ *Lu Yin zi zhuan* 廬隱自傳 (Lu Yin's autobiography; Shanghai: Diyi Chubanshe, 1934). Quotations are from this text.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

things that happen at such an early age as three years old. A self-conscious narrator, Lu Yn explains it in this way:

Since I was only three years old then, of course I do not remember that incident clearly. But later as I grew older I learned about the whole thing when I overheard Mother and my aunts mention it in passing. It undoubtedly incited in me sorrowful emotions. It would have been as well if I had been drowned in that river. See what happens now. After struggling painfully on the voyage of life, one still cannot escape the fate of death in the end—Since I began to wear that gray pair of glasses, life has become so meaningless to me and I have adopted a passive attitude since then.^①

The distancing effect between the narrating and experiencing self is distinctively highlighted in this passage, where the narrating self tries to find the determining factor in her childhood that helps shape her present personality. The discovery of her father's cruelty towards her at the age of three has completely changed her views on life, as if she were looking out on life through a "gray pair of glasses."

Her father dies when she is six, and the family moves to her mother's brother's house. An untoward child reluctant to learn to read and write, she is still disliked and maltreated by the family. At the age of nine she is sent to a boarding school run by a church. It is a school that take in children of the proletarian class, and Lu Yin suffers from hard labor and malnutrition there. Religion provides her with temporary

^① Ibid., 4.

consolation, although when she goes home for holidays she is mocked by her brothers and cousins while trying to tell them about the garden of Eden.

The turning point comes when at thirteen she passes the entrance examinations to Girls' Normal College. There she forms close bonds with some fellow students, while her mother begins to like her better. The crucial event during her college years is that she becomes addicted to novels. An avid reader, she browses through at an incredible speed all kinds of fiction that she can lay her hands on. Her cousin, who has moved from another province to live with the family, lends her a popular novel *Yu li hun* 玉梨魂, a story about a girl who struggles for self-liberation in love but ironically chooses to conform to the traditional solution in the end. And as a result Lu Yin becomes engaged to her cousin due to their common liking for literature.^②

But Lu Yin still has a long way to go from reading fiction to becoming a writer herself. After graduation, she teaches school for a year, dislikes the job, and finally becomes a university student. It is a time when constant civil wars and foreign invasions beset China. She is active in student movements, and is elected the editor-in-chief of a magazine. Her fiancé, ready to get married, writes her about the issue and advises her not to "run wild outdoors from morning till night."^③ A transformed woman eager to lead a new life, she begins to fear that a marriage with such a conservative man would suffocate her. She

② Ibid., 42.

③ Ibid., 65.

writes him, informing him of her thoughts about life and society, and telling him that she has been reading books about anarchism. Dealing with a determined woman like her, he has no choice but consent to break the engagement.

Lu Yin's story is a typical case in which a Chinese woman at the beginning of this century looked toward self-improvement and self-liberation. She joins a secret society called "Social Reform," and is introduced to books on socialism. During her university years she also begins to write stories. Despite the discouragement and ridicule from the people around her, she is headstrong and manages to publish stories in magazines and newspapers. But she still feels the social restraints imposed on women, and she "dared not cry out for breaking the constraints of *lijiao* 禮教 (social decorum)." It is in the short story "Nüren de xin" 女人的心 (A woman's heart, 1933) that she manages to do so. She says in her autobiography:

...In my recent story "A woman's heart" I daringly cried out the slogans for shattering constraints. I daringly opposed the old social system, and I even daringly denied the idea of chastity that is imposed on women only.

But this was not enough. I was trying hard not only to be the mouthpiece of the people of my own class, but to lead a deeper life from now on and to voice the dissatisfaction of all classes. I began to build up my whole concept of ideal.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., 97-8.

Written in the first person, the above passages convey the yearning, or even the determination, of a woman writer who senses a new challenge in her literary career, and is ready with all her mind to meet that challenge. "A Woman's Heart" tells about a woman who suffers from an arranged marriage and later has the courage to end her unhappy married life in order to pursue the man of her own choice.³⁵ It may sound an ordinary story to us today, yet for Lu Yin's generation it stood for something "daring," an outright rebellion against a tradition that had long bound women to their unfair fate.

According to Lu Yin herself, this change of attitude in her occurs because of Li Weijian, a man she has met and has fallen in love with.³⁶ He is "a brave man thoroughly belonging to the new age. In his mind there was no residual poison of feudalistic thinking, while nothing was taboo."³⁷ The two become companions in literary career as well as in life. Together they publish a volume of love letters, real love letters that they have written each other.³⁸ According to Lu Yin, the publication

³⁵ Collected in *Lu Yin ji wai ji* 廬隱集外集 (Beijing: Shumu Wenxian Chubanshe, 1989).

³⁶ In 1923 Lu Yin married Guo Mengliang, who already had a wife, and then became a widow in 1925. In 1928 she met Li Weijian (1907-1981), whom she married in 1930. Cf. Yan Chunde et al., ed., *Zhongguo xiandai nüzuojia* 中國現代女作家 (Modern Chinese women writers; Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), 253-80.

³⁷ *Lu Yin's Autobiography*, 96.

³⁸ The book is entitled *Yunou qingshu ji* 雲鷗情書集 (Collection of love letters by Cloud and Sea Gull; Shanghai: Shenzhou Guoguang Faxingsuo, 1931). Fourth edition, 1932.

of this collection of letters is a landmark in her career, launching her into a new direction in writing. She says:

*This was a collection of real love letters, among which not one entry, not one sentence, not even one word was fabricated. When we wrote those letters we were also doing genuine self-analysis. In those letters it can be seen that I was no longer stubbornly entrapped in my sorrows. I wanted to rebuild my life; I wanted to lead a new direction in life. With such a determination, whatever social decorum and ridicule from society were shattered to pieces by my hand.*³⁹

To borrow Lu Yin's own term, we may as well say that her autobiography is marked by passages of "self-analysis" that lay out before the reader how she turns from a naive reader to a novice in literary practice, and then to a sophisticated writer who is conscious of her own purposes in writing. She goes so far as to divide her writing career into three stages: sorrowful period, period of change, and period of new dimension. According to her, her first collection of stories *Haibin guren* 海濱故人 (Old acquaintances by the seaside, 1925)⁴⁰ belongs to the sorrowful period, *Collection of Love Letters by Cloud and Sea Gull* (1931) belongs to the period of change, and "A Woman's Heart" (1933) belongs to the period of new dimension. Only a self-conscious writer would be capable of such self-analysis. Being analyzed at the narrating moment, the past experience that has long been confusion becomes

³⁹ Lu Yin's *Autobiography*, 97.

⁴⁰ *Old Acquaintances by the Seaside* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1925).

cleared up. The result is a better self-understanding.

"Old Acquaintances by the Seaside," though written in the third person, is autobiographical in content. Among the five girls who form the bond of sisterhood in the story, Lusha is Lu Yin's alter ego. What deserves our attention is the nostalgia for the past mingled with the insecurity resulted from the uncertainty of the future. The "present," when the girls study in the same school, is only a transient period that will become the past very soon. As we read along, we find the flux of narrative time moving so incoherently that we can no longer distinguish the sequence of the story time. The only unchangeable memory left is that of their sisterhood, a utopia where they enjoy being called "infatuated lovers" and where they can harbor the thought of an "ideal life." Falling in love (with a married or a single man) and marriage (with or without love) bring about harsh realities. Among the most difficult part is how to shift from adolescent love for the same sex, which is not necessarily lesbianism, to the adult love for the opposite sex. Love for the same sex, if it is not lesbianism, is certainly free from the anxieties that may result from heterosexual love. All the five girls experience the difficulties of the transition from adolescence to womanhood, sexuality being part of the main problems involved in the process. Within the story, the numerous accounts of each's "sentimental journey," in the form of dialogues, letters, and flashbacks, form an intricate web of narrative configuration that defies analysis. One gets the feeling that the undefinable narrative maze of the story is a reflection of the author's own perturbed mind. Lu Yin's adolescent

bond with schoolmates like Shi Pingmei and Feng Yuanjun is no doubt echoed in the story.

In the above I have discussed two women writers who use the first-person technique to tell their own stories of becoming authors. Becoming an author means for them not only being able to write stories and books, but also being the “author” of their own lives. Writing, self-expression, and self-growth become synonyms in a sense. Being an author opens up the possibility of controlling one’s directions in life, and of divulging in writing one’s joys and sorrows while struggling for existence. The effect is the combination of asserting one’s identity and of catharsis.

The epistolary form, also a first-person mode of writing favored by the May Fourth literati, has a similar effect for women writers. Lu Yin wrote during her “sorrowful period” an epistolary story titled “Huoren de bei’ai” 或人的悲哀 (Perhaps the sorrows of being a person, 1922).^⑪ The story consists of letters written by a girl named Yaxia to her friend addressed as K. Y., who is no doubt her close girl friend. Letters written by K. Y. are never witnessed by readers but reported in Yaxia’s letters, therefore we know that an exchange of epistles is going on. What we see in Yaxia’s letters is the self-description of the inner life of a girl tormented by physical illness and depression. Yaxia suffers from insomnia and a cardiac disease. Most of the time she is bedridden, doing nothing but writing her friend about what goes on on

^⑪ First published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 (Short story monthly), 13. 12 (Dec. 1922). Collected in *Old Acquaintances by the Seaside*, 66–89. Subsequent citations from this story refer to the latter text.

her mind. She complains to her friend about her illness: "There is probably no hope for my disease to be cured." There are also reminiscences of the times when K. Y. and other friends visited her. Always soul-searching, she recalls how she has decided to adopt the attitude of "playing roles in life" because of what K. Y. says to her during one of her visits: "How can life have meaning! All is nothing but acting in a play. Who doesn't wear heavy make-up and a mask on the stage?" (p. 66). Then Yaxia remembers what K. Y. says later during the same visit: "Meisheng and Zhaoren became engaged and then disengaged again. This may just as well tell us the fact that life is a play, while even love that seems to be holy is undependable." (Ibid)

Yaxia tells her friend that it is her remarks that have made her change her attitude toward life. She says:

Since that day I have completely changed my attitude. I have put away my former habit of careful deliberation, and have done nothing but let myself go—like a boat without destination, drifting in the sea. Whatever difficulties I have met, I always let my natural sentiments guide me. Joy, anger, laughter and vituperation are no longer pent-up emotions.^⑫

Like a Proustian narrator, she distances her narrating self from her experiencing self, while trying to find what influence her past experiences have exerted on her present self and how they shaped her character. Yet unlike Proust, who engages in the retrospective act without

^⑫ Ibid., 69.

communicating his thoughts to anyone, our narrator here has a narratee—someone to tell her story to. Although the narratee is always silent, a dialogue seems to be taking place. Indicators abound that there is frequent contact between the letter writer and her friend, for instance: “After you left the day before yesterday, I sat alone at the window in front of the rose bushes”; (p. 67) “I am planning to move into the Hospital for Women and Children tomorrow, therefore send your future letters to room number 15 of the second floor there”; (p. 69) and “I hope you can come tomorrow, because I plan to take the early train the day after tomorrow to Tianjin...”⁴³ Statements like these are intended to make us believe that the letters we read are “real” letters.

