Being a Woman and a Warrior in Modern China: Xie Bingying's Autobiographical Practices, 1920s–1980s

By

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Abstract

There are two prevailing public perceptions of Xie Bingying 谢冰莹 (1906–2000): as a rebellious daughter leaving the patriarchal family and as a courageous soldier dedicated to national salvation. The former aligns with the emphasis on women's emancipation since the late Qing period, which intertwined individualism and nationalism and heralded a new page in modern Chinese literature. The latter stems from Xie's involvement in the Chinese civil war and anti-imperialist struggles throughout the twentieth century. Both perceptions encompass Xie's experiences of domestic, social, and national wars, establishing her as a recognised woman warrior and weaving her story into the spectrum of women warriors in Chinese history.

Historians often rely on Xie's autobiographical writings as primary sources to study Chinese women's wartime involvement. However, less attention has been paid to the nuanced dimensions of Xie's emotional struggles in factional conflicts, her construction and reconstruction of war memories, and her efforts to empower herself and ordinary women through the establishment of an intimate female community on the frontlines. Instead, her lived experience has often been reduced to a grand patriotic narrative centred around specific historical events rather than capturing the dynamic changes, ruptures, and continuity in her life. How did a female warrior situate herself in wars on various levels at different life stages? To what extent does her constant revision of memory relate to her geopolitical mobility from mainland China to Taiwan and the US? How did she navigate women's wartime corps to reconcile 'crisis femininity' and the exploitation of women's emotional labour by the nationalist agenda? Overall, what was a modern-day woman warrior, and how did she negotiate with herself and others?

In China, the interpretation of first-person wartime accounts is still in its early stages, and the field has not yet fully developed a reading of traumatic experiences that distinguishes it from interpretations in Western warfare. Through a textual analysis of Xie's autobiographical writing, this study aims to explore her gendered, transnational, and intergenerational war memories, with a particular focus on a woman warrior's subjectivity in war remembrance. It also discusses how Xie worked into this seemingly nation-oriented and male-oriented discourse of war and reconciled its violence with individualistic humanity and female affect.

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Abbreviations Used in This Thesis

BWNU	Beijing Women's Normal University
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDS	Central Daily Supplement
CMA	Republic of China Military Academy, commonly known as Whampoa Military Academy (Wuhan)
CLAA	Chinese Literature and Arts Association (Taiwan)
CWAA	Chinese Writers' and Artists' Association (Taiwan)
CWWA	Chinese Women's Writing Association (Taiwan)
CYWA	Chinese Youth Writing Association (Taiwan)
HWBSC or Service Corps	Hunan Women's Battlefield Service Corps
KMT	Kuomintang
NRA	National Revolutionary Army
NTNU	National Taiwan Normal University
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
SUFA	Shanghai University of Fine Arts
WAC	Women's Advisory Council of the New Life Movement
WGC	Women's Guidance Committee of the New Life Movement

Introduction: A Chinese Women Warrior in Memory

The long twentieth century witnessed a poignant trudge unfolding for Chinese people within and outside the border. Both military personnel and civilians found themselves deeply involved in a relentless, sometimes recurring, cycle of escape, resistance, loss of life, and the subsequent reconstruction of homes. An even more multifaceted challenge facing women engaging in war service arose from a complex interplay of entrenched patriarchal structures and colonialism, encapsulating stories of revolt, responsibility, and compromise. The dual titles of Xie Bingying's 謝冰瑩 (1906–2000) autobiography, 'Girl Rebel' and 'Female Soldier', illustrate the entanglement.[1] For women who came of age in the 1920s, a resolute commitment to challenging the entrenched gender structure remained threads that spanned the tumultuous era, while this was mediated by an overarching nationalist discourse. The war brought about profound transformations, not solely as a result of the distressing physical and psychological displacements they endured but also due to new social and political arenas that opened up to them. These new spaces allowed women to cultivate intimate communities beyond the familial sphere and to forge new identifications through interactions with people from distant places, the authorities, and the nation-state as a whole.

The Northern Expedition (1926–1928) and the formation of the women's team at the Chinese Military Academy (zhongyang junxiao 中央軍校, commonly known as Whampoa Military Academy) (Wuhan) crystallised Xie's conception of her country. This young woman from Xinhua County, speaking with a heavy Hunan accent, met schoolmates from nearly every province in China. Their collective origins form a map drawn by individuals who have transcended geographical boundaries and would soon embark on a voyage to help more people. After a few months of intense training, Xie marched with the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) to the rural areas of Hubei from April to July 1927. Although trained in firearms, she and her fellow women were not permitted to carry guns on the battlefield. They rescued soldiers and disseminated revolutionary ideas within peasant communities to unite them against warlords and landlords. Xie's diaries, later

[1] The translators, Lin Taiyi and Lin Rusi, who worked on the English-Chinese bilingual version of Xie's autobiography, renamed her work from *A Female Soldier's Autobiography* (yige nübing de zizhuan 一個女兵的自傳) (1936) to *Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying* (1940). Taiyi and Rusi are daughters of Lin Yutang, Xie's close mentor, and received full support from the author throughout the translation.

collected and published as *War Diary* (congjun riji 從軍日記) (1929/1933), are vivid records of this military experience. For the first time, a Chinese female soldier chronicled her military service and made her accounts renowned among Chinese readers.

Figure 1: In 1927, Xie Bingying, at the age of 21, traveled with the medicine unit to serve on the front lines in western Hubei. Although she is holding a rifle in this photo and had received firearms training at the Chinese Military Academy, women were not permitted to use firearms during the march. Courtesy of Wenhsun Literary Resource Centre (Wenxun wenyi ziliao zhongxin 文訊文藝資料中心), Taipei.

Because of conflicts between the Comintern and the Kuomintang (KMT) authorities, the women's team was abruptly disbanded in the summer of 1927. Xie returned to Xinhua to resist a marriage arranged by her parents and only achieved it on her fourth attempt. Her subsequent journey to Shanghai and Beijing could be seen as a continuation of Nora's story, the protagonist in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), who had been widely celebrated in China since the 1910s as an icon of women's emancipation. However, the path to self-fulfillment for this 'Chinese Nora' proved far less fortunate than the early feminists had envisioned. The gap between social theories and women's lived experiences can be attributed to the challenges of adapting to new social conditions and the vulnerability of women in the political sphere, as will be explored in Chapters One and Two.

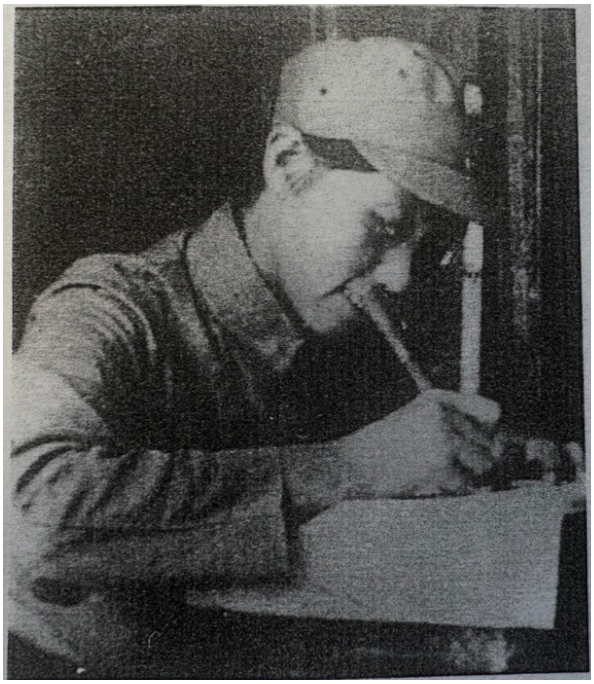

Figure 2: In 1937, Xie Bingying, in her uniform, was writing New War Diary on the front line of Luodian, Jiangsu Province. Courtesy of Wenhsun Literary Resource Centre, Taipei.

Figure 3: In October 1954, Xie, then a professor at Taiwan Provincial Normal College (now National Taiwan Normal University), was writing from her apartment in Taipei. Courtesy of Wenhsun Literary Resource Centre, Taipei.

After *War Diary* and several collections of essays, correspondences, and fictions, Xie's first autobiography, *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography* (yige nübing de zizhuan 一個女兵的自傳), was published by Liangyou Publishing House (Shanghai) in 1936. It

introduced her formative years, encompassing childhood, school days, march in the Northern Expedition, and marriage-related conflicts. One year after the end of the War of Resistance, Xie published the complete version of her autobiography, titled *Ten Years of a Woman Soldier* (nübing shinian 女兵十年) (1946). In addition to the content of the 1936 version, Xie also included her successful evasion of the prearranged marriage, her educational pursuits and imprisonment in Japan, and the establishment of the Hunan Women's Battlefield Service Corps (HWBSC) in 1937 – an initiative aimed at providing both medical and mental support at the frontlines. During the chaotic post-war period, she temporarily disentangled herself from political forces and founded a child day-care centre in Hankou, Wuhan, to reduce the burden on displaced mothers in finding employment opportunities. In 1946, Beijing Women's Normal University (BWNU) invited Xie to assume a role as a professor of Chinese literature, where she contributed her expertise until an offer from National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) beckoned two years later. Xie relocated to Taiwan in 1948 and reworked the 1946 version as *Autobiography of a Woman Soldier* (nübing zizhuan 女兵自傳) (1956). Her constant visiting and revisiting of memories concerning the Northern Expedition constitute the most compelling yet less discussed aspect of a comparative analysis of these three versions. The subsequent decades saw Xie embark on trips across Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the United States. She and her husband, Jia Yizhen 賈伊箴, resided in San Francisco until her passing in 2000.

Xie's career as a soldier-writer not only involved detailing her participation in the Northern Expedition and the War of Resistance (1937–1945) but also revisiting and reinterpreting her memories over time. Her writings span both war and post-war periods, offering first-hand accounts of female soldiers' inner ambiguities and affect in the twentieth century. They also reveal how nationalist discourse positioned women in various social settings, how women employed strategies of negotiation within these frameworks, and the kinds of communities they worked to establish beyond the atrocities, casualties, and military strategies.