Similar to most narrators in first-person narrative, Yaxia is melancholy, her mood easily alternating between elation and depression. When upon her brother's invitation she travels in Japan and meets with a “socialist” who is under police surveillance, she becomes so indignant that, she writes, she would “blow open the hearts of the evil guys who interfere with my holy freedom” if she had a gun in her hand then.⁴⁴ When she hears the sick groaning and whimpering in the hospital, she immediately becomes dejected, while the thought of death occupies her mind. She envisions death as a garden that can relieve pain: “These few days whenever I close my eyes, there appears a beautiful garden—a garden built by vision stands in front of me, much more beautiful than anywhere on earth. Now I only long for death. It

⁴³ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 77.

seems death is happier than life!"^{④⑤} Upon learning the news that one of her suitors has died of a broken heart because of her rejection of his love, she loses the will to live and even vomits blood.

Yaxia's last letter to K. Y. ends with her mental preparation for committing suicide. She is staying in her aunt's house near a lake, and it is late at night:

Tonight they were all asleep... Hasn't death arrived? I could hardly wait! At that moment I tried hard to climb down from my bed. My two legs were trembling in such a way that I was shocked. Just then a shaft of cold light penetrated in from outside the window. On the surface of the lake the silvery light was glistening. I knew that the crimson coral bed at the bottom of the lake was already prepared for me...^{④⑥}

It may seem strange that a person before committing suicide would have the heart to describe in such detail what she sees and feels. Even if we explain it as a dying person writing her last will and bidding farewell to her acquaintances, still it leaves some doubt as to the possibility. In a postscript attached to Yaxia's last letter to K. Y., Yaxia's cousin concludes the story this way: "My cousin jumped into the lake and died sometime last night... All her belongings have been packed and given to my aunt to take back home. There is a little book titled *The Mystery of Life*, on which it is written that it is meant for you as a souvenir. I am now mailing it to you..." (Ibid)

^{④⑤} Ibid., 78.

^{④⑥} Ibid., 89.

By committing suicide Yaxia ends her young life. One of her character traits is worth our attention: during her lifetime she stubbornly rejects love of the opposite sex, probably because she feels that she will never recover from her illness, or because she thinks that love between man and woman is selfish. Once she becomes very indignant because two men vying for her love behave in an uncivil manner towards each other. Is there any connection between her aversion to love between man and woman and her death wish? This is a mystery that will be hard to solve.

In *Collection of Love Letters by Cloud and Sea Gull* we find a different kind of epistolary story. As Lu Yin puts it herself, “self-analysis” or self-expression is the essence of her and her lover’s collaborative collection of billets-doux. She calls herself Cold Sea Gull in the letters, and her lover is called Strange Cloud. While exchanging their love for each other, the lovers indulge in exposing their secret thoughts in detail. Cold Sea Gull, a self-tormented soul, reaches out to her lover as if he were someone who might save her from the pit of suffering and lead her to “a bright future.”^④ Always indulging in self-pity and depressions of which the exact cause cannot be pinpointed, she writes as her moods direct her—sometimes flying high and full of eulogy for the “bright future” that in her mind is awaiting her and her lover, sometimes sinking to such a low ebb that she dallies with suicidal thoughts. She clings to her lover the way a drowning person grabs at a

④ In *Collection of Love Letters by Cloud and Sea Gull*, 85. Subsequent citations from the story appear in this text.

floating piece of wood. In letter 31 she describes a vision verging on religious meaning:

I am exactly like a drowning person surrounded by the rough seas on all sides, my eyes dazzled, my ears deaf, my heart leaping. At the nick of time, suddenly a leaf of Bo tree floats over on the surface of the sea, with you riding on it. Quietly you arrive at my side, saying tenderly: "Poor soul, come! I will take you to another world." I lift up my head in surprise. When I see clearly that it is you, I begin to fear and tremble. I dare not climb unto the leaf. I know that the sufferings on my shoulders are too heavy, and how is your leaf able to carry them? If unfortunately even you are dragged down into this boundless sea of suffering, how can I bear it?...^{④8}

Here her lover is likened to Buddha, riding on a leaf of Bo tree to rescue her from the sea of suffering. To Strange Cloud, the woman also gives him a new birth: "Cold Sea Gull, you have given me new life, pushing me into a deeper level of life. How can I ever repay you?"^{④9} For the lovers their love is holy, bringing life to death. Or, in psychoanalytical terms, love is the force that constantly fights against the death instinct. As Herbert Marcuse says in *Eros and Civilization*: "[T]he death instinct becomes Eros' partner in its own right in the primary instinctual structure, and the perpetual struggle between the two

^{④8} Ibid., 73.

^{④9} Ibid., 118.

constitutes the primary dynamic.”^⑩

For Lu Yin, this kind of exposé of their “real love letters” is something to be proud of, almost equal to the declaration of a new life found. When we examine in detail Cold Sea Gull’s letters, we can see that they do convey the ideal of “creating a new world.” She writes in letter 22:

Strange Cloud,

Originally I was determined to play my role in life. Be it sorrows, joys, separations, reunions, sweetness, sourness, or bitterness, I wanted to taste all alike. Some say this world is too complicated, and yet I detest its monotony. I am willing to use the force of all my life to create a polyphonic, harmonious world. I am willing to be the person who sacrifices herself to make that wish come true. I yearn to be always the protagonist in a tragedy...^⑪

It is the disdain of the present world that triggers the wish to create a new sphere in which the lovers find their freedom of movement. She says in an outburst of emotion: “Oh, from now on I will be like a lonely wild goose in the high sky, never hoping to perch on the trees in this world. This world can of course forsake me, while I should also learn to forsake this world.”^⑫ In letter 49, she again tells Strange

^⑩ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 28.

^⑪ *Collection of Love Letters by Cloud and Sea Gull*, 50-1.

^⑫ *Ibid.*, 53.

Cloud: "Paradise on earth is being built now."⁵³ Her lover, in a like mood, echoes her longing for creating a unique world for themselves. He says in letter 30:

*Now I have already created a mysterious world in this life. I do not hope for an afterlife, religion, ghosts or gods, because what I own now has surpassed everything, more wonderful than anything. I believe that I am wisdom itself, a kind of absolute wisdom, while you are the source of my wisdom...*⁵⁴

He says near the end of that letter: "Let us create a doctrine that combines both soul and flesh. In other words, let's build a world of peace."⁵⁵ The lovers are not resorting to logic to converse with each other; love has its own logic that defies explication.

The struggle against the death instinct, disdain for the mundane world, and the wishful thinking of creating a "paradise on earth" constitute the content of *Collection of love letters by Cloud and Sea Gull*. The epistolary form in Lu Yin's hand becomes an efficient vehicle for conveying the ups and downs of emotions. She was also good at the diary, another first-person narrative mode that is appropriate for self-expression. *Lishi de riji* 麗石的日記 (Lishi's diary, 1923)⁵⁶ is a story of a girl who dies young. There is an unidentified narrator, presumably Lishi's close friend during her lifetime, who proclaims that she owns

⁵³ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁶ First published in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*, 14. 6. Collected in *Old Acquaintances by the Seaside*, 90-105.

the young girl's diary and is going to publish it. According to this unknown narrator, clues in the diary can prove that the cause of Lishi's death a year ago was something other than a physical disease. The unknown narrator says:

*The doctor said Lishi had died of a cardiac disease, but I am sure that Lishi indeed died of a broken heart instead of a physical disease. The diary that she left behind can prove that. Now let me publish her diary.*⁵⁷

The unknown narrator's remarks serve as a sort of narrative frame for the story. The diary Lishi keeps is rendered in its entirety, and in the end the unknown narrator rounds off the narrative frame by saying: "Reading Lishi's diary entries, my hot tears helplessly flow down. Alas! I can say nothing more."⁵⁸

The diary vividly captures Lishi's undulations of mood. Like most of the female protagonists in first-person narratives, she is again a sickly girl, sentimental and melancholy. When we read on, we find that the source of her melancholy is lesbian love, considered as taboo by society.⁵⁹ She is in love with a girl friend Yuanqing. Like a lover longing for the beloved, she feels uneasy without seeing Yuanqing or receiving her

⁵⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the sisterhood Lu Yin formed with her girl friends such as Shi Pingmei and Feng Yuanjun, see Meng Yue and Dai Jinghua, *Fuchulishi dibiao—Zhongguo xiandai nüxing wenxue yanjiu* 浮出歷史地表—中國現代女性文學研究 (Voices Emerging into the Foreground of History: A study of contemporary Chinese women's literature; Taipei: Shibao Wenhua, 1993).

letter for one day. The diary dated December 24 reads:

It's deep in the winter and bitterly cold. The wind is howling, while I feel all the more bored. I have been yearning for Yuanqing's letter, but have been disappointed three times. Maybe she is ill? But it doesn't seem to be likely, because when we met yesterday, she was still lively and happy, without any sign of getting ill at all. Are there other reasons except for that?... I have known her for two years. When I first met her, of course I was not able to judge what kind of person she is. But given our continual correspondence and conversation since then, she may not be too cruel and cold...⁶⁰

This reads exactly like a person in love, yearning to hear from the other party, while worrying about her caprice and insincerity in love. There are also moments of elation, when her love is returned by her beloved. In the entry dated January 3, while Lishi is recovering from her illness, Yuanqing pays her a visit. Lishi expresses her distrust of friendship with the opposite sex, thinking that such love only deprives one of one's freedom. Yuanqing agrees with her. Lishi writes: "Yuanqing was very much of the same mind with me, therefore our relationship turned from ordinary friendship to love for the same sex."⁶¹ They envision a "long-term plan," talking about living together in the future. It sounds almost like an engagement between the two. At night Lishi dreams a beautiful dream about their future life together.

But lesbian love is unacceptable in society after all. The tragedy

⁶⁰ *Old Acquaintances by the Seaside*, 93.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

comes when Yuanqing's mother insists on her marrying her cousin. Lishi records in her diary Yuanqing's letter informing her of the bad news: "Alas! Lishi! Why didn't you make up your mind, putting on a man's suit, wearing a man's hat, behaving like a man, and come to my house to ask my hand in marriage? Now realizing that you are a girl, they forbid me to marry you, and have instead found a bright young man for me."⁶² Half a month later, Yuanqing writes a letter from Tianjin, where she is sent to study and to get to know her future husband, which reads: "Lishi, our understanding before was really childish thought. Love of the same sex will never be accepted by people in society. I hope you recover from that mistake as soon as possible."⁶³ When Lishi learns of Yuanqing's incoming wedding, she no longer wants to live: "Alas! Memories only sadden me. Whenever I write my diary and think of Yuanqing who has forsaken me, I can hardly wait to leave this world for good. But I have no courage to commit suicide. Let me die of melancholy! Let me die of melancholy!"⁶⁴

Death, a relief for pain, ends Lishi's sad story. Who is the one who publishes Lishi's diary, and judges that she "died of a broken heart instead of a physical disease"? This is a mystery unsolved in the story. This unknown narrator, probably Lishi's close friend during her lifetime, as has been said above, can also be seen as the reader's alter ego, whose sorrowful emotion incited by reading the diary anticipates the

⁶² Ibid., 102.

⁶³ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 105.

reader's reaction, in a sense. The diary, meant to induce the reader's tears, is reported through the unknown narrator's words as having achieved that effect.

Mao Dun once commented on the characters in Lu Yin's stories and pointed out that they are mostly young people searching for the meaning in life. According to him, from "Perhaps the Sorrows of Being a Person" to "Lishi's Diary" the main theme of her works can be reduced to one urgent, painful question: "What is life?" He writes:

...almost all her "characters" we see are either enthusiastic, day-dreaming youths who are roaming painfully while "pursuing the meaning of life," or young people, burdened with the bondage of thousands of years of traditional thinking, yelling crazily about "self-development." Yet their fragile hearts meet with taboo everywhere they turn to. One of these "characters" says: "My heart is wandering without destination. Which way shall I turn to?... I may as well play my roles in life!" ("Perhaps the Sorrows of Being a Person") This was the voice of all the young people who were wandering painfully in life at that time (around 1921).⁶⁵

If as Mao Dun says, Lu Yin's characters are seeking the meaning in life, her story in the diary form in 1929, *Gueiyan* 歸雁 (The returning wild goose), features another youth who wanders in life's journey and finds herself lost in the drifting

⁶⁵ Mao Dun, "Daoyan" 導言 (Introduction), in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系 (Great Collection of Chinese new literature; Shanghai: Liangyou Tushu Inshua Gongsì, 1935), vol. 1 of fiction, 19-20.

tide. ⑥ It is again the story of a young woman tormented by self-inflicted pain and unable to free herself from the abyss of suffering. Renqing, whose boy friend died not long ago, returns to her aunt's house in Beijing to recover from her sad memory. Years before her family used to make their home there. Now her mother being long dead, her siblings living in other parts of the country, she likens herself to "a lost lamb away from the horde," and "a wild goose left alone." In Beijing she is introduced to Chianchen, who is younger than she is and falls in love with her. But Renqing, with a broken heart, no longer has the courage to accept love. In the meantime one of her best girl friends, Xinghen, dies. Tremendously disturbed, Renqing dallies with heavy drinking and flirts around with other young men in the hopes of pushing Chianchen away from her. She succeeds in the end; Chianchen is engaged to another woman. When Chianchen asks her to meet his fiancée, she decides to flee again: "Returning wild goose! Returning wild goose! Now you must leave again with a heavier burden of sorrow!" ⑦

The story has a great deal of autobiographical elements in it, of course. Lu Yin's first husband Guo Mengliang died in 1925 after two years of marriage. She became mentally unstable, falling into drinking bouts, often laughing and crying unexpectedly. In 1927 she met Li Weijian, a promising young poet who made his name by translating Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." Li was born in 1910, making him twelve

⑥ Originally published in *Huayan yuekan* 華嚴月刊 (Huayan monthly), no. 1-8 (1929). Reprinted in *Lu Yin Ji Wai Ji*, 96-174.

⑦ Ibid., 174.

years younger than Lu Yin.⁶⁸ She rejected his wooing several times, partly for the memory of her deceased husband, partly because of the age difference between them. In 1928, Lu Yin's writer friend Shi Pingmei died of brain-fever.⁶⁹ It was another heavy blow to Lu Yin. Unlike the end of "The Returning Wild Goose" in which the female protagonist pushes her suitor to another woman, in 1930 Lu Yin finally accepted Li Weijian's proposal for marriage. They led a happy married life until her death in 1934.

When one discusses female writers' stories in the diary form, one cannot omit a famous piece by Ding Ling (1940-1986), "Shafei nüshi de riji" 莎女士的日記 (Miss Sophie's diary) (1928).⁷⁰ It was a story that turned her into a celebrity overnight in the literary circle. Featuring a young woman who suffers from neurasthenia, tuberculosis, and insomnia, the diary is the self-narration of a capricious girl who tortures men who fall in love her. But similar to Lu Yin's diarists, Miss Sophie is also a self-torturing woman, longing for sexual liberation, and yet unable to free herself completely from traditional bondage. She rejects Wei's love because he is dull and too green to know how to capture a woman's heart. But she sort of flirts with him, letting him come

⁶⁸ Mei Zi, "Preface to *Huang Lu Yin xuan ji*," in *Huang Lu Yin xuan ji* 黃廬隱選集 (Selected works of Huang Lu Yin; Hong Kong: Xianggang Wenxue Yanjushu, 1990), 2-3.

⁶⁹ Qu Yüxiu and al., ed., *Shi Pingmei xuanji* 石評梅選集 (Selected works of Shi Pingmei), 452.

⁷⁰ Originally published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 (Short story monthly) 19. 2 (Feb. 1928): 202-23.

frequently to see her and divert her from her illness, yet reluctant to show him any special favor. When she is introduced to Ling Jishi, a tall, handsome man, she falls desperately in love with him at first sight. She writes:

Yes, I understand myself. I am just a woman through and through. A woman only thinks of the man she wants to conquer. I want to have him. I want him to sacrifice to me his heart, kneeling down while soliciting a kiss bestowed by me. I am nearly mad, thinking repeatedly about nothing but the steps that I am going to take. I am nearly mad.^①

This is a daring woman, declaring herself a conqueror in the game of love. She turns on her charms and tries every possible way to pursue him without letting him know about it. She moves to a place near his dormitory, on the pretext that she wants to live near her girl friend Yufang, who also plans to live in the neighborhood. Telling Ling that she intends to learn English with him, she easily invites Ling to come regularly to her lodging. But she fluctuates between what she should do or not do as a “decent” woman. At moments of self-doubt, she would chastise herself: “I regret it now. I regret the wrong things I did during the daytime, things that a decent woman would never do.”^② As Yitzi Mei Feuerwerker points out, “Sophie’s ambivalence toward sexuality is also characteristic of the particular limbo in which the quasi-liberated young woman found herself during the 1920s and 1930s, when she was

① Ibid., 208.

② Ibid., 207.

only partially freed from the traditional institutionalized modes of womanly behavior.”⁷³

Sophie laughs at her girl friend Yufang, who dares not live with her boy friend for fear of pregnancy: “These people who believe in abstinence! Why shouldn’t one embrace the naked body of the beloved? Why does one suppress the expression of love?”⁷⁴ After Ling Jishi leaves her lodging without doing anything more than pressing her hand, Sophie regrets that she hasn’t encouraged him to do “something more daring.”⁷⁵ Yet she cannot understand why she feels uneasy when she is alone with him:

*...When I was left alone in my room, I would think of the so-called weird happenings between man and woman. Actually in this regard, I am not boasting, the training I have gone through is at least doubling or multiplying the experiences of a few of my friends. But lately I don’t understand at all. Whenever I am alone with that tall guy, my heart leaps, and I feel ashamed and afraid at the same time.*⁷⁶

When she finds out that Ling Jishi is actually “a despicable man” who frequents prostitution houses, she is still fatally attracted to him. Yet she shuns his further approaches after she finally receives a kiss from him. She pushes him away, and decides to go to the south to

⁷³ Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 44.

⁷⁴ “Miss Sophie’s Diary,” 208.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 212.

squander away the “residue of my life.”⁷⁷

“Miss Sophie’s Diary” marked the triumph of the diary form during the twenties. The pathetic image of Miss Sophie as a woman caught between the awakening of sexual consciousness and traditional restraint on women’s sexuality is monumental.