Stories about Xie's later years seem to rather contradict her early image as a dauntless fighter. After resuming correspondence with some of her long-lost friends from mainland China in 1980, Xie expressed significant concern about their recent circumstances and hinted at the possibility of her visit to China. However, she eventually ceased mentioning

it over the objections of her husband. Due to Jia's strong antipathy towards China under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), he burnt letters sent to her from the Mainland and prevented her from responding.[2] Although Xie's expulsion from the CCP in 1931, her alignment with the KMT since the late 1930s, the persecution of her friends during the Cultural Revolution, and the tensions between Taiwan and the Mainland during the Cold War may all explain this, readers of her military works might find this discreet wife unfamiliar.

Nowadays, Xie Bingying's life and writing remain a subject of ideological debate. Xie has long been marginalised in modern Chinese studies, not only because of her 'suspicious' political stance after the 1930s, but also because veterans' narratives of 'runaway patriotism', in Rana Mitter's terms, might threaten the legitimacy of the CCP government's authoritarian construction.[3] It was not until the 1980s that her colleagues in mainland China began to write recollections of her, paralleling scholars' efforts to rediscover her legacy.[4] This period corresponded with the CCP government's burgeoning tendency to encompass non-communist-led revolutions and overseas Chinese within an overarching umbrella of patriotism. Xie's name is highlighted in national commemorations and the genealogy of Chinese women warriors. However, in the more nuanced political realm, mainland scholars have been reticent to discuss her anti-communist statements in Taiwan. Rather, emphases have been placed on the argument that although Xie was aligned with the KMT during the War of Resistance, she did not shy away from criticising the corruption within the troops.[5] Taiwanese scholars, on the other hand, have discussed why and how she deleted content related to leftist ideology from her later works, noting that her early

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[2] Wei Zhongtian, *Forever Friendship: Correspondences from Xie Bingying to Wei Zhongtian* (Yongheng de youyi: Xiebingying zhi Weizhongtian shuxinji 永恆的友誼: 謝冰瑩致魏中天書信集). Beijing: Zhongguo sanxia chubanshe, 2000, 41.

[3] Rana Mitter and Aaron Moore, 'China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45 (2), 2011, 225–240, 238.

[4] See, for example, Hualing Meng, 'Notes on the Visit of Xie Bingying' (Xie Bingying fangwen ji 謝冰瑩訪問記), *New Historical Materials*, 4, 1995, 99-109. Yang Xianru, 'The Underground's Struggle in Peiping in the 1930s' (Sanshi niandai chu beiping dixiadang douzheng pianduanlu 三十年代初北平地下黨鬥爭片段論), in *Memoirs of Beijing Revolutionary History* (Beijing gemingshi huiyilu 北京革命史回憶錄). Beijing: Zhonggong Beijing shi dangweishi yanjiushi, 1983, 42-43.

[5] Xu Xuhong, 'Xie Bingying and the Left Alliance: From Lu Xun's two letters to Wang Zhizhi' (Xie Bingying yu zuolian: Cong Lu Xun zhi Wang Zhizhi de liangfengxin tanqi 謝冰瑩與左聯: 從魯迅致王志之的兩封信談起), *Xinwenxue shiliao* 新文學史料, 3, 2013, 93–103. Feng Chao, 'On Xie Bingying's Thought Transformation and the Value Orientation of *Yellow Rive*' (lun Xie Bingying de sixiang zhuanbian yu Huanghe de jiazhi daoxiang 論謝冰瑩的思想轉變與黃河的價值導向), in *Xiandai zhongguo wenhua yu wenxue* 22 現代中國文化與文學 22. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2018, 91–102.

political ideology, though left-leaning, was not closely related to mainland left-wing writers' group.[6]

The ambiguity of Xie's memory is virtually downplayed, reducing her legacy to mere a description of *doing* rather than acknowledging a historical *being*. Beneath the seemingly calm surface of a woman warrior's life story, there is an undercurrent reflecting how female subjectivity was precariously constructed alongside nation-building. How much trust can we place in her autobiographical writing? Can the mnemonic truth and the historical truth be reconciled or at least coexist? How can we use it to interpret deep emotions, such as shame, regrets, and patriotism? This thesis examines both the historiography of Xie Bingying and her constructed image, presenting a multifaceted narrative of femininity, camaraderie, familyhood, emotion, and memory. Its purpose is threefold. First, the attention to specific historical junctures eclipses the evolution of Xie's writing that addresses familial and social wars across her whole life, resulting in a snapshot of particular texts rather than a sense of how these experiences fit into a wider body of work and interact with each other. An objective study of Xie Bingying recovers a fuller picture of women in the Republican Chinese political and cultural landscape, rather than only controversial political figures and intellectuals. Second, it investigates ways to bring disparate methodologies into productive dialogue, aiming to allow historians to use autobiographical writing and first-person war accounts while maintaining their ambiguity and hermeneutical openness. Third, it explores ways of reconciliation and forgiveness both during and after the war, in particular how a woman warrior readjusted to post-war peace through a purported conservative turn. Despite political division, the post-1949 literary scenes in the Mainland and Taiwan still reflect a certain consistency, with Xie and other first-generation immigrants playing a significant role in the KMT's cultural rejuvenation programme.

By examining a field that has not thoroughly established the complex reading of traumatic experiences distinguishing Western warfare interpretation, I also problematise the nation-state paradigm that dominates scholarship on cultural production in wartime China. This thesis consists of two intertwining layers: the historical and the mnemonic.

[6] See for example, Yang Chia-hsien 楊佳嫻, 'Becoming A "Female" Soldier: A Study of Xie Bingying's Military Career Essays' (Chengwei nübing: Xie Bingying de junlü shuxie 成為(女)兵:謝冰瑩的軍旅書寫), *Jindai zhongguo funü yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究, 30, 2017, 123–166. Chang Tang-Chi, 'On Xie Bingying's Leftist Beliefs and Later Transformation', *Tamkang University Journal*, 32, 2015, 283–311.

Since we cannot speak of memory without having a basic understanding of history, the first layer is a critical biography. Beginning with a Chinese Nora leaving her parents' home, we trace her journey through the Northern Expedition, Puyi's visit to Japan, the War of Resistance, and the relocation to the south, spanning from Xinhua County in Hunan to Hubei, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Beijing, and extending to Japan, Taiwan, Malaya, and the US. Drawing on archives, autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, historical journals and newspapers, interviews, and scholarly works, this thesis investigates how a woman participated in the construction of China's national identity through her mobility. It further provides insight into Xie's 'conservative turn' in her later years, particularly given the academic reticence in mainland China.

Given the linear and fluid narrative demanded by a biography, however, the first layer may raise but cannot fully address hermeneutical issues such as the question of authenticity in Xie's autobiographical writing, nor can it offer comprehensive readings of her feminist statements and sentiments that embed in discursive contexts. The second layer thus consists of thematic explorations of memories, primarily investigating Xie's depiction of other women and emotional struggles across time. Rather than reading her works as evidence bearing on a verdict on the resistance discourse or a chameleon pandering to censorship, I propose an open-ended approach that redeems them as multivalent utterances of a complex female subjectivity. Focusing on Xie's autobiographical writing and her lifelong entanglement with conflicts and wars, this thesis places her memories in China's ever-shifting geographical, social, cultural, and political landscapes in the twentieth century, where her network building, self-reflection, and interactions with others unfolded. It also extends to the global stage, examining how transnational travels post 1949 contextualised Xie's re-evaluation of the Chinese language and culture.

I build this thesis on the works of many scholars who have contributed to our understanding of the problem of women's wartime participation. However, due to their divergent thematic or methodological focuses, they have generally not problematised the evolving writing practices of a woman warrior as a means of reflecting women's construction of both individual and collective identities or explored how these identities have shifted over time in response to the changing meanings of patriotism. By seeing the experiences of being a warrior and the art of narrating a woman warrior's story as both instable and continuous, this thesis transcends mere documentation. Rather, it seeks to

explore the dynamics of gender and conflicts through a modern woman warrior's diligent recapture of the past across temporal and spatial contexts – a journey that helped her envision an evolving social order. In that sense, autobiographical writing is not merely an expression of one's inner emotions, but an articulatory practice that participates in the reproduction of forms of self and sociality.

How Was A Woman Warrior Formed, and By Whom?

The stories of iconic women warriors, including Hua Mulan 花木蘭, Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉, and Qin Liangyu 秦良玉, have been constantly circulated and adapted in the form of oral storytelling, fiction, drama, and poetry since imperial times. They contributed to China's national imagination, patriotic propaganda, and cultural heritage, inspiring later generations to protect their homeland. Women born in the turbulent first quarter of the twentieth century emerged as both inheritors and conveyors of this ongoing warrior legacy. They intertwined their own existence with it through broader yet more daily military endeavours. In recent decades, scholarly attention has shifted towards women's wartime engagement and post-war activities.[7] Nonetheless, the emotional struggles of women during and after the war often remained unnoticed within a media and educational framework predominantly shaped by male intellectuals. Even less attention has been paid to how individuals who underwent distinct wars and multiple migrations reflected upon and revisited their war memories, navigating the evolving dynamics of their identities as Chinese citizens, modern women, and female soldiers, leading to a lopsided focus on texts specific to particular battles rather than encompassing a comprehensive panorama. Women warriors frequently assumed practical roles, such as caregivers, nurses, interviewers, and mobilisers, in implementing the ambitious strategies devised by political leaders to safeguard their nation, yet they were also among the earliest casualties of the political

[7] To name a few, for women's salvation associations, see Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010; and Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, Women and Politics in Wartime China: Networking Across Geopolitical Borders. London and New York: Routledge, 2018; for the service provided by nurses and care workers on the frontlines, see Nicole Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018; for veterans' oral accounts, see Helen Young, *Choosing Revolution: Chinese Women Soldiers on the Long March.* Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001; for soldiers' widows' struggles for compensation after the war, see Linh D. Vu, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and The Politics of Dead Bodies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016; for communist women in rural aeras, see Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

undercurrents during post-war peace. Their narratives about war shed illuminating insights not only into the nation's reliance on its unsung supporters during difficult times but also into its apprehensions about uncontrolled disillusionment.