Paradise of Love and Beauty

In *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuoshi* 中國現代小說史 (History of modern Chinese fiction), there is a section titled “The Vision of an Ideal Heavenly Kingdom of ‘Love’ and ‘Beauty.’”⁷⁸ Both Lu Yin and Bing Xin, another pioneer woman writer in modern China, are discussed in this section. The editor of the book, Zhao Xiaqiu, borrows the term from Mao Dun, who in *Great Collection of Chinese New Literature* points out that May Fourth authors like Bing Xin, Ye Shaojun and Wang Tongzhao envision in their works “an ideal and harmonious heavenly kingdom of ‘love’ and ‘beauty.’”⁷⁹ Mao Dun saw Bing Xin and Lu Yin as the two most influential women writers at the beginning of the twenties. According to him, both were writers of “problem fiction,” a specialty attributed to the affiliates of the Association of Literary Studies. In his mind, both in their works are posing a fundamental question, “What is life?” He concludes that whereas Bing Xin chose “love” as the answer

⁷⁷ Ibid., 223.

⁷⁸ Zhao Xiaqiu et al. ed., *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuoshi* 中國現代小說史 (History of modern Chinese fiction), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1985), 420.

⁷⁹ Mao Dun, *Great Collection of Chinese New Literature*, 25.

to life's problems, Lu Yin opted for "hatred."^⑩

Respectable critic and writer though he was, Mao Dun's conclusion in this regard is debatable. One may agree that on the whole Bing Xin and Lu Yin do write in very different styles. While the former's writing is characterized by childlike serenity and lucidity, the latter's is marked by anxiety and torturous emotional entanglements. Yet there is danger in such a clear-cut division. For instance, Bing Xin wrote in 1922 a story titled "Fengren biji" 瘋人筆記 (Notes of a madwoman),^⑪ undoubtedly an imitation of Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman" (1918). Almost a surrealist story, "Notes of a Madwoman" is a narrative by an old woman whose deranged mind is like the entangled threads that she uses to mend people's shoes. She worries about and watches closely from her little house the struggle between the "White Prince" (symbolizing good) and the "Black Prince" (symboling evil) who frequent the street outside; she complains about her fingers that become numb because of writing as well as mending shoes; and finally she has to stop writing because the blood of her finger tips has been curdled by too much writing and mending work. In the story, writing gradually becomes equivalent to mending shoes. Both tasks have to be done, and while undertaking these tasks, her eyes grow wings and fly away, her body is exposed to carnivorous crows, and her heart is filled with ice. The message of the narrative is confounding and perplexing. Yet at a

^⑩ Ibid. 18-9. Zhao Xiaqiu holds the same view in his book. See *Zhongguo Xiandai Xiaoshuoshi*, vol. 1, 443.

^⑪ In *Short Story Monthly*, 13. 4 (April 1922): 17-22.

second reading, it seems clear that people who do not know how to walk straightforwardly and thereby wear out their shoes are those who fail to live proper lives, and she is doomed to mend their shoes the way she is doomed to write to the last moment about what she sees and understands, so that people will know what is going on in this world and how to live in it.

To write is to tell the unbearable truth. The story conveys the madwoman's anxiety about the possibility of completing her tasks. Bing Xin's style in this story is a sharp contrast to that of her stories. The syntax is torturous, revealing the deranged mind of the madwoman. Of course we may still say that the madwoman's anxiety originates from her love of mankind, and that she is determined to save this world with her writing. Yet when we consider Lu Yin's works, it is doubtful whether we may say that her answer to life's problem is "hatred." It is true that her stories are usually tragic in vision; they tell about men and women pining away for love, tormented by the question of the meaning of life, and unable to tear themselves away from the painful cocoon they have woven for themselves. If Bing Xin usually glorifies the joy and consoling power of love, Lu Yin's constant message is that love and pain are inseparable.

Lu Yin wrote a fable titled "Dishang de loyuan" 地上的樂園 (Paradise on earth) in 1930.⁶² The characters in the story are Miss Cuckoo, Mr. Cuckoo, Mr. and Mrs. Crow, Master Lark, Nightingale the Poet, Godd-

⁶² Originally published in *Xinyue Yuekan*, 3. 5-6 (June-July 1930). Collected in *Lu Yin Ji Wai Ji*, 222-48. Quotations are from the latter text.

esses of Flowers, the Old Poet, the Philosophers, and so on. Originally Miss Cuckoo lives in the garden of spring and is pursued by numerous male birds, but she rejects them all until she meets Mr. Cuckoo. Moved by his persistence and sincerity, Miss Cuckoo marries him. Yet their married life proves to be disharmonious. Miss Cuckoo, always yearning for beauty and pleasure, is constantly thwarted by her husband's insistence on doing "serious" work. One day the Goddess of Spring informs her that the garden of spring will be destroyed. The prophesy turns out to be true. Miss Cuckoo sees with her own eyes her husband shot down by two hunters, and she witnesses the flowers in the garden wither one by one. She cries and cries until she vomits blood. She leaves the garden and starts her wandering in life.

She is ridiculed by the cicadas, and faints out of anger and sadness. Mrs. Wild Pigeon, a devout Buddhist, brings her back to consciousness, and advises her to practice *zen*. Miss Cuckoo, with a broken heart, accepts her advice, and has stayed on the Bo tree for more than a year. Mr. and Mrs. Crow, though lamenting for Miss Cuckoo, cannot help gloating over her misfortune. This is probaly Lu Yin's pessimistic vision of human relations; sufferings of other people do not necessarily arouse real sympathy. Yet what is more important is a fundamental question posed here: can the idea of the paradise in afterlife be a substitute for a paradise on earth? Miss Cuckoo, symbolizing a person searching for happiness in this life, may be temporarily consoled by religion, but she has never given up her ideal of building an earthly paradise. At the nick of time, the Fairy of Happiness appears and

encourages her to pursue her ideal:

*Ah! Distress has entrapped you to such a desperate position. But your soul should gain freedom, above all facts...Your warm sentiments and far-fetched, miraculous imagination will save you from all sufferings. Pursue your quest, my clever little soul!... These beautiful flowers from the fairy land and their intoxicating fragrance will become true on earth. Only when you seize life can a paradise on earth be built.*⁸³

Following the little fairy's advice, Miss Cuckoo grows a rose garden in a wilderness. Yet the luxurious beauty of the flowers incurs jealousy instead of admiration among the birds. They start spreading rumors about her personality, because roses "symbolize love," which is a suspicious quality in a widow like Miss Cuckoo. Some ridicule that she is still thinking of love after her tragic marriage; some scoff at her for pretending to be "romantic," since "romantic is a fashionable term now."⁸⁴ Only Master Lark comes to show his sympathy. He is good at speaking, "gathering numerous smart literary terms together, like in a speech."⁸⁵ But Master Lark's speech, though flowery, is unable to move Miss Cuckoo's heart. It is when Nightingale the Poet comes along that she falls helplessly in love.

Like Miss Cuckoo, Nightingale the Poet is also a lost soul in this world, looking for the fruit of truth in the desert of life. He has

⁸³ Ibid., 227.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 228.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

been to the orchard of truth, but the fruit there turns sour in no time. He has sought advice from three Philosophers, but they introduce him to books of such varieties that truth becomes a delusion. Then he decides to forsake the spiritual world and seek comfort in the carnal world. Living with Miss Parrot for a summer, he discovers that carnal pleasure does not satisfy his heart. When he finally meets with Miss Cuckoo, he knows that he has found what he has been looking for. He says to her, "Ah, beautiful soul, let us build a paradise on earth!"[Ⓔ]

It is a paradise of love that they build together. Both the Goddess of Flowers and the Goddess of Love come to bless them. Life outside continues to be tragic and subject to temporal changes, while inside the paradise it is perpetual spring, with time standing still. But Satan becomes jealous, and resorts to all kinds of devices to destroy the happiness there. He reminds Miss Cuckoo of the loneliness and sorrows in life; he tempts Nightingale the Poet in the disguise of a lascivious woman. All these attempts are to no avail. So finally Satan informs the Prince of Fire of the existence of the paradise. The Prince, enraged, ravages the earth with his burning fire. Yet although the flowers and trees are burned to ashes on earth, inside the paradise everything is intact. The flowers there are still blooming with their sensuous and lustrous beauty. Miss Cuckoo laments that "the spring in life is gone." (p. 245) Nightingale the Poet, though, consoles her with the following words:

[Ⓔ] Ibid., 236.

*“My darling! Is this [worth breaking your heart?...Our lives are by no means led in the real world. Our souls are forever free. The roses are deeply-rooted in our hearts. Unless our “selves” disappear, the roses in our hearts will always keep their beauty and freshness. My darling! We live in a world with deficiencies—the deficiencies constitute a deep, dark valley, which is nonetheless mysterious at the same time. Inside it there are lively immortal dragons, fire balls radiant with red light, and beautiful orchids. As long as we are willing to search deep inside, we are sure to see things more beautiful and even better!”*⁸⁷

Nightingale the Poet is of course an advocate of the freedom of the “self,” a key concept embraced by May Fourth writers. According to the critic Yang Yi, the awakening of selfhood marked especially the works of Yu Dafu.⁸⁸ Yang states that “May Fourth new literature demanded the realization and expression of the self; it was written for the self instead of for saints and sages.” He continues to say that this is the awakening of the consciousness of personality, and due to its awakening, autobiographical literature emerged during the beginning phase of new literature.⁸⁹ If Yu Dafu was the pioneer and champion of autobiographical fiction among male writers, we may say that Lu Yin was probably his counterpart among female writers. We remember that her first husband

⁸⁷ Ibid., 245.

⁸⁸ Yang Yi, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo yu wenhua* 二十世紀中國小說與文化 (Twentieth-century Chinese fiction and culture; Taipei: Yejiang Chubanshe, 1993), 115–31.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 120.

died after two years of marriage in 1927, and in 1930, the year "Paradise on Earth" appeared, she married the poet Li Weijian, who was famous for translating Keat's "Old to a Nightingale." Isn't it appropriate that in the story "Paradise on Earth," Lu Yin chooses deliberately to give Miss Cuckoo's heart to Nightingale the Poet?

Yet Lu Yin's tragic vision of life is also revealed at the end of the story, when Miss Cuckoo dies in the arms of Nightingale the Poet. Death is the only destroyer of the happiness in paradise. Like a prophet, Lu Yin actually foresaw her own early death in 1934, when she died in childbirth at the age of thirty-five.⁹⁰ In an article entitled "My Views on Creative Writing," Lu Yin states that the crucial element in what can be called creative writings is personality, while "the essence of art is subjectivity."⁹¹ According to her, tragedy is more likely to incite sympathy from the reader than comedy, because the tragic feeling is shared by most people, be they noblemen or commoners. In her view the responsibility of a creative writer is to:

describe with warm sympathy and in desperate language the tragedy in society, so that on the one hand the people in pain will get great comfort from sympathy, and on the other hand their self-consciousness will be awakened, and they will fight hard to reach light from darkness—to increase their desire to go on living...⁹²

⁹⁰ See *Selected Works of Huang Lu Yin*, 4. See also Li Weijian, "Yi Lu Yin" 憶盧隱 (In remembrance of Lu Yin), in *Lu Yin Ji Wai Ji*, 533-39.

⁹¹ Lu Yin, "Chuangzuo de wuojian" 創作的我見 (My views of creative writing), in *Short Story Monthly*, 12. 7 (July 1921): 18-22.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 21.

Such a statement does not seem likely to have come out of a writer who believes that the answer to life's problem is "hatred." Her essays as well as creative works convey the message that "love" is the only thing worth living for. In "Paradise on Earth," Miss Cuckoo, her alter ego, dares to pursue a second marriage and build a paradise of love and beauty despite the gibes and ridicules from other birds. With her tragic vision, Lu Yin held on to love as "the spring of life."

Breaking the Taboo: Women's Sexuality

Feng Yuanjun (1900–1974) was one of the May Fourth women writers who wrote especially against traditional bondage of women. Like most contemporary women intellectuals, her life consisted of a similar scenario: the rejection of an arranged marriage, the yearning to gain knowledge, and the determination to pursue love. ⁹³ She was born into a gentry family in Honan. Her father died when she was little. As a child under the instruction of a family tutor hired by her mother, she studied the Classics with her two older brothers, the eldest one being the famous philosopher Feng Youlan (1895–1990). But when her brothers left home for high school and university education, she was deprived of the chance to learn: "Liberal as she was, her mother would

⁹³ For the recount of Feng Yuanjun's life, I depend on Sun Reizhen's biographical study on her, collected in *Modern Chinese Women Writers*, 107–20; and the "Appendix" to *Feng Yuanjun chuangzuo yiwenti* 馮沅君創作譯文集 (The creative writings and translations by Feng Yuanjun; Jinan: Shandong Renmin Chubanshe, 1983), 336–350.

not hire a private tutor just for a girl.”⁹⁴ It was a heavy blow for Yuanjun, but she did not succumb to fate. She taught herself by studying the books used by her father and brothers, and asked her mother to teach her the Classics. At the same time she avidly read through the books on both classical and new literature her brothers brought home during the summer and winter vacations.

During the summer of 1917 Youlan came back from Beijing, where he went to university, and told her the news that Beijing Girls' Advanced Normal College was established. Yuanjun jumped on the news and implored her mother to let her go to that school. But her mother, though moved by her willpower, faced a predicament: how was she going to explain to Yuanjun's fiancé's family if she let her go to college? The marriage had been arranged, and it was time to consummate it. Finally Mrs. Feng decided that she would deal with the problem alone and let Yuanjun have her own way. The young girl passed the entrance examination and was admitted to the school. It was the time right before the May Fourth Movement, and students were enthusiastic about demonstrations and petitions. A conservative and stubborn bureaucrat, the president of the school locked up the school gate so that the students would not be able to go out to the streets to parade. According to her biographer, "Feng Yuanjun was the first one to lift up a stone to crash the iron lock, opening a passage way for her schoolmates, letting the seething tides of revolution pour out of the school and converge with

⁹⁴ Cf. *Modern Chinese Women Writers*, 109.

society.”⁹⁵

After graduation in 1922, she was admitted to the Graduate School of National Literature of Beijing University. Her creative writing activities started during her university years. After graduating from Beijing University in 1925 she started teaching classical literature at several universities, including Shanghai Jihan University and Fudan University, where she met her future husband Lu Kairu, a fellow teacher of classical literature. It was Lu who helped edit and publish her three collections of short stories: *Juanshi* 卷蕪 (Xanthium strumdirum, 1926), “Chunhen” 春痕 (Traces of spring, 1926), and *Jiehui* 劫灰 (Ashes after the fiasco, 1928).⁹⁶ The two even planned to collaborate on a history of Chinese poetry. Working closely together, they gradually fell in love with each other. Lu asked Yuanjun’s eldest brother Youlan for her hand, but Youlan, knowing nothing about Lu’s family background, was reluctant to consent to the marriage. Yuanjun, a determined woman, asked Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi to write letters to Youlan to petition for her, and Youlan finally gave in. In 1929 she married Lu. The two became career partners as well as life-long companions. They went to Paris to study in 1932, got their Ph. D. degrees, and in 1935 returned to China to teach classical Chinese literature for the rest of their lives.

Feng Yuanjun’s creative writing career lasted from 1923 to 1929,⁹⁷ the year she got married. Lu Xun deplored that a talented person like

⁹⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁹⁶ All three collections were published by Beixin Books, Shanghai.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Modern Chinese Women Writers*, 107.

her should stop writing after such a short period of time, while half jokingly, half cynically stating that happiness is the enemy to art. ⑧ He especially praised Yuanjun's story "Lüxing" 旅行 (The journey, 1924). ⑨ According to him, it "describes faithfully the youths right after the May Fourth Movement, who showed tremendous willpower to fight against tradition and yet were afraid to do so at the same time. So their love lives had no way out and became tragically entangled and melancholic." ⑩ "The journey" is collected in *Xanthium Strumdrum*, which contains stories based on Yuanjun's cousin's tragic experience of marriage. Wu Tian, her cousin and a landlord's daughter, was engaged to a landlord's son through her parents' arrangement. Wu Tian fought violently against her parents' decision, but to no avail. Around that time she fell in love with Wang, a fellow student at Beijing University. Upon hearing the news, her mother locked her up in a room so that she would not be able to go to school and meet with Wang. A passionate young woman, she intended to commit suicide by refusing to eat and drink. Fortunately her two brothers came back from the States at the nick of time, and petitioned to their mother for her. The young girl was finally allowed to go back to Beijing to attend school. But one of her brothers, with a doctoral degree himself, looked down upon Wang.

⑧ "Daoyan" 導言 (Introduction), in *Great Collection of Chinese New Literature*, vol. 2 of fiction, 7.

⑨ Originally published in *Chuangzao zhoubao* 創造週報 (Creation weekly), no. 45 (March 1924): 1-7. Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 17-25. Quotations are from the latter text.

⑩ Lu Xun, "Introduction," 7.

So Yuanjun advised Wu Tian and Wang to go to Honan to take the examinations for going abroad for studies. "The Journey" is a story based on their experience of traveling together from Beijing to Kaifeng, Honan. ⑩

The story is written in the first-person narrative, with the girl as the narrator. No names are given; her lover is always referred to as "he." She never mentions the destination of their trip, while the purpose of their staying together for ten days on the trip is described as "to accomplish the mission of love," a dubious phrase that seems to suggest the consummation of their love, yet will prove to be quite misleading after we finish reading the story. She says half jokingly, half seriously that the luggage put between their seats in the train is the "borderline" between them. She feels like holding his hand, but dares not to do so for fear of arousing other passengers' attention, unless when the light in the train is out temporarily. She says:

But we felt proud of ourselves. We shamelessly looked upon ourselves as the noblest people in the whole train. Not only did those people behave rudely and inelegantly, but their purpose for traveling on the road was either for accomplishing the mission of fame or profit. Our purpose, on the other hand, was to accomplish the mission of love. They asked for a world using gold as its floor and jade as its beams; the world we asked for had on its roof a shining moon and sparkling stars, and its ground was strewn with

⑩ Cf. *Modern Chinese Women Writers*, 113.

fragrant lotus flowers...^⑩

What she means by “to accomplish the mission of love” is a mystery here, while the utopian vision of a world of love filled with stars and flowers sounds like the Garden of Eden. The closer they are to their designation, the more nervous they become. The man keeps on taking out his watch and checks the time, while she “was afraid of what was going to happen at night—but only using ‘afraid’ to describe how I felt is not appropriate enough, because besides the feeling of fear there was actually elements of hope.” (p. 19) Again this sounds like the complex feelings involving the expectation of the consummation of their love: fear mixed with shyness and longing. But the reader will find that he is tricked once more.

The two lovers who are bold enough to take the trip together and to stay in the same hotel suite deliberately withhold from sexual intercourse. She says: “Physically our expression of love was limited to billing and cooing with a smile, mumbling love talks, and sweet and warm kissing. I know that other people, whoever they are, would never believe this.”^⑪ It is not because they are afraid of criticisms from their families and friends; simply taking the trip together is already something that could be looked upon as “against decorum.” It is that they want to prove that their love is “pure”; even though they sleep in the same bed under the same quilt, they will not do what the other party (meaning the girl) is reluctant to do.

^⑩ *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 18.

^⑪ *Ibid.*, 22.