Contemporary public remembrance of women warriors delivers a lavish, even rhetorical, paean. Since the 1980s, public media in mainland China has integrated Xie into the grand narrative of female patriotism and counter-tradition. In 2021, *Women of China* (zhongguo funü 中國婦女), the first national women's periodical founded by the CCP in 1939, launched a special issue titled 'A Century of Women's Excellence Under the Party's Flag' (dangqi xia bainian jinguo bieyang hong 黨旗下百年巾幗別樣紅) to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the CCP. In an article introducing female communists in Hunan, Xie was enshrined as 'the first female soldier in modern Chinese history and the first soldier-writer in Chinese history', despite being only one member of the women's team in 1927 and her expulsion from the CCP in 1931.[8] Similarly, the 2022 Directory of Historical Figures in Hunan presents Xie's life story in chronological order, highlighting her military service and literary achievements during the Northern Expedition and the War of Resistance, as well as her resolute rejection of a prearranged marriage by her mother. In Taiwan, NTNU's 2015 Special Exhibition praised Xie as 'a leader in the renewal of the modern woman'. Her glorious title, 'woman warrior', 'represents an unprecedented image of a young woman in Xie's time who dared to ask her parents to leave her boudoir and bravely entered the battlefield, either to serve in the army or on the battlefield, regardless of the gossip of the old society'.[9] The consistent focal point combines verbal and visual features, dramatising her as the sole performer in shaping gender roles within the theatre of war.

[8] For the original text, see http://www.womenofchina.com/zt/2021/0624/4469.html.

[9] Jiayu Cui, *Research on Xie Bingying and Her Works* (Xie Bingying jiqi zuopin yanjiu 謝冰瑩及其作品研究). Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 2008. For the archive, see http://archives.lib.ntnu.edu.tw/exhibitions/HsiePingying/exhibit_02.jsp.

Figure 4: Xie Bingying's residence in Xinhua County, though not often maintained, preserves much of its original structure. The interior walls are adorned with two plaques presented by the Xie Bingying's Residence Memorial Centre and overseas Chinese, inscribed with phrases: 'The literary heroine of the world' (juedai wenhao yangshijie 絕代文豪揚世界)and 'Bingying's great achievements are renowned throughout China' (Bingying weiji yu zhonghua 冰瑩偉績譽中華). Photographed by the author, 2021.

If a woman's war experience does manage to reach a wider audience, it may have already undergone transformations, distortions, and evolutions, due to political regimes' strategies to interweave it with the enduring legacy of warriors and nation-building. Nonetheless, it may also be significantly shaped by the subject's personal will, as revealed in Xie's lifelong self-reflection. Such a convergence does not necessarily imply a compromise, but rather the reconciliation of a suffering individual in constant dialogue with her past self, a tortuous mental process that requires close reading. The autobiographical writings act as a palimpsest after the occurrence of brutality, recording information in different tones, about different details, perhaps only revealed from a certain angle, or at later times. It includes not only straightforward accounts of the past in the conventional sense, but also rhetorical devices typically found in literary works – omission, hyperbole, flashbacks, and metaphors – elements that might render a purportedly documentary-type work seem unreliable. Paul Fussell, a veteran-turned-historian, discusses literary responses to the war as ways of revealing the uncertainty, fear, desperation, and human errors that

defined the actual experience of living through it.[10] Such a study is not only of interest to historians, but further enriches our understanding of autobiographical writing and its relation to literature, historiography, and memory construction. Autobiographies and literary narratives, as Christopher Lloyd describes, become imperative for historians to understand 'the material and psychological reality' that individuals faced, especially given it is virtually impossible to think or write about the Second World War without making moral judgments.[11]

In a study of the psychic self, Judith Butler differentiates between the writing subject and the textual subject in autobiographical writing, noting that the self will generate the self and become a site of alteration through autobiographical reflexivity:[12]

> On the one hand, the subject can refer to its own genesis only by taking a third-person perspective on itself, that is, by dispossessing its own perspective in the act of narrating its genesis. On the other hand, the narration of how the subject is constituted presupposes that the constitution has already taken place, and thus arrives after the fact.[13]

This circular construction relies on the development of self-awareness, which presupposes the confrontation between self and society and forms a subject that continues to renew itself. In this regard, autobiography is about iterability and what is narrated as a new 'truth' at each narrating point. For current scholarship on war memory, the belief in authenticity bypasses the carefully crafted text and focuses only on the author's authentic interpretation of her experiences. Yet given the ambiguity of memory and the subjective nature of the narrative stance, authors can construct a 'truth' that differs from their past selves, who were also presented at the same events. In other words, truthfulness resides in the motivation and intentions of the storytellers rather than in the resulting stories.[14]

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[10] See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; Pail Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
[11] Christopher Lloyd, *Collaboration and Resistance in Occupied France*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 5, 11.
[12] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997, 13.
[13] Ibid, 11.
[14] William Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Even in times of peace, war lives on those who have been through it. This thesis moves beyond viewing war as an ensemble of statistics, battles, atrocities, and exploits. Instead, it adopts a more nuanced approach, focusing on how war becomes a susceptible memory, narrated by a sentimental subject who is continually inspired by, responds to, and participates in the writing of history for her readers of each generation. Most of my analysis will therefore be restricted to the 'I' in the work, without the pretence of assessing the inner subjectivity of the historical Xie Bingying. The multiplicity, ineffability, and ambivalence present in literature and memory make it impossible to analyse Xie's writing through a single methodology. In the next section, I aim to construct a framework that addresses three dimensions.

Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue

In his article exploring new possibilities for the study of the history of war, Hans van de Ven suggests the need for further research into 'wartime everydayness', that is, 'no matter how deep the disruption, devastating the damage, and traumatic the turmoil caused by the war, the Chinese people developed new normals'.[15] One way to achieve this is to explore personal accounts that reveal people's intimate responses to horrific events, their worlds of thinking and feeling. By speaking themselves with written words, people became 'enmeshed in webs of attachment, endowed with feelings, emotions, and imaginations, and active participants operating in complex social networks'.[16] This 'web of attachment' is often absent from narratives about a woman warrior, where she is typically depicted as a lone heroine journeying between the battlefield and home, only to be supplemented posthumously with extravagant accolades. But being in a long and contested history, her story does not end with the conclusion of a battle, nor can it become reducible to a monolith that facilely weaves into the mythos of women warriors. Scenarios Xie presented include, but are not limited to, while her adventures were marketed as a true portrait of women's liberation, the protagonist herself was penniless and struggling with unkind booksellers; she was expected by younger women who also wanted to venture into the world to be a

[15] Hans Van de Ven, 'Wartime Everydayness: Beyond the Battlefield in China's Second World War'. *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 13(1), 2019, 1–23, 3–4.
[16] Ibid, 3.

role model, yet the weight of this responsibility felt overwhelming; she began to question whether her youthful ideals were correct and sought to make changes.

Struggles concerning emotions, communities, ideals, and identities are conveyed through the medium of writing and are repeatedly enriched and reshaped by the subject in a creative way. As an interdisciplinary project that seeks to bridge the boundaries between literary and historical studies, this thesis aims to bring three specific strands to a point of concurrency, though not to be confused with the intellectual work already done by those who have preceded.

First Strand: On Autobiography

The first strand is the incorporation of autobiographical writing and memory studies in history. In current historiography, the self-reflection of prominent political figures – through diaries, autobiographies, and poems – is no longer regarded as a minor category of evidential texts. Instead, it serves to testify their wartime activities as complex phenomena that demonstrate alternative trajectories of nationalism and offer insight into their personal thoughts and analyses of various people, not just the state.[17] Fruitful self-awareness enriches the subjective dimension of historiography. Nonetheless, the stories of more ordinary participants in war often become footnotes to the nationalist discourse or supplements to collective memories. Although scholars have pointed out the uncertainty of memory and the problems with confusing the writing subject with the textual subject, in terms of modern Chinese studies, personal writings are still treated as archival documents, readings for psychological investigations, or sub-sections under broader social themes.[18] Attention to autobiographical writings by women who experienced the war has been limited to particular historical junctures rather than how they reflected on the past in light of their present experiences, as well as the possible revision of memories during their cross-boundary travel.

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[17] For instance, from Chiang Kai-shek's diaries, Hans Van de Van interprets Chiang's hesitations and cautions behind his decisions. See Hans Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China 1925-1945*. London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2003. For Zhou Fohai's diaries, see Dongyoun Hwang, 'Wartime Collaboration Through A Collaborator's Eyes: Zhou Fohai (1897–1947) and His diary', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 24 (1), 52-71. For Wang Jingwei's poems, see Zhiyi Yang, Zhiyi Yang, *Poetry, History, Memory: Wang Jingwei and China in Dark Times*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2023.

[18] See Janet Ng, *Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003, 17.

Chinese women have started the modern autobiographical practice since the late Qing and flourished it as an expressive venue for self-creation during the New Culture Movement, when the awareness of the self as a political entity deepened.[19] Literary studies offer a more sophisticated analysis of women's autobiographies than historical studies. For instance, autobiographical writing reveals that accomplished female authors like Ding Ling, Feng Yuanjun, and Bing Xin were actively involved in shaping their identities as historical beings through processes of self-negotiation. Military life was seldom a focus in these accounts. While Ding Ling's military life has garnered some attention, her role in organising the Northwest Field Service Corps and her propaganda efforts are not typically highlighted as significant in her oeuvre. The most frequently discussed woman warrior is likely Qiu Jin, particularly because her 'personal life' depicted in her traditional poetry reflects her intimate struggles about the gendered role in a patriarchal society.[20] Yet most women serving on the front lines were more 'ordinary' people who had no privilege of writing in a quiet room.[21] The scarcity of war-related personal accounts written by them can be largely attributed to frequent marches, the demands of their busy workloads, and the lack of opportunities for creative writing, except when commissioned by newspapers.[22] During the Northern Expedition, Xie could only write letters with paper on her knees. She complained in *War Diary* that her bag was lost during the march. While the clothes were of little consequence, it was the loss of the four diaries that vexed her a lot.[23]

Oral histories have become a crucial method for tracing the political trajectories and emotional lives of women warriors. Helen Young's research, based on interviews with twenty-two female veterans of the Long March, highlights that military service provided women with a justifiable reason to evade arranged marriages and patriarchal abuse. As Young observes, women only began to grasp the significance their male leaders attached to what had appeared to them as a lengthy and grueling troop movement after hearing talks about the remarkable accomplishment of the Red Army's '25,000 li Long March'.[24] Danke

[19] Jing M. Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops: Autobiographical Stories by Modern Chinese Women Writers*. Hong Kong University Press, 2003, 14.
[20] See Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-century China*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, 100.
[21] Of course, there was little that was truly 'ordinary' about these women: most peasant women and students did not leave their homes to join the army or become leaders of organisations in war.
[22] For an insightful examination of diaries by ordinary soldiers during the Second World War, see Aaron Moore, *Writing War*.
[23] Xie Bingying, *War Diary* (Congjun riji 從軍日記). Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1933 [1929], 15.
[24] Helen Young, *Choosing Revolution*, 12.