The raw material out of which the story develops is relatively unimportant. Many a detail different from real life has been added for ideological reasons. For instance, their refraining from sexual intercourse as discussed above. Another example is that the lover in the story is already married; he is described as the victim of an arranged marriage. This provides a chance for the narrator to harangue the reader with statements against traditional marriage system. She even goes so far as to announce the idea of anti-marriage as an institution: "Even though our behavior was too romantic, it was a result of the poor marriage system... Most of the tragedies in this world are due to the unnatural relationships between people. Our love would rather forsake the titles of those unnatural relations."^⑭ As much as she declares that she is willing to dispense with marriage for the sake of free love, her lover's legal wife is the mote in her eye. She says, "But now I felt that person to be my rival in love, although I knew clearly that between them there was only the relationship formed by old decorum and old habit."^⑮ She even thinks that her lover should get a divorce from that woman so that it can "reduce his crime in law and the unfavorable criticisms we received from society."^⑯

She feels criticisms from friends and relatives too much to bear. Even though they try to pretend that they do not sleep in the same room, visitors' smirks make them suspect that everyone is joking about their

^⑭ Ibid., 25.

^⑮ Ibid., 21.

^⑯ Ibid., 21.

living together. But she is determined that she will not regret what she has been doing. She says:

The love we wanted is absolutely limitless. We would only let it develop freely, never letting it subject to the approval of the old decorum. At this time of transition from the old to the new, one would rather sacrifice oneself for the new born principle and truth than surrender to a moral system that has announced bankruptcy. In case the pressures from all sides proved to be too heavy for us to resist, we would sink into the bottomless ocean while embracing each other. ⑩

After spending ten days together almost like man and wife, they take the train back to Beijing. So this is the "mission of love" they have accomplished, a weird experiment that could take place probably only during the May Fourth era, a "time of transition from the old to the new." Men and women, longing for free love, were unable to completely shake off traditional bondage. Therefore, just as Lu Xun says, "their love lives had no way out and became tragically entangled and melancholic."

Lu Xun liked the title of Feng Yuanjun's first collection of stories, "Xanthium Strumdrium," which means, according to him, "a kind of grass that will not die even if the center of its leaves is plucked out."⑪ The first story collected in this book, titled "Gejue" 隔絕 (Separation,

⑩ Ibid., 23.

⑪ *Great Collection of Chinese New Literature*, vol. 2 of fiction, 7.

1924), ⑩ is again written in the first person, with the young girl as the narrator. We remember that in real life Yuanjun's cousin Wu Tian was finally released to join her boyfriend after being locked up in a room for refusing to accept the arranged marriage. But in the story she writes, Yuanjun changed the whole tale into a tragedy, letting the girl and her boyfriend commit suicide. According to Yuanjun's biographer, she deliberately did so "in order to expose to the core the bloody marriage system of the feudal society, so that more would be awakened to the fight for women's liberation."^⑪ No matter whether this statement is truly what the author had in mind when she made the story a tragedy, the fact at least shows the young protagonists' determination to live and die for love. The girl says, "Life can be sacrificed, but the freedom of will cannot be sacrificed; without freedom I'd rather die."

The story is written as the young girl's letter to her boy friend, who is waiting at a local hotel for news from her while she is confined in a room in her mother's house. Originally she plans to ask her cousin to deliver the letter to him, so that he will wait for her outside the wall and help her escape when she jumps out of the window of her room. But her plan does not work, and the letter turns out to be her last will. When she starts to write, it is already the second day she is locked up. Except for the things for daily usage, her mother denies

⑩ Originally published in *Chuangzao jikan* 創造季刊 (Creation quarterly), 2. 2 (Feb. 1924): 67-76. Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 3-13. Quotations are from the latter text.

⑪ Cf. *Modern Chinese Women Writers*, 113.

her the possession of any pen or paper. She implores her cousin to smuggle in a pen and a few pieces of paper, and manages to write down her words. She repeatedly juxtaposes their concept of love with other people's idea of "free love": "Why is it that love, which we think to be holy, noble, and pure, becomes so dirty and ugly in their eyes?"^⑩ Her mother chides her for "having committed adultery" with her boyfriend; she not only lets her mother "lose face," but makes her ancestors feel angry and ashamed in the underworld. This is a standard way of scolding unruly children in China. The idea is that the mistakes she makes have become a stigma for the whole family clan, ancestors included.

At the time she picks up the pen to write, she had been summoned to her mother's house the day before, and three days later she will be married into the Liu family. There are markers of time in the letter, indicating that she continues to write over a long period of time, probably two or three days: "After having written that sentence to you last night, I have reluctantly lain in bed...";^⑪ and "The son of the Liu's family [her intended] will be home tonight (my cousin told me so)..."^⑫ Although her original plan is to escape from home and run away with her lover, the idea of death permeates her writing. She describes the world as "a large prison," and if there is no other way out, she is more than ready to "escape to another place in this world,"

^⑩ *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 4.

^⑪ *Ibid.*, 10.

^⑫ *Ibid.*, 12.

or to “head for another world.” Yet whatever she does, she and her lover will always “lean on each other.” She says to her lover: “I have told you repeatedly that our love is absolute, boundless. In case we are not able to resist opposition from the outside, together we will go to the sea.”^⑭ “To go to the sea” becomes a euphemism for death in the story.

The letter is full of confessions of love, reminiscences of love scenes when they were together, promises to die for love if unable to escape, and so on. She recalls the first time they met each other, their first kisses with palpitating hearts, and their promises to consummate their love when the time is ripe. Confined in the little room, without anything else to do but write, she resorts to it as if it were the only thing that proves her still in the right mind: “In a dazzling mind last night I filled up two large pieces of paper with my writing. From now on however deranged my mind becomes, I will try hard to write down the thought that has come upon me in this little room. This I think will not do any harm to any other people, but it does me a great deal of good.”^⑮ The final words in her letter are: “My cousin just came in. She is willing to deliver this letter to you, and tell you that outside my window there is a wall that separates a deserted alley. Tonight at twelve you may wait for me outside that wall.”^⑯

Her cousin, who delivers this letter to her lover who is waiting in a

^⑭ Ibid., 4.

^⑮ Ibid., 9.

^⑯ Ibid., 13.

nearby hotel, finishes the story in her own words. In “Gejue zhihou” 隔絕之後 (After the separation, 1924), she describes what happens after the confined girl wrote her last words: ⑯ Late that night her mother suddenly falls ill with a stomachache. The whole family is thrown into a turmoil. The doctor is sent for, with the servants and family members running all over the house. The young girl loses the chance to run away. To escape from her destiny of the arranged marriage the next day, she pours down her throat the poison she has brought home with her. When her cousin discovers that something is wrong with her, she is already breathing her last. All she can do is to show her cousin her farewell letter to her mother, in which is written words like this: “Mother, don’t blame me. I won’t blame you, either. What destroys the love between us is the conflict between two kinds of incompatible thinking. If this kind of conflict is not eliminated, tragedies like this will never disappear on the stage of life.” ⑰ Her lover, when informed of the news, rushes to her bedside, and manages to exchange a few kisses with her while she is still half conscious. He says to her, “Victory belongs to us in the end,” and swallows the poison he has with him.

Then her cousin gives a brief account of how the lovers met each other. They first knew each other in a literary society, and in three years’ time they fell in love with each other. Yet she had been engaged to a

⑯ Originally published in *Chuangzao Zhoubao*, no. 49 (April 1924): 1-4. Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 13-7. Quotations are from the latter text.

⑰ Ibid., 14.

landlord's son since she was a little baby, while after graduating from high school he married a woman he had never met. Both are victims of arranged marriages, and yet their ill-starred fate has not stopped their love. "They volunteered to be the pioneers to sacrifice for free love," says her cousin. ^{①⑩} And their love does end in tragedy, a modern Chinese version of Romeo and Juliet. Yet the cause of their tragedy is not a feud between two families, but the conflict between two systems of thinking. It is the tragedy of a transitional period, when the old system still held sway with the new ideas struggling to gain power.

In Feng Yuanjun's stories, often the mother represents the old patriarchal system that crushes youth's longing for freedom in love as well as in life. In "Separation" the mother, relentlessly insisting on the consummation of the arranged marriage, is the direct cause of the two young lovers' deaths. But in "Cimu" 慈母 (A loving mother, 1924), ^{①⑪} an autobiographical story, the mother is shown as loosening her control little by little, symbolizing the relenting of the parental power in face of the children struggling for independence.

The beginning of the story seems to portend a tragic ending. The narrator says early in the story, "I was an unruly youth who forgot the love between mother and daughter for the sake of the love between the two sexes."^{①⑫} It has been six years since she left home for study in

^{①⑩} Ibid., 16.

^{①⑪} Originally published in *Chuangzao Zhoubao*, no. 46 (March 1924): 6-10. Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 26-33. Quotations are from the latter text.

^{①⑫} Ibid., 26.

Beijing, and she has never returned home for fear of the fulfillment of the marriage arrangement planned by her parents when she was little. When she left for Beijing her mother was displeased, and now she has come to the city to look for the daughter, "But Mother has decided not to let me lead a bachelor girl's romantic life."^⑫ When the narrator hears that her mother has already been brought from their hometown to the provincial capitol by her two brothers, she immediately feels that this is the prelude to a "family tragedy." She deliberately delays seeing her mother, not even answering her letters. But her brother's letter of ultimatum comes, which says: "Mother has become extremely disappointed and angry because my sister has not returned... If my sister does not come, she will go to Beijing right away."^⑬

To the narrator, this is the beginning of a tragedy. She envisions the methods of committing suicide, and the ways to write her last will. Her lover accompanies her to the province, and on the way she makes an agreement with him that they will choose to die together if there is no way out. She says, "After we got on the train, I suddenly felt the darkness lay ahead in and the future. I was not going to life, but to death...Our little world was reaching its end, which was near at hand."^⑭ So the lovers' world, the sphere of life, is in contrast to the world represented by the mother, the sphere of death.

In the narrator's mind, her reaction against the mother's decree has

^⑫ Ibid., 27.

^⑬ Ibid., 28.

^⑭ Ibid., 29.

double implications: "Although I realized that my action was subverting the old oppressive marriage system, at the same time I could not deny that my action was upholding the sanctity of love."²⁵ This is the declaration of the apotheosis of free love, a May Fourth characteristic. At the hotel where her lover waits for her return, they give each other a good-bye kiss, in her imagination the last kiss they will ever bestow on each other.

When she plucks up courage and walks into her brother's house, she is surprised to find that it is her mother who opens the door to her. The old woman's expression of happiness and tears make her immediately regret that she has judged her mother wrongly. She feels that she has committed a crime in front of God, and almost kneels down before her mother to ask for pardon. The mother then explains why she has been so angry and disappointed at the daughter: it is because she has seldom written home and has not asked for financial support from the family for the past year. For the mother, this is the sign of the daughter's independence, a proof that she wants to cut off all relationships with the family. When the daughter expresses her wish to break off the arranged marriage engagement, the old woman sighs, and makes the following statement as if the whole burden of the pressure from the family clan is on her shoulders:

"You youngsters should think in my place. If I did as you wish, how would I have the face to confront your uncles...But I have no

²⁵ Ibid.

... courage to do what I want to do. To force you to get married... I have no heart to see you suffer... If you insist on your own ideas, do it the way you think is right. Never mind me, an old woman..."^⑫

So this is the image of the "loving mother." Probably the fact that the authority in the story is a woman helps mitigate the severity of the patriarchal law. She turns out to be an intermediary between the old and the new, giving hope for a future when the union through free love will replace the age-old arranged marriage system. Yet when in a story in which the authority is represented by a man, there seems to be no such mitigation, as can be seen in the story "Wudian" 誤點 (Delay, 1928).^⑬ The female protagonist is likewise summoned home to explain her "unruly conduct." This time the girl who rejects the arranged marriage arrives home and confronts her older brother, in whose words free love is a shameful crime: "What is free love? Free love is fooling around with a man, committing adultery!... Don't think that love is absolute or limitless; in this world there is no such thing as spiritual, pure love. The elements that constitute love are nothing but money and sex!"^⑭ The older brother's worldly wisdom sounds, of course, blunt to the young girl who looks upon free love as sanctified. His opinion no doubt represents the biased thinking of the die-hard upholders of patriarchal authority.

^⑫ Ibid., 32.

^⑬ Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 33-50.

^⑭ Ibid., 44.

Feng Yuanjun's other story "Zhenfu" 貞婦 (A chaste woman, 1926)^② describes a poor woman victimized by the blind loyalty to the values of a patriarchal society. The story begins with a man violently beating up a woman with a horse whip, while she pitifully implores him to stop. It is an awful scene to start a story. The next moment the reader finds to his partial relief that it is only a dream. The woman wakes up from her dream, with her heart still palpitating from her nightmare. By and by we discover that the woman is seriously ill, lying helplessly in bed, without even the strength to get water for herself. The house is full of people, some playing card games, some idling around, but no one pays attention to her. She, Lady Ho, has been deserted by her husband, who has hated her since their wedding day. Apparently in their arranged marriage he is also a victim, but, having been educated abroad and gotten into an affair with another woman whom he later marries, he plays the hardhearted man and drives her out of the house. Sent back to her parents' home, she becomes ill and is neglected by her own family. And then the deserted wife has earned the name of "a chaste woman" around the neighborhood, because, determined to maintain her chastity even after being deserted by her husband, she has turned down the marriage offer from a local magistrate who is a widower. When she hears that her mother-in-law, who used to treat her inhumanely, has just died, she insists on going to the funeral to pay

^② First published in *Yusi* 語絲 (Threads of talk), no. 86 (June 1926). Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 66-75. Quotations are from the latter text.

the due respect of a daughter-in-law. Unable to talk her out of the idea, her aunt accompanies her to her husband's house, where she first stuns, and then moves, all who are present, family members and guests alike. She speaks to her husband for the last time, and then loses consciousness. Four days later she dies, and she is buried beside her mother-in-law's grave. On the epitaph is engraved the words: "The Tomb of the Chaste Woman Lady Ho, Married into the Family of Mu."¹³⁰

So this is the price of remaining "chaste" under the patriarchal law. We might as well say that Feng Yuanjun was using the story to participate in the discussion of the problem of chastity that aroused so much attention during the first few decades of this century in China.¹³¹ Like most women writers of the period, Feng was very much concerned about themes like marriage and love. "Qiandao" 潛悼 (Silent mourning, 1928),¹³² a story about a man falling in love with his cousin's wife, is a direct questioning as to the binding power of marriage: does marriage guarantee love for one's spouse? The story is told from the point of view of the man in love. Since he has never divulged his love to anyone, including his cousin-in-law, neither he nor the reader knows for sure whether she is also in love with him. But it is the man's wishful thinking that she does love him, and that she pines away for the impossibility of the fulfillment of their love.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹³¹ Cf. notes 8, 9, 10.

¹³² Collected in *The Creative Writings and Translations by Feng Yuanjun*, 95-110. Quotations are from this text.

The narrator confesses in the beginning that everything exists in his mind: "To tell the truth, I really do not know whether you loved me, or whether you were conscious of your love for me."¹³³ When he holds his present lover Weiwei in his arms, he cannot forget the sorrows his cousin-in-law's death has brought upon him. In his mind he has already committed a crime before the goddess of love. According to him it is not a crime judged by the moral law of this world, which is a "worldly law based on hypocrisy." (p. 96) Love has its own law that defies human judgment. He says, "What I mean by a crime is that I am not loyal to the goddess of love. I should not love another woman,"¹³⁴ Since he is in love with Weiwei now, he should not be still thinking of his cousin-in-law. But what fills him with remorse is that it is not within his power to control his feelings. He says with sadness: "I never meant to steal another's soul, but my own soul was stolen unconsciously by another. When I discovered the fact, what I felt was the pain that scathed my bones and drilled my heart."¹³⁵

To the narrator their relationship is the union of two souls if her soul has also been unconsciously "stolen" by him. In that case, he says, then her husband owns only her "empty, soulless body," while the reason for her premature death must be the suppression of love for himself. Whether such love is a crime or not before human law is not his concern; the thing that matters is that they do love each other. He

¹³³ Ibid., 95.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 96.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 97.

pities ordinary people who fail to see eye to eye with him, "Poor people, they are not able to break through their confinements or break open the yokes on their shoulders. What is there to be afraid of? Truth is always on the side of true love."¹³⁶ His narration is meant to be a confession to the woman he loves. He addresses her: "Right now all I know is to show my true, warm heart to you who are in heaven. If you have always been faithful to your husband and have never felt any love for me, then I have insulted your chastity. Please look upon it as my confession."¹³⁷

Then their "history of love" is rendered in retrospection. According to the narrator, it all starts with her wedding. She is a famous beauty in the neighborhood, and he has heard about her for a long time. On the wedding night when he finally lays eyes on her, it is like discovering the real quality of womanhood for the first time. She is twenty years old, while he himself "just came of age, still vague and confused in the awareness of sex."¹³⁸ He says, "From your person I came to know the beauty of women's features, postures, *esprit*, and even the deepest spots of their souls. It was you who opened up a new world for me."¹³⁹

Then he recounts how following local custom, some naughty young men want to peep at the "sleeping beauty" in bed while the bridegroom

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 98.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

is locked in the study. But “out of jealousy” the narrator prevents the plan from being carried out. Those crude young men’s gaze on her body would be an “insult” not only to her and her husband, but to the narrator himself. ⑩ The most “erotic” moment comes when the narrator is allowed to untie the flower the bride wears on her chest. On the day after the wedding, it is local custom for guests and relatives to ask for something belonging to the newlyweds as a token of good luck. The narrator sets his eye on the bride’s flower. When he asks her to untie it from her chest, she smiles without doing anything. Then he offers to untie it himself. To his surprise and gratification, she gives him another smile, which he interprets as permission. For the narrator, her smiles mean more than he can ever tell. He says, “I don’t know why. Somehow I felt that smile seemed to be a temptation to me.” ⑪ The next scene is indeed a great temptation:

“Treating me with such indulgence, you made me feel relaxed and intimate. You sat there, while I was standing. I lowered my head, exactly in front of your breasts! All of a sudden your fragrant breath intoxicated me. I even forgot where I was, my heart palpitating wildly. (The first time my heart ever palpitated for anyone!) At the same time I seemed to hear you pant slightly.” ⑫

When trying to detach the flower from her bosom, the narrator is so nervous that his hands tremble violently. It takes quite a while

⑩ Ibid., 100.

⑪ Ibid., 101.

⑫ Ibid., 102.

before he succeeds. He keeps the flower in his treasury box. It is “the gift bestowed by a beauty, my invaluable property, the object that will be buried with me when I die in my old age.” So in his imagination it is a token of love, a thing he will treasure until he dies.

While divulging to the lady his admiration for her, the narrator searches his memory to find proofs that the lady has also been showing him special favor. He recalls that at another wedding a year later, as one of the four best men, he accompanies the bridegroom to the bride's house, where his cousin-in-law and other female relatives are gathered behind a screen to peep at the bridegroom and the best men. According to one of the girls, his cousin-in-law keeps on talking to them about the narrator. It seems to him that her attention is constantly fixed on him. Reflecting his wishful thinking, he says: “Sister Ling said that you often mentioned me when the sisters were talking together—your Younger Brother Ing! Younger Brother Ing! Let me ask, according to our local custom, who would address a ‘younger cousin-in-law’ as ‘younger brother’?...Maybe you took that special address and praises of me as unintentional. That's fine. Being unintentional is more natural. That's because my soul had crept into the deepest spot of your soul.”^⑩ At a second reading, the last sentence sounds erotic, as if what the man implies is creeping into the deepest spot of the woman's body.