Li also explores the roles of women as 'activists in war mobilisation, propaganda, and wartime production' in Chongqing from oral documents.[25] The landscape of displacement exhibited a remarkable tolerance for political diversity. It opened avenues for women to voice themselves on the public stage and exert influence within China's wartime politics. In a broader context, the testimonies of comfort women, often gathered through oral interviews decades after the system was dismantled and the women were 'liberated', have been gaining increasing attention in mainland China, Taiwan, and the Philippines.[26] These narratives serve as a reminder of the agency exhibited by women across continual social, cultural, and political transformations in the turbulent era.

Autobiographical writings and oral narratives share key similarities and differences, particularly regarding the unreliability of memory. Both are retrospective in nature, though oral narratives are often recounted much further from the time of the events the subjects describe. Both interrogate historical data, not by asking whether women achieved what men did, but by exploring what women were actually doing. Thanks to the careful guidance of interviewers, oral interviews can shun military or political jargon and concentrate more on everyday aspects of women's lives, such as their childhood experiences, motivations for joining the revolution, and non-political relationships with other women. Xie also avoided specific discussed political events, such as the peasant movement, either by completely omitting passages from earlier works or by employing subtle irony to navigate sensitive topics. While more parts of her writing remain closely tied to her personal life, this avoidance, not because of external questions, still invites rich interpretations. Autobiographical writing is, by its very nature, a window onto intense mental activity. The shifts in her tone, changes in focus, and variations in retelling the same stories offer deeper insight into her evolving perspectives and emotional life. Likewise, if the interviewer and interviewee engage in multiple conversations, the same story may be retold with varying details and embellished with exaggerations. Some memories may take on mythic proportions, an aspect that both oral history and autobiographical research equally consider. Many contextual factors could influence how much the interviewed women were willing to disclose about themselves, including the interviewer's nationality, the source of the

[25] Danke Li. *Echoes of Chongqing*, 133.
[26] See, for example, Peipei Qiu, Su Zhiliang, and Chen Lifei, 'Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves', in *Contemporary Chinese Studies*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013; Myrna Elizabeth P. Borromeo, 'Media for Justice and Healing: The Case of Philippine Comfort Women Survivors', *Review of Women's Studies*, 20 (1–2), 2010, 87–122.

project's funding, and the language in which the final book would be published. Xie, too, was affected by external circumstances, but fortunately, each of these shifts has been preserved in her long writing career.

Unlike formal courtroom testimonies or loosely structured interviews, autobiographical writings offer polysemic articulations of a romantic lyrical subject. History and memory intertwine in a sophisticated subject, imbued with the power to resist the punitive forgetting often imposed by the victor's history on the marginalised or defeated. The autobiographical 'I' carries not only the author's personal memories but also the collective memory filtered through them. It constructs a quiet, towering monument to lost battles, questioned ideals, forgotten companions, unpraised victories, and the long, difficult struggles of days and nights. It extends those moments in interviews that might otherwise be reduced to simple 'silence', for example. After a series of life-altering events, Xie divorced her second husband and returned to her hometown, heartbroken. Her mother, still angry and resentful over the failed marriage she had arranged, refuses to speak to her. Yet, late at night, believing her daughter to be asleep, she gently stroked Xie's hair and quietly wept. Feeling the tenderness in her mother's touch, Xie was overwhelmed with a deep wave of sadness:

> Just for the sake of my own freedom and happiness, I made my mother sleepless all night, praying for my news. Now? What have I gained from all these years of struggle? I was liberated from the old-style marriage but entangled myself in a new kind of love. I want to tell her that for four years I suffered all the bitterness of the world and all the torment of fate: I was in prison; I was almost starving to death; I gave birth to a child. I am now in exile, with no future ahead of me.[27]

This extract from Xie's 1946 autobiography was completed nine years after she first enlisted, seven years after escaping an arranged marriage, and five years after the occurrence of the event. Behind her widely publicised Nora-esque departure from a patriarchal family, her celebrated participation in the Northern Expedition, and her dedication to communist ideals, Xie only reflected her path of pain through writing and

[27] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of a Woman Soldier* (Nübing zizhuan 女兵自傳). Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1985 [1956], 256.

embedded it in an intimate space of the mother-daughter bond. While it remains uncertain whether a heartfelt, reconciliatory conversation ever took place, Xie poignantly captures various moments of silence: a mother stuck when talking about Confucian ideals of filial piety, a heartbroken mother who only wept when she thought her daughter was asleep, and, finally, a mother, rendered speechless by a stroke, who finally longed to read her daughter's books.

In most times, Xie's belated confessions reached only her readers rather than her mother, who passed away in 1936, long before this autobiography was published. In the silent author-reader communication, the latter might allow themselves a plaintive moment and admit having entertained the same thoughts. Thereby a connection is established between a warrior's traumatic adventure and everydayness. Issues such as the characteristics, reliability, rupture, romance, and continuity pertaining to individuals' war memories and their carriers lack comprehensive exploration in studies on China's historical non-fiction. Xie's intricate and cyclical recollections provide a valuable lens through which we can explore how a modern woman perceived people in wars and conflicts across time and how she reconciled with the past in the post-war period.

Many pieces in Xie's work demonstrate the limit of evidential research. Nonetheless, current scholarship tends to highlight her early wartime experiences, placing minimal attention to the discrepancies in her writings, her struggles concerning the nationalist agenda, and her literary contributions after relocation, including potential connections or continuities with her works on the Mainland. Granting the authenticity of Xie's autobiographical writings, they dwell on two primary perspectives: First, Xie's noteworthy military service, coupled with her bold stance against foot-binding and arranged marriage, represents a female rebel's courage to challenge the confines of a patriarchal family and devote herself to the national revolution.[28] Second, autobiography as a self-reflective genre raises high expectations among historians regarding the reliability of the author and her life story. Xie's writing was used as unmediated primary sources to investigate modern Chinese women's participation in sea bathing during the Republican era, their rates of enlistment in

[28] Jing M. Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*. Li Guo, 'Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-Century China'. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 17 (3), 2015, 1–8.

the military, political engagement, as well as their practices of wartime mobilisation and medical care in rural areas.[29]

Chapters One, Two, and Five focus on how human life has been defined by linear time and coloured by cyclical memories. Xie confided her regrets to those who would never hear them again, including her parents, friends, comrades, and her past self, and revised her memories for those who would follow. Sorrow emerges when a moral and sentient individual confronts the relentless march of history. When juxtaposing her pain in the face of so-called 'freedom' with her return to the front lines during the War of Resistance and her conservative shift after relocating to Taiwan, Xie's writings become a multifaceted self-examination that spans generations, reflecting the tumultuous times that shaped her. She never sought to actively transcend history's definition of her as a fighter, but the multiplicity of her autobiographical writing reveals a rich blend of compromise, contemplation, and dialogue.

Second Strand: On Memory

The second strand is the construction of women warriors as a cultural hallmark representing national unification. As Anita Shapira points out, encapsulating victim behaviours in grand narratives of heroism fails to capture the nuances of individual recollections, which often do not fit into clear-cut, black-and-white portrayals.[30] The artistic portrayal of the legendary women warriors around resistance literature has constituted a research lacuna in their personal voices, especially with the loss of understanding of their changing minds and interpersonal interactions. She is typically portrayed as a lone warrior with lofty ideals, accompanied by elders who act either as guides or as obstacles. Women in similar circumstances, especially those who have not achieved the same success, are often notably absent in her story. Xie's writing not only reflects her personal experiences but also the

[29] See, for example, Gail Hershatter, 'State of the Field: Women in China's Long Twentieth Century'. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 63(4), 2004, 991–1065; Hsiao-pei Yen, 'Body Politics, Modernity and National Salvation: The Modern Girl and the New Life Movement'. *Asian Studies Review*, 29(2), 2005, 165–186; Nicole Barnes, *Intimate Communities*; Antonio Barrento, 'Going Modern: The Tourist Experience at the Seaside and Hill Resorts in Late Qing and Republican China'. *Modern Asian Studies*, 52(4), 2018, 1089–1133.

[30] The dominant frameworks of victim behaviour, whether characterised as heroic or collaborative, often prove inadequate in capturing the subtleties of individual memories, which resist simplistic black-white dichotomies.

stories of the women she encountered throughout different stages of her life. For example, the Chinese Nora who fled home was not a lone figure but part of a group of confused, impoverished, yet hopeful young women who traveled from small towns to big cities in search of a livelihood. The women she led on the front lines during the War of Resistance were not simply united by shared ideals, but part of an organisation that required careful management, showcasing women's leadership abilities and their capacity for mutual support.

The emphasis on gender within the compound term 'woman warrior' underscores a female subject who has ventured into a realm conventionally associated with men and displayed remarkable courage, strength, and determination that defies societal norms. Meanwhile, it often denotes women who defended their nation during incursions, particularly when men were unable to fulfil their expected obligations. Among the earliest renowned examples of imperial China is that of Hua Mulan. Against the dynastic transitions from the late Ming to the early Qing dynasties, female generals such as Liang Hongyu and Qin Liangyu further achieved popularity through oral traditions and fiction.[31] Hongyu, having acquired martial arts skills under the tutelage of her army commander father, participated in the Jin-Song conflicts against the Jurchen to assist her husband. Her feat of beating the war drum recurred in later recreations about heroic women during dynastic decline and crisis.[32] Similarly, Qin Liangyu, who honed her martial prowess alongside her brothers, accompanied her husband to confront local warlords and repel Manchu-led Jin invasions on the southwestern border of the Ming Empire. The War of Resistance witnessed another climax in the adaptation of these women warriors' stories, when many of the over 600 Chinese dramas released at the time had titles that specifically referenced these patriotic female fighters.[33] This Han-centred discourse can be riddled with predilections; for instance, the debate over Hua Mulan's nomadic tribal origins and the identity of her enemy. In the context of resistance literature during wartime, invocations of warriors'

[31] Louise Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China*. Mānoa: Hawai'i University Press, 2001, 87.
[32] For example, *A Pair of Heroes* (Shuanglie ji 雙烈記, ca. 1580s) by Zhang Siwei 張四維 (1526–1585) and *The Qilin Mantle* (Qilin ji 麒麟罽, ca. 1600s) by Chen Yujiao 陳與郊 (1544–1611).
[33] See Qin Xianci, ed., *Historical Materials on Wartime Literature* (Kangzhan shiqi wenxue shiliao 抗戰時期文學史料), Taipei: Wenxun yuekan zazhishe, 1987, 170-203.

stories tend to reflect a politically necessary moral dualism that prioritises high-mindedness over individual critical intelligence.[34]

The genealogy of the women warriors is well-developed within the arborescent structure of historiography, yet it lacks a clear depiction of interpersonal connections and coetaneous linkages. Unlike male knights who travelled alone to challenge the oppressive regimes and mutually supportive male societies, female knights errant usually developed into an isolated symbol of ardent bravery against the backdrop of the dynastic transition, with a stronger connection to heterosexual mentors.[35] In her study of women's roles in the context of national trauma within late imperial literature, Wai-yee Li employed *xia* as a comprehensive appellation that encompasses 'defiant, unconventional women', and, more often, 'it refers to women of valour and discernment', such as general Liang Hongyu.[36] The self-loyalty suggested by *xia* transforms into a dual allegiance when gender references are introduced. Female anti-conformists within this framework serve as an embellishment to the narrative of national salvation, contributing their intelligence to either the men within their families or other male masters, while ultimately to the state by aiding the former or critiquing their incapacity. Their extraordinary courage and martial prowess were harnessed both from their fathers, brothers, and husbands and for the defence of these men. In her exploration of female figures in Chinese fiction, Louise Edwards notes that both autonomous female knights errant and all-women military units paradoxically reinforced the existing patriarchal social structure by fulfilling men's claims of virtues that were culturally coded as masculine.[37] Amidst dynastic transitions, they emerged as rebels who led loyalists from the prior dynasty in acts of resistance against the ruling government. In doing so, they reconcile the role of 'barbarians' who 'invigorated and sometimes redefined the purported defence of legitimate political authority' and were steadfast supporters of the erstwhile regime.[38]

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[34] Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993, 82–93.
[35] Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2014, 205.
[36] Ibid, 205.
[37] Louise Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 10.
[38] Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, 206.

Despite women's departure from certain conventional 'womanly' behaviour, their revolts in imperial China were circumscribed by the parameters established by patriarchal authorities, framed as provisional responses to national emergencies. A recurring motif across various iterations of the Mulan-like myth is the concept of 'homecoming'.[39] This narrative setting underscores that while these warriors assume male attire to confront a perceived erosion of virtue and societal order, once the order is reinstated, they withdraw from their warrior personas and re-enter the domestic sphere. Their transgression of gender roles symbolises societal turbulence, whereas their subsequent domestication serves as a token of post-war peace.[40] In other words, the disruptive yet captivating figure propels the story to its climax, but the long-awaited sense of normalcy and an essential narrative resolution manifest at the crucial homecoming stage. Although, in the context of the early twentieth century, homecoming often signaled the start of another impending escape for women.

The war provided a vibrant arena where women could establish networks with a wider cohort, despite the potential dissolution of these connections once the war ceased. In imperial China, such bonds were primarily exclusive to men, who absorbed initial lessons in competition and cooperation ingrained within hierarchical male relationships through formative interactions with their brothers. This early conditioning, coupled with support from male patrons, laid the foundation for men to develop intricate social networks, as did their participation in secret societies, shared examination training, common teachers, schools, and communal travels. This process not only garnered men's recognition but also improved their societal status by shaping fundamental structures that underpinned societal interactions: 'the family system, the civil service examination system, and patterns of male sojourning'.[41] The power of male bonding sometimes even threatened the monarchs with common 'high purposes' that sparked radical actions.[42] It should be noted that, despite centring their lives around households and carefully avoiding posing any perceived threat to the established gender norms, women in the late imperial era managed to forge links through shared interests. In an analysis of the development of women's literary culture

[39] Joseph R. Allen, 'Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior'. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, 4, 1996, 343–379, 377.
[40] Louise Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China*.
[41] Susan Mann, 'The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture'. *The American Historical Review*, 105 (5), 2000, 1600–1614.
[42] The most famous examples in Chinese literature include *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*.

during the Qing dynasty, Dorothy Ko examines the diversity of Jiangnan women's networks that transcended geographical, temporal, and social boundaries.[43] For these women, their kinship and affinal connections facilitated the expansion of activities such as gatherings, verse exchanges, outings, and religious rituals to neighbouring cities, enabling a rhythm and logic of their own. Nonetheless, such connections were limited to noblewomen and their maids.

Women warriors' journeys remain uncharted outside the main thread, leaving readers uncertain about how they interacted with their mothers, sisters, and other women who shared similar aspirations, and whether they expressed any shared confusion about the return of glory. In a 2005 article reviewing the efforts of Chinese elite women to attain political influence, Edwards further states that while women from various ideological backgrounds unified and empowered themselves during a time of national turmoil, their endeavours did not significantly disrupt the entrenched perceptions of male dominance. Instead, it led to the frame of 'crisis femininity', in which exceptional circumstances create a mere temporary departure from traditional feminine norms as women assume roles of military leadership, engage in warfare, or defend cities in revolutions including the Xinhai Revolution, the Northern Expedition, and the War of Resistance.[44] The primary consequence was not to challenge the underlying association between women and political leadership but rather to safeguard and consolidate the existing structure. While women may have experienced a conditional liberation from their conventional loyalty to patriarchal family structures, they still performed as emotional supporters and caregivers of male soldiers, encouraging their enlistment and sacrifice for the nation.

The study of twentieth-century war history has witnessed a shift from military operations and leadership to writings about soldiering, in which more historians take a bottom-up approach to examine individuals' diverse wartime encounters once obscured by state violence, media control, and cultural markets that perpetuated existing hierarchies of

[43] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

[44] Louise Edwards, 'The Impact of the War on Women's Political Participation in Modern China: The Problem of Crisis in Femininity' (Zhanzheng dui xiandai zhongguo funü canzheng yundong de yingxiang weiji nüxing de wenti 戰爭對現代中國婦女參政運動的影響：危機女性的問題), *Research on the Hundred-year Feminist Thought in China* (bainian zhongguo nüquan sichao yanjiu 百年中國女權思潮研究), Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2005, 220–226.

power.[45] As the subjects of a large yet often subordinate aspect of China's war stories, women serving at the frontlines were not blind assistants overshadowed by the wise male commanders, no matter how traumatic the casualty or how disillusioned the prospects of emancipation. Contrary to the perception that women's military activism was facilitated through assimilation into male identities, they actually celebrated womanhood and female friendship through mass mobilisation and dedicated work at death's door. The questions remain unanswered: How did women warriors experience war and interpret an identity that encapsulated both collective attributes, i.e., the enduring myth of Chinese women warriors and the discourse of nationalism, and individual attributes? Were they aware of, and if so, how did they respond to, the crisis femininity underlying each promise of empowerment? Why were they still willing to support their country through its dark times? Beyond their predecessors in the genealogy of women warriors, did they have peer role models, and what role did their mothers play? To understand the wider agency of Chinese women in war, it is pertinent to reframe the key theme from one centred on their exploitation to a focus on their individual efforts, collaboration, and emotional struggles within an expanding community of similar kind.

The patriotic efforts of women warriors, the dynamics within women's communities, and their emotional struggles collectively shaped the fabric of wartime women's culture in China. The exploration of women's networks has primarily focused on elite women, particularly those with a certain level of political agency. While compared to their counterparts safeguarded by other social standing, more ordinary women warriors were often vulnerable to post-war challenges.[46] This predicament is exemplified by Xie and her comrades' trajectory following the Northern Expedition and the War of Resistance, which was marked by their powerlessness in factional conflicts and in society. Despite the unfavourable circumstances, women still developed their own initiatives and language. They learnt from each other's strengths, not merely invoking historical icons or women in high positions. An illustrative case, which will be examined in Chapter Four, is Xie's transformation from the Northern Expedition to the War of Resistance and how she led a team composed of female nurses, students, and teachers. She suffered from the dissolution of the women's team in the Northern Expedition but still rallied herself and other women

[45] Aaron Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
[46] For elite women's wartime activities, see Vivienne Xiangwei Guo, *Women and Politics in Wartime China*.

to contribute to the War of Resistance. The narratives of women facing the war and the aftermath of war, as well as the interaction between women of different backgrounds, form integral threads within the broader tapestry of women's wartime experiences in China. This connection sometimes extended beyond borders. Xie continued to cultivate friendships with journalists, writers, and even in prison, despite the discrimination against the Chinese in Japan, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Third Strand: On Emotion

The third strand is the insufficient attention that the current field of military history has paid to Chinese women's emotional lives. The joys and sorrows of individuals who are not prominent politicians like Napoleon or Chiang Kai-shek may seem less meaningful when discussing the course of history. Yet the expression of emotions through actions and language is never simply about the nature flow of human feelings but is always also about something more complex, namely, identity, gender, culture, authority, power, and community. It is historically situated, relating to distinct qualities of social experience and relationships that define the vibe of certain generations. In recent decades, the history of emotions has been richly explored by academics. Important contributions to this emerging field have been made by scholars like Peter N. Stearns, Timothy Tackett, Barbara H. Rosenwein, William M. Reddy, Sarah Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, to name but a few. As Rosenwein points out, the history of emotions moves beyond the grand narrative and challenges the assumption of a linear, progressive model.[47] It advocates for a focused exploration of the formation and evolution of human emotional behaviour across contexts, as well as the tensions that arise as individuals negotiate with the emotional norms imposed by the social order.

Scholars have begun to focus on the emotional lives of ordinary people in war and how they navigated these emotions to support their nation through probably the darkest time of its history. By examining the diaries of Japanese and American soldiers during the Second World War, Aaron Moore points out that soldiers disciplined their 'weak' feelings, such as homesickness, fear, hunger, and sympathy for the enemy, through writing, which

[47] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Ithaca Ny: Cornel University Press, 2007.

served as a strategy to survive the cruel demands of the battlefield. These emotions developed into individuals' inner perceptions of the war, such as their disbelief in orders from their superiors, anxiety about casualties, and frustration with their comrades.[48] Nicole Barnes found that Chinese women's active involvement in medical service not only raised a challenge to gender norms that exclusively defined the battlefield as a masculine space but also fostered an intimate community wherein trust and care could be cultivated among citizens.[49] In some cases, references to emotion are implicitly woven into the analysis of traumatic events. Gail Hershatter analyses a desperate scenario faced by communist women of being abandoned by their troops in the Jiangxi Soviet due to their inability to embark on the arduous Long March.[50]

Yet when comparing Xie's identity as both a writer and a warrior, it becomes clear that literary studies focus more on the inner struggles of female writers and their fictional characters than history studies. In the 1920s and 30s, female writers gradually shifted from seeking freedom by escaping patriarchal families to embracing a new moral vision of 'revolution + love' (geming jia lianai 革命加恋爱). This eventually led to their direct or indirect involvement in the war, where collective political action and national salvation gained unparalleled importance in literature.[51] Current scholarship on Xie's works follows this thread, attributing her suffering to the familial constraints that deprived her of freedom, while her decision to join the army is seen as the realisation of her autonomy.[52] This seems to achieve what Western moral philosophers define as the modern 'expressivist self', who perceives moral authority as internal and takes pride in being an autonomous moral agent, free from the teleological constraints of traditional society. Opposed to it is a criticised 'heroic self', who bases moral judgements on the ethics of action rather than the hermeneutics of intention.[53] Tensions between individuals who perceive and those who are merely what they act explain why the enlightenment project could have such a wrenching impact on social imagination in the colonial context of China, particularly on

[48] Aaron Moore, *Writing War*.
[49] Nicole Barnes, *Intimate Communities*.
[50] Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*.
[51] See Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, part 3.
[52] See for example, Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010, 9.
[53] Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

the articulation of sentiment. Writers appropriated the romanticist celebration of individual autonomy and love to critique Confucian discourses, often using the contentious relationship between freedom and filial piety as a site of practice.

In war history, discussions and disseminations of women warriors' stories tend to prioritise what they did over how they felt, situating them within a broader framework where personal expressions are eclipsed by military operation. Otherwise, women's emotions may be collected in hindsight, as veterans disclose the suffering they endured in interviews or memoirs.[54] While emotional characters attaching to women warriors' public image, including bravery, dedication, and heroism, appear well-justified, the individual existence risks being confined to the problematic notion of the heroic self. A particular challenge lies in contextualising women warriors' patriotism within different contexts while preserving its multifaceted nature. For instance, the influence of Enlightenment discourse and its celebration of individual autonomy undeniably shaped Xie's generation. Many, for instance, participated in the war not out of national loyalty, but as a means of escaping patriarchal marriage or fulfilling self-development. However, it is equally important that as they traversed China, serving its people and defending their homes, a sense of national solidarity gradually developed, reshaping their understanding of self and others. How nationalism became a normative expectation for these women and whether this expectation induced emotional turmoil and transformations remains an area that requires further exploration.

Xie consistently demonstrated patriotism in her writings; however, the medium, the focus, and the emotions she conveyed beyond the theme of revolution vary across experiences. Some emotions reinforced her patriotism, such as the suppression of certain unpleasant feelings on the battlefield to focus on military missions. Others, however, led to confusion, and still others develop in psychologically harmful ways, such as feelings of shame, as explored in Chapter Three. Some are even more subtle and manifested by silence. In Xie's work, communication among women – whether between mothers and daughters, comrades in arms, or friends – often features extended monologues and moments of silence. In a space momentarily detached from the constructed vocabulary of patriarchy, emotions

[54] See, for example, Helen Praeger Young, 'Threads from Long March Stories: The Political, Economic and Social Experience of Women Soldiers', in *Women in China: The Republican Period in Historical Perspective*, edited by Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski, Münster: Lit, 2005, 172–193.

circulate between individuals through illocutionary means, forming an intimate environment centred on women's bewilderment, pain, and empathy.

One of the most prominent studies of emotion in twentieth-century China is that of the revolution, in particular the role of love, hatred, shame, and bitterness in the Communist activities, including the Land Reform, the Anti-Rightist Movement, and the Cultural Revolution.[55] A typical scene depicts an evil gentry bound in the middle of a square, surrounded by vengeful peasants who take turns recounting his crimes. Their fervent, cacophonous voices crescendo into a collective verdict: 'Shoot them to death!'[56] This is also a scene familiar to Xie and her fellow women when they marched in rural areas of Hubei in 1927:

> The crowd that had gathered to see the three old prisoners surged in like a tide. The noise was underscored by triumphant, cheerful laughter, and every peasant's face, even those of the young children, was adorned with a proud smile. They craned their necks to peer into the dark house, as if fearing that the three old prisoners might slip away through the door, which they had already tightly barred.[57]

Although Xie expressed sentiments similar to those of the peasants in this 1936 article, a tinge of incongruity haunts in her depiction of the audience stretching out their necks, a scene echoing the numbness of Chinese spectators Lu Xun 魯迅 bitterly observed during a classroom screening in Japan. Xie continued that, following the day's intense denunciations, she was responsible for guarding three landlords scheduled for execution the next day. She experienced a vague sympathy for two of them: an elderly man with a white beard who wept, and another man who was so emaciated almost resembled a skeleton. Moved by their poignant lamentations, 'somehow, I poured a cup of tea and brought it to

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[55] Huang Daoxuan, 'A Spiritual History of the Rectification Movement' (Zhengfeng yundong de xinlingshi 整風運動的心靈史), *Jindaishi yanjiu* 近代史研究, 2, 2020, 4–26. For an elaboration on the communists' political mobilisation under Mao Zedong, see Yu Liu, 'Maoist Discourse and the Mobilization of Emotions in Revolutionary China', *Modern China*, 36 (3), 2010, 329–362.

[56] Sulamith Heins Potter, 'The Cultural Construction of Emotion in Rural Chinese Social Life'. *Ethos*, 16, 1988, 181–208. The scene is reminiscent of Potter's observations of rural China, namely people's lack of hidden depth: a man is what he does.

[57] Xie Bingying, 'Three Old Prisoners' (Sange lao qiufan 三個老囚犯), *Funü Shenghuo (Shanghai 1935)* 婦女生活 (上海 1935), 2 (4), 1936, 112–116, 111–112.

the old, bearded man's lips'.[58] A modern self emerges from the tears of the other, revealing an unheroic identity whose vision of ordinary life casts doubt on the purportedly higher forms of activity, including resistance, liberation, and revolution.

Xie's accounts also capture the emotions of women around her who had undergone similar experiences. While their stories may not be the most emblematic of the era, these texts highlight how wartime states depend on the collective support of their female citizens – support that arises not only from institutional mandates but also from the accumulation of individual decisions. In the military academy, what captivated these young women were not the familiar tales of Mulan, Liang Hongyu, or Qiu Jin they had heard since childhood, nor the speeches about serving the people. Rather, it was the camaraderie, humour, and conversations shared among women from different provinces that gradually shaped their sense of a geographically conceived homeland. During the War of Resistance, Xie encouraged her corps members to keep diaries documenting their front-line experiences. It was not until one member encountered the sight of blood and severed limbs that she almost fainted, realising that this was not an imagined adventure, but a brutal reality in which 'a mother had lost her son'.[59] This profound moment deepened her understanding of the weight of her responsibilities.

Some emotions deeply involved with patriotism, such as shame, will also be examined at the individual level. In Western studies of emotion, shame illustrates how self-experience is fundamentally dependent on the Other, with its experiences providing vivid examples of other-mediated forms of self-awareness.[60] Yet the Western paradigm sometimes overlooks a variant of shame that emerged under the profound influence of colonialism on indigenous morality. It is also difficult to overlook the sense of superiority embedded in the manipulation of shame as a tool for fostering national pride. Consider, Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, observes that in the demand for government apologies for the history of slavery, shame – much like love – can be mobilised to construct collective ideals.[61] This feeling different for the minority or the defeated. Amal Treacher, in her

[58] Ibid, 116.
[59] Yan Chao. 'A Soldier Injured by Steel Plate' (gei gangban yashang de gongbing 給鋼板壓傷的工兵), *Kangzhan (Hankou)* (War of Resistance 抗戰), 9, 1937, 208.
[60] Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
[61] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

exploration of Egyptian masculinity, suggests that humiliation stems from a sense of emasculation experienced when, for example, Egyptian men were made to feel they could not, and should not, govern, thus being rendered powerless. This fear of losing masculinity lies at the core of shame and is closely linked to postcolonial subjectivity.[62] Laura Berlant connects masculinity to what she defines as 'cruel optimism', a 'condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object'.[63] For Berlant, fantasies of a 'good life' increasingly diverge from the realities of how people live, giving rise to an overwhelming sense of unpleasure and shame.[64] This burden is even heavier on marginalised groups – such as the colonised, women, sexual minorities, and immigrants – who consistently wrestle with their own identities. As Sedgwick points out, shame is a 'bad feeling' that makes one something, as it 'floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-consuming identificatory communication'.[65]

Confucianism interprets shame differently from modern thought, so when Chinese intellectuals, following the New Culture Movement, abandoned their traditional cultural framework in search of new pathways abroad, they encountered disorientation not only in daily life but also in their pursuit of knowledge. This 'bad feeling' had the potential to completely subsume one's existence in the presence of the Other, even leading some to self-destruction. Women were in an even more challenging position, as they were pressured to transform their bodies, including reshaping their feet, altering hairstyles, and changing clothing styles, under the dual demands of national survival and gender expectations. As Chapter Three shows, this complexity in relation to individual autonomy is often overlooked when shame is exclusively examined as a tool of state propaganda. The chapter will exp、lore the inverse: the motivations of the woman warrior herself when she became enshrined as a spiritual figure meant to inspire the citizens. Chapter Five then discusses how, after the May Fourth discourse on emancipation was proscribed, Xie centred her patriotism on the concept of Chineseness, positioning herself on the global stage through her reengagement with Confucianism.

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[62] Amal Treacher, 'Postcolonial subjectivity: Masculinity, shame, and memory'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (2), 281–299.
[63] Laura Berlant, *Cruel Optimism.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011, 24.
[64] Ibid, 11.
[65] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993, 5.

Xie and her comrades' pain and confusion remind us that, despite the post-war glorification of the bravery of those who defended their land and people, women warriors were also victims of war who had been through gratuitous loss. Their emotions give rise to works that can be viewed as a counter-memory to China's resistance literature, even though the author herself may not have intended them as such or may have attributed them entirely to a constructed enemy, such as Japanese militarism. I attempt to distance from the attempt to place the entire history of women warriors within the patriotic tradition and rather to explore how sentiment individuals sought to undermine or reinforce masculine power relations and what kind of community they endorsed and endeavoured to realise. Xie's depictions of emotions illustrate how her new self-perception and emotions entered the local circulation of existing norms and intersected, negotiated, or conflicted with them, thus shaping her position within society. There exists a 'grey zone', to borrow Primo Levi's term from his analysis of Jews who were both victims and collaborators, between 'patriotism' and 'returning home' of a woman warrior, which does not allow for easy moral judgement about heroism. The emotions of a survivor serve as an exercise in interpretation and exegesis, enriching the methods used to address the experiences of people affected by war.

Overall, the abundance of Xie's writings facilitates our study of the nuances of a woman warrior's memories about her past and others. Living almost throughout the twentieth century, she experienced familial conflicts with her parents, the Northern Expedition, the War of Resistance, and the Cold War. What sets Xie's autobiographical writing apart is her frequent revisions of war-related memories against different sociohistorical contexts that began in the 1930s and her extensive travels across diverse geographical regions, both of which increase the ambiguity and complexity of a modern woman warrior's emotional life. In addition, records from her HWBSC left valuable information about the operation of women's organisations in the initial year of the Second World War, which might incubate connections with the short-lived women's team in the Northern Expedition a decade earlier. Xie's autobiographical practice elucidates how a nation relied on its women warriors to go through some of the most brutal days. Her writing not only offers a female perspective on the confluence of institutional regulations, political turmoil, forced migration, and gender challenges but also affords a glimpse into the intricate process by which the cumulative consequences of an individual's reconstruction efforts are manifested in her circuitous self-defying journey. Therefore, the exploration of Xie's

autobiographical practice should extend beyond an analysis of her individual works and delve into comparisons between them, particularly examining the varying discourses on identical events and tracking the author's alteration across different contexts.

Like her female contemporaries, Xie's focus on her emotional life exemplifies what distinguishes twentieth-century women's autobiographies from traditional autobiographies dominated by male writers, in which credibility rests on an impersonal stance that keeps subjectivity at a distance.[66] By contrast, women's writings tend to capture critical moments in the midst of ongoing negotiation of the authors' lives, allowing them to creatively reimagine the past, emotionally respond to it, and, by doing so, subjectively comment on the present. There is no such thing as a coherent subject, because writing about the past is, for the female author, a form of self-exploration that explores the process of an unfinished occurrence rather than providing evidence for a completed event in the past. The passage of time creates incoherence rather than an entity of selves.[67] The prosperity of the modern publishing industry also contributed to this characteristic. Many of Xie's wartime writings were published in installments in literary journals and newspaper serialisations before being compiled into collections, making them a series of essays without obvious continuity.[68] Her autobiographical acts thus refer to the disconnected selection, edition, and arrangement of different pieces of the author's articulation from and about different periods, demonstrating an active way of negotiating her identities in history rather than a mere reflection of a completed life story.[69]

Outline of Chapters

This thesis is organised into five thematic chapters, exploring the dynamics of how a woman warrior in modern China navigated the constraints and aspirations of expression over time. It also examines how she not only engaged in the production of icons but also endowed existing tropes with new significance. Chapters One and Three focus on two motifs prevalent in China during interwar periods of the early half of the twentieth century:

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[66] Jing M. Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*.
[67] Jing M. Wang, *When 'I' Was Born: Women's Autobiography in Modern China*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, 177.
[68] Xie Bingying's autobiographical writings were published as episodes in *Central Daily Supplement* (*CDS*) and *Cosmic Wind* before they were compiled into collections.
[69] Janet Ng, *Experience of Modernity*, 9. Jing Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 167.

Nora and national shame. The introduction of *A Doll's House* into China was a landmark for Chinese feminism. Discussions on Nora's story thrusted the conflicts between women and their patriarchal families into public discussion. However, interpretations of this narrative were largely suspended at the literary level, predominantly shaped by male intellectuals, and failed to encompass the realm of women's interpersonal communications and their self-reflections on lived experiences. Central to Chapter One is the inquiry into how Xie, a Chinese Nora, engaged with her female counterparts during her journey of self-discovery. Meanwhile, this chapter asks why Xie's conflict with her mother emerged as the focal point of the familial discord. It perceives Xie's escape as a multifaceted process involving her disentanglement from familial networks, contemplation, and her endeavours to re-embed herself into the social nexus with a different social role.

Studying in Japan was a cost-effective option for Chinese students in the 1920s. The personal trauma triggered by national shame before the Second World War is richly represented in the works of male scholars with experience studying in Japan, such as Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Lu Xun, and Guo Moruo 郭沫若. Their depictions of individual sensations deviate from the scholarly concept of shame in Confucianism. Compared with men, women are more likely to suffer from sexual-related violence in the shadow of international conflicts. How could we understand shame on the level of personal perception rather than state propaganda and enlightenment discourses? If we look back to the early days of the 'hundred years of national shame' story, what was unique about the emotional lives of Chinese students in Japan, the birthplace of China's national shame? Was there a moment when their bodies experienced an uncontrollable shudder, and what was the individual difference? Was there a chasm between it and the nationalist discourse that encouraged people's devotion to the nation? Adopting a lens of affect to emphasise the importance of personal writing, Chapter Three explores how shame as an affective conception made its way into the Chinese vocabulary, how it was perceived and articulated at specific junctures in Chinese history, and the discrepancy between personal feelings and nationalist discourses. There is insufficient research on whether men and women experience and respond differently when in similar positions. I aim to participate in filling this gap by comparing Xie's autobiographical writings with those of male writers. Focusing on Chinese students' portrayal of personal bodily sensations and how emotions interact with gender issues, I argue that the linkage between individual experiences and the crisis of Chineseness

facilitates Chinese students' projection of personal sufferings onto a grand trauma, endowing the former with more 'practical' value. Yet while male students covered the failure of manhood under the seemingly severer failure of nationhood, Xie emphasised the importance of transnational friendship despite war-related hatred.

The other three chapters relate to more tangible wars: The Northern Expedition, the War of Resistance, and the Cold War. I paid more attention to the dynamic ensemble of Xie's war memories than to the facts about each war. Xie's constant rewriting of experiences during the Northern Expedition, which will be discussed in Chapter Two, exemplifies the complex entanglement of authenticity and fiction in autobiographical works. This experience overlaps a bit in the timeline with Chapter One but focuses more on the emotional politics Xie experienced and her rewriting of a war experience in the following decades, from which her shifting attitudes to revolution, peasants, and family relations are revealed.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, the efforts of elite women in promoting gendered militarism encouraged Chinese women to enter spaces traditionally reserved for men. Nevertheless, it also confined women's participation to a gendered range, submitted them to a male-dominated discipline, and constantly required women to invest emotional labour beyond their professional work. Drawing on Xie and her members' wartime writings, Chapter Four focuses on how a women's battlefield service corps managed to reconcile the harsh realities of war with the rhythms of their everyday work, as well as the role of silence in their emotional communications. This service corps stood as a testament to how a woman warrior, having experienced disillusionment following the Northern Expedition, could guide a novel cohort of women towards defending their nation. In doing so, they fostered a cohesive and effective female community, empowering ordinary women to find their voice within the freedoms afforded by the wartime milieu. Despite the weighty emotional labour demanded of them, these women displayed resilience in their negotiations with superiors, male comrades, and local populations. The diaries maintained by the corps members offer a window into their diverse backgrounds, distinct personalities, and the multifaceted nature of their responsibilities. Moreover, these diaries highlight the corps as an amalgamation of military discipline and intimate friendship, engendering a profound sense of security and mutual respect among its members. In cases of enormous horror, they provided the fuel for righteous and redemptive affect.

The Cold War began to cast a global shadow in the late 1940s, with tensions rising in the East Asian theatre between the United States and the Soviet Union, and, more broadly, between the Western democracies and the socialist states. Nonetheless, the term 'cold' war is a misnomer for violent conflicts in Asia: 'hot wars' were raging in Korea and Vietnam; the People's Republic of China (PRC) shelled islands along the east coast of mainland China in the Taiwan Strait in 1954 and 1958; the KMT's preparations for war in Taiwan were in full swing.[70] Xie, who accepted the invitation of NTNU in 1948, did not realise at the time that she would never return to the Mainland. As Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang points out, the KMT's anti-communist policies strongly resonated with the Mainlanders' guest mentality during the initial two decades after the War of Resistance. This was especially evident before 1949 when a considerable number of arriving exiles, primarily affluent urban residents, sought temporary refuge in Taiwan from China's turmoil.[71]

Taiwanese studies tend to argue that, contrasting with the determined counterattack perspective of male sojourners, female writers emphasise the experiences of both Mainlanders and local Taiwanese, transferring exile literature to migrant literature since their early arrival in Taiwan. Chang Shuo-han 張漱菡, who frequently employed the metaphor of the 'Peach Blossom Spring' in her work, adopted a structure akin to Tao Yuanming's original story in her 'In the Deep of White Clouds' (baiyun shenchu 白雲深處) (1955). In this essay, Chang substituted Mainlanders for the fisherman and the mountains of southern Taiwan for Wuling. Likewise, Chung Mei-yin 鐘梅音 and Hsu Chung-pei 徐鐘佩 portrayed Taiwan as a serene paradise, diverging from the KMT's perception of it as a mere transitional site.

However, women's political involvement remains substantial, particularly in the areas of domestic and overseas Chinese education. It would be an oversimplification to diminish the influence of the global conflict context in their work and solely emphasise their distance from the KMT's anti-communist propaganda. Chapter Five explores the conservative criticism in Taiwanese scholarship directed at Xie after the 1980s. This critique arose

[70] Jini Kim Watson, *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021, 5.
[71] Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, *The Great Exodus from China: Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Modern Taiwan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 103.

following the expulsion of Kuo Liang-hui from the Chinese Women's Writing Association (Taiwan) (CWWA) under Xie's leadership and the subsequent banning of Kuo's fiction, *The Lock of the Heart*. To investigate what may appear as a betrayal of Xie's public image, this chapter first analyses the differences in Xie's depictions of two archetypal women – the Chinese Nora and female workers – across Mainland China and Taiwan. Ambivalence surrounding women's futures is central in her novel *The Sacred Soul*, which, while seemingly a typical May Fourth free-love novel, portrays the male protagonist, symbolising the Mainland, as hypocritical and weak. It also calls into question the periodisation scheme that posits a radical break between Chinese and Taiwanese literature after the exile.

The focus then turns to her involvement in the design of Chinese textbooks in Taiwan and the US. Finally, this chapter delves into Xie's compilation and annotation of classical Chinese texts and her growing affinity with Confucianism while residing in the US. This marks a departure from her prior alignment with May Fourth literature and Western paradigms. Xie established a comparative perspective as her geographical mobility expanded beyond the borders of mainland China, culminating in her connections between her Chinese identity and her identity as a global citizen. I argue that Xie was not merely driven by her being a Chinese but by a rethinking of nation, language, and identity in a foreign culture dominated by anglophone communities. For Xie, her hometown becomes an eternal city of the past, present, and future, where a cosmopolitan individual is repositioned.

Chapter One: Chinese Nora and Her Women: The Familial War and its Aftermath

Introduction

In 1928, at the age of 22, Xie Bingying left her in-laws' house alone and travelled to Datong under the pretence of accepting a teaching position at a girls' school. Continuing her journey to Changsha without stopping, Xie corresponded with Xiao Ming, her husband assigned by her mother, persistently seeking his agreement for their divorce. After three failed attempts to escape the unwilling marriage, months of protests with her formidable parents, and patient negotiations with Xiao, Xie succeeded in convincing him to publish a divorce announcement on a local newspaper. This year-long struggle began in July 1927, when Xie returned Xinhua County following the disbandment of the women's team in the Northern Expedition. Her brother had already warned her that their mother would force her to have the wedding once she arrived home. Nonetheless, Xie insisted that evading the arrangement without its formal cancellation would hinder her from wholeheartedly embarking a new life. Despite hardships, the divorce announcement seemed to serve as a hallmark in a woman warrior's story: She unbound her feet, responded to the call for military service, and now has finally liberated herself from the constraints of a patriarchal family.

Xie's persistent initiatives to challenge her mother's authority during her earlier life, along with her journey to leave her hometown, delineate the adventurous trajectory of a Chinese Nora. Current studies mainly interpret this experience as a young rebel's successful defiance against the constraints imposed on Chinese women, which demonstrated to them a promising future to transcend traditional gender structures.[1] The mere focus on this glamorous moment, however, crystallises the image of Chinese Nora into the climactic posture of her departure from her parents' family. It eclipses the complexity of her ensuing transformative journey and the intricate emotional struggles she confronted, marked by the incubation of new social relationships and roles. In depicting mother-daughter communications, Xie presented different meanings of silence before she escaped home and after her eventual return a few years later. In

[1] See, for example, Li Guo, 'Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-century China'; Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 56.

between the changes were the camaraderie she shared with like-minded young women in urban cities and the contemplation she engaged in with herself.

Before discussing the nuances of Xie's journey, this chapter first reviews the predicament facing Chinese Nora and introduces possible new discussions. The Nora trope can be traced back to 1918, when the 'Ibsen Issue' in *New Youth* (Xin qingnian 新青年) introduced Nora, the heroine of Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, to China. Intellectuals soon elevated the play to the status of a 'romantic bible', with Ibsen and Nora emerging as cherished icons of Western literature.[2] They first discussed the play as a prototype for modern Chinese fiction in 1910s newspapers, then propagated it to the broader populace through newspapers and books in the ensuing decades.[3] At a time when the social function of new literature and individualism gained attention, the social values of *A Doll's House* outweighed its literary importance. Ibsen evolved into a symbolic figure of the subsequent literary revolution and anti-tradition movements. As Mao Dun 茅盾 juxtaposed, 'in those days, the name "Ibsen" held a pervasive presence amongst Chinese youth, rivalling even the prominence of Marx and Lenin today'.[4] Nora's questioning of gender discrimination and marriage, where she was regarded as a mere 'doll-wife', garnered effusive praise. She was hailed by scholars as a Western precursor to the Chinese 'independent woman'.[5] Literature of the time featured many Nora-like figures who broke from the confines of patriarchal households in pursuit of liberation.[6] This narrative mirrors the lived experiences of Chinese women who suffered from familial conflicts, epitomising the clash between new knowledge and old rituals.

Although Nora served as a source of inspiration and hope from afar, it was not feasible for Chinese women to actually be her. Unlike the patriarchy concealed by a delicate façade in *A Doll's House*, where Nora decides to leave home only when Helmer, her husband, accuses

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[2] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950*. California: Stanford University Press, 2007, 97. Between the 1910s and the 1940s, the names of Ibsen and Nora appeared in Chinese novels, journals, and newspapers more frequently than the names of Shakespeare and Hamlet. See Chengzhou He, 'World Literature as Event: Ibsen and Modern Chinese Fiction', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 54(2), 2017, 141-160.

[3] Chengzhou He, 'World Literature as Event', 148.

[4] Shen Yanbing, 'Few Words about *A Doll's House*' (Tantan juilei zhijia 談談傀儡之家). *Wenxue Zhoubao*, 176, 1925, 38.

[5] Mao Dun, 'On Nora' (Cong Nala shuoqi 從娜拉説起), *Zhujiang Daily Supplement for Women*, Apr 29, 1942, 71. Hu Shi, 'Ibsenism' (Yibusheng zhuyi 易卜生主義), *New Youth*, 4 (6), 1918, 489–507.

[6] For a discussion on Nora dramas and their cultural import in modern China, see Chengzhou He, 'World Literature as Event'.

her of tarnishing his reputation, the Chinese Nora faced harsher censorship of chastity and regulation of her feminine body from childhood. Intellectuals in the Republican era often portrayed Chinese families as inherently regressive and enshrined heterosexual relationships as a solution, encouraging women to rebel against parental authority by seeking refuge under the protection of a male partner, while the underlying issue of women's fragility within their circulation among men remained unaddressed. A notable illustration is Hu Shi's short dramatic version of *A Doll's House* titled 'An Event of Lifelong Significance' (Zhongshen dashi 終身大事) (1919). The protagonist Chen Yamei leaves her home with the man she loves because her parents disallow her to marry him – a rudimentary elopement-plot of the popular Nora-Plays in following years.[7] Modern critics have pointed out that the aim of male intellectuals' admiration for Nora was not to empower real women, but rather to enhance motherhood.[8] Women became, as Wendy Larson points out, an 'important site for the construction of the modern nation', whose liberation served to be a signifier for modernity and the betterment of the nation's future generation, without direct consideration for women's rights.[9]

The social links Ibsen's Nora possesses further distance her from her Chinese counterparts. In Ibsen's narrative, Nora's interactions with other female characters, like Mrs. Linde, her friend who visits Nora for job opportunities, and Old Anne, a mother-like nurse caring for Nora and her children, serve as reminders of the possibilities available for women to forge fulfilling bonds beyond familial roles. Yet, the Chinese Nora, particularly those from small towns and rural regions, contended with a narrow exposure to female role models or like-minded female partners. Their primary sources of insight into women's empowerment and emancipation were channelled through the lens of male intellectuals and stories of historical figures such as Hua Mulan and Liang Hongyu. Qiu Jin stands as a more contemporary example, yet Zhang Taiyan's questioning of her – whether an aggressive woman like Qiu Jin could retain her feminine virtue – was pervasive at the time.[10]

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[7] Li Xia, 'Nora And Her Sisters: Lu Xun's Reflections on the Role of Women in Chinese Society with Particular Reference to Elfriede Jelinek's *What Happened after Nora Left Her Husband or Pillars of Society* (1979)'. *Neohelicon XXXV (Budapest)*, 35 (2), 2008, 217–235, 222.

[8] See Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

[9] Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 7-8.

[10] When writing Qiu Jin's biography, Wu Zhiying has to construct this wandering woman warrior as a knight errant carefully, a female *xia* (侠), by doing which Wu could justify Qiu Jin's 'unconventional behaviours' in challenging the gender roles and failing to fulfil her duty as a daughter and a wife, and most importantly, a mother. See Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China*, 55.

Susan Mann reminds us of the considerable dynamism that male networks have generated throughout Chinese history.[11] The emotional attachments established by men outside the kinship systems find expression not only within literary forms like poetry and novels but also grant them the agency to traverse geographical expanses and navigate the intricate societal frameworks that shaped human behaviour in imperial China. Specifically, the expansion of men's sojourning due to the development of trade and transport networks facilitated the formation of larger networks of mobile male friends who relied on each other for convenience, forming strong and lasting ties of patronage and protection. This propensity frequently leads men to invest a significant portion of their time in seeking solace and camaraderie among their male peers, rather than turning to women for companionship.[12]

Correspondingly, extant scholarship has aptly noted the extensive and significant legacy of women-dominant communities in China, ranging from private poetry clubs in the Qing dynasty, magazine offices in Republican China, service corps during wartime, elite women's political sociality, to lower-class women's tenement network.[13] However, Chinese Nora, one of the earliest iconic emblems of Chinese feminism, often finds her interactions with other women relegated to the backdoor. Despite personifying an enduring spirit of defiance and courage, her journey is imbued with an undercurrent of tragedy as she embarks on a path characterised by absence – a dearth of companionship when confronting the perils of abandonment and degradation, and a lack of an authentic audience willing to engage with her thoughts and emotions attentively. Instead, male voices frequently dominate the discourse. Although the Nora-type runaway usually occurs early in a woman warrior's life journey, it holds importance in understanding how a woman perceives and interprets her initial confrontation. This moment sheds light on how she forms relationships with others, as well as with herself, amidst social conflicts and inner struggles. It also foreshadows the challenges she would face later in life, such as the crisis femininity during national emergencies, the formation of women's intimate communities, and their dissolution.

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[11] Susan Mann, 'The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture', 1600-1614.
[12] Ibid, 1603.
[13] For women's private poetry clubs in Qing dynasty, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. For elite women's wartime organisations and networks, see Vivienne Guo, *Women and Politics in Wartime China.* For lower-class women's social networks in 1930s and 1940s Beijing, see Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937–1949*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2015. For women nurses' cooperation on the battlefield, see Nicole Barnes, *Intimate Communities*. For the roles of women in wartime Chongqing and their political activism within the underground CCP, the National Salvation Association, and the Women's Advisory Council, see Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing*.

At the same time, discussions surrounding Nora's literary persona have distanced her from authentically representing women's real lives. To what extent could an individual's personal journey be shaped by the portrayals of modern women in literature? Did she twist and reshape this portrayal through her own creative expression? By limiting our exploration of the Chinese Nora to mere parent-daughter and heterosexual relationships, we inadvertently confine our analysis to a restricted point. More nuanced aspects of her interpersonal life remain unexplored: Did Nora's relationship with her mother carry equal significance as that with her father? How did she cultivate