Then he describes a scene at the card game table. On a snowy night, to entertain a lady guest, they play poker games together with

^⑩ Ibid., 103.

other cousins. In his mind, it is one of the rare occasions when Chinese men and women can enjoy the company of the opposite sex other than one's own spouse. He labels the Chinese society as "a society that strictly separates men and women."^⑭ And it is only on occasions such as card games that men and women are allowed to mix and have fun together. At the card game table, the ordinary strict decorum separating the two sexes is subverted. He says, "Only on this night that would charm one forever did the strong wine and glamorous, warm atmosphere help arouse our passion, allowing us to get away from the real, straitjacketed, ugly circle of life, and to jump into the mysterious, romantic, beautiful paradise."^⑮ The card game table becomes a utopian symbol. What he longs to do but never dares to in ordinary life is taking place during the games. There, at the poker game table, he can touch her hand when dealing her cards. His foot can touch her foot when he corrects her on a wrong move. Sitting face-to-face, they send secret glances at each other. She often shuns his eyes with a smile when sensing him staring at her. But when he is not looking, she directs her eyes toward him again. This playful exchange of glances delights him beyond measure. He says, "Your meandering looks thrilled my soul instantly; your smiles comforted it...Your smile showed your retreat when my soul charged at you, but I felt it was the mixing of our two souls..."^⑯ The particular

^⑭ Ibid., 105.

^⑮ Ibid.

^⑯ Ibid., 106.

diction he uses implies the desire of carnal contact, not simply "the mixing of our two souls." He takes pride in that he has witnessed her attractiveness from all angles, which probably even her husband has had neither the joy nor the chance to see. He challenges the husband's monopoly of the wife's person: "I could be proud in front of Elder Brother Gui, although in name and in reality you belonged to him. Ha! Ha! What else could I ask for! What else could I ask for!"^④

The beauty of his heart dies of tuberculosis. He interprets her illness as a result of maltreatment by her parents-in-law. They have always blamed her for not being able to bear children. Even before she dies, they already start looking for a new daughter-in-law to replace her. He feels it a pity that she has never come into his dreams, while her husband does dream of her during sleep. But it is the narrator's wishful thinking and consolation that she has always been closer to him in temperament than to her husband. Yet the truth finally dawns on him that, a loyal and submissive wife as she has always been, she probably has never felt anything special for him. He says, "Yet my final conclusion is that in your heart there was only him, without me!!!"^⑤ And then he asks her to accept his narrative as confession, if she has never loved him. This is a peculiar sort of affair; the man and the woman, another man's wife, never exchange a word of love when she is alive. So pent up is his emotion that he needs to divulge to her in words his love for her after she dies. Has

^④ Ibid.

^⑤ Ibid., 110.

the woman ever felt any love for him? Is the ultimate cause of her death the suppressed emotion for him? Since the story is told only from the man's point of view, this is a mystery that will never be solved.

In the beginning of this century in China when arranged marriages were still in practice, how many men and women, influenced by the new tide of thinking about free love, longed to break through the arbitrary bondage of marriage, yet did not have enough courage to do so? How many tragedies of love like the one told in "Silent Mourning" occurred during this transitional period? With her subtle language and appropriate choice of first-person narrative, Feng Yuanjun has given us a story that will become monumental in modern Chinese literature.

Woman as Woman

When Hu Shi wrote about Li Chao, a girl who heroically struggled for independence but died a premature death, he meant to do "a detailed biographical study" of her, a case study, so to speak. It was indeed a sincere effort on his part to understand the social conditions in a patriarchal society that thwarted women's aspirations for self-liberation. Most of his contemporaries would jump to the conclusion that only a new China could ensure the healthy growth of the "new woman." This was a utopian vision shared by most intellectuals at the time.^⑩

^⑩ See the beginning of this study.

Yet given that the woman issue had been constructed as part of China's nation-building agenda since the late Qing, we should perhaps take into consideration that this was an agenda mainly envisioned by male intellectuals, which, in turn, was reinforced by "revolutionary women" like Ding Ling. By stressing that "women constitute [the other] half of the population," and that the birth of the new woman was the prerequisite to that of a new China, male critics and writers of that period might have downplayed another image of May Fourth women intellectuals, which was inward-looking, groping for self-expression, and struggling for self-identity as a woman while crossing traditional gender boundaries. While agreeing to the roles women are entitled to play on the national plane, or in the public sphere, how do we understand them as persons with private joys and sorrows? In other words, how do we understand woman as woman, new or old?

In her article "Gendering the Origins" Yue Ming-Bao echoes Roxane Witke's observations of the function of women's issues since the late Qing period:

In her study of Mao Zedong's early writings on female suicide cases, Roxane Witke makes the important observation that the preoccupation with female oppression became very popular during the May Fourth period. However, she believes that the popularity had less to do with an interest in women's issues per se than with the fact that the case study approach was developing as a polemic genre. In the heated atmosphere of reform and enlightenment, many intellectuals engaged in writing about women's oppression

because it functioned as an irrefutable signifier for marking one's own revolutionary stance. Thus, the emergence of the "woman question" (funu wenti) in reform literature and fictional writings during this period was less a conscious effort to change the oppressive structure of a patriarchal society than an attempt to utilize women's issues as a political stratagem for advancing China's nation-building program. ¹⁵⁰

To support Witke's and her own view, Yue examines May Fourth fiction that is "written in the name of revolution" and deals with "the oppression of predominantly uneducated females." The stories she analyzes include Ye Shengtao's "Yisheng" (One life, 1919), Xiao Qian's "Yuxi" (The raining dusk), and Yezi's "Changjiang lun shang" (On the Yangzi ferry). In those third-person narratives, we see low-class women depicted by male writers as silently suffering creatures, without subjectivity. If low-class women in male writers' stories are unaware of the self, and treated as the representatives of an oppressed "class," intellectual women, the new women created by male writers, are perhaps better off, occasionally endowed with a mind capable of some thinking, and ready to join men's "revolution," as are some female characters in Mao Dun's novels. Or we can see in Yu Dafu's and the neo-impressionistic writers' stories sexually liberated new women, who are capricious, sensuous, and dangerous from men's viewpoint, and

¹⁵⁰ Yue Ming-bao, "Gendering the Origins of Modern Chinese Fiction," in Tonglin Lu, ed., *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 53.

yet whose minds, nevertheless, are opaque to the reader as well as to the male characters.

If in May Fourth male writers' works, the third-person narrative stance was most often chosen to depict the new woman (in addition to oppressed women) in the context of the social and the sexual revolution, then we may venture the observation that, by contrast, women writers more often than not chose the first-person narrative stance to tell the story of the new woman. It is in women writers' subjective writings that we see women themselves as the subjects of enunciation. Writing about the "new women," writers like Lu Yin, Bai Wei and Feng Yuanjun led tumultuous lives as their characters do. The scenario of the new woman's revolt against tradition was as follows: running away from home to avoid arranged marriages, to pursue free love, and to gain education and independence. It was always a life of Diaspora, not only away from her father's home, but also from the protected, secure realm of her gender, no matter how oppressive it might be. While aspiring for liberation, she also drifted in the flux of life. Love, though enticing and glorified by her as a "paradise on earth" or a "utopia," is changeable and can bring heartbreaks and arouse one's death instinct. The conflicts of her life took their toll on her writings as well as personality. Underneath the glow and the straightforward rhetoric of the revolutionary woman, there was the palpitating heart of the private woman, who, in search of a form for self-expression, developed a narrative strategy that was shapeless and hard to define. As can be epitomized by the formlessness

of the meandering narrative in Lu Yin's "Old Acquaintances by the Seaside," the May Fourth "new woman" spent her lifetime searching for meaning in life.

新 女 性——

五四婦女的自我解放

彭 小 妍

提 要

民國初年，中國女性意識到她們應該和男人一樣，成為獨立自主的人。女性開始爭取受教育、繼承財產和婚姻自主的機會。許多雜誌專事處理婦女問題，著名學者和一般讀者都紛紛為文，討論婦女獨立自主的相關議題。

中國現代女作家崛起於這樣的文化環境中，自然發展出足以反映時代的寫作特性，例如婦女解放的呼籲、女性在性問題上的覺醒、對教育的渴望、經濟獨立等等。本文探討二、三〇年代崛起的三位女作家如何表達這種心聲。白薇（1894—198?）、廬隱（1899—1934）、馮沅君（1900—74）當紅之時，和冰心及丁玲齊名，但日後卻為讀者所遺忘。半世紀後的今天，有必要重新檢討這三位婦女運動的先鋒。

她們所選擇的敘事模式、所關懷的主題和使用的語言，在在顯示出她們急欲擺脫數百年來壓迫女性聲音和身體的束縛。筆者雖無意為這幾位作家寫傳，卻將探討她們人生歷練中的某些關鍵性史料；因為她們的人生歷練，如同她們的作品，足為當時爭取自主權的女性之寫照。

關鍵詞：新女性 婦女自主 解放 婦女解放運動 敘事模式
自我解放

The New Woman: May Fourth Women's Struggle for Self-Liberation

Peng Hsiao-yen

During the early Republican years, Chinese women were awakened to the fact that they ought to be independent human beings like men. They began to fight for the chance of getting an education, for their right to inherit the family property, and even for the right to decide their own marriages. Numerous magazines were devoted to the woman issue, with eminent scholars as well as ordinary readers contributing articles discussing a variety of problems concerning women's independence.

Emerging in such a cultural milieu, modern Chinese women writers no doubt developed in their writings characteristics that reflected the imprint of their times: the outcry for emancipation, female sexual awakening, the longing for self-improvement, economic independence, and so on. In this paper I try to show how three women writers in the twenties and thirties managed to voice all these desires in their works: Bai Wai (1894-198?), Lu Yin (1899-1934), and Feng Yuanjun (1900-1974). At the peak of their writing careers they aroused as much attention as Bing Xin and Ding Ling. Yet somehow for some reason or other, they were forgotten with the lapse of time. After more than

half a century, it is time to “unearth” these three writers who were among the pioneers of the women’s liberation movement.

The narrative modes they chose to write in, the themes they were concerned about, and the language they used manifest that they were eager to break the bondage that suppressed women’s voices as well as their bodies for centuries. Although I by no means pretend to be their biographer, some facts in their lives will be discussed, because their lives, like their writings, did exemplify a generation of women who were fighting for self-liberation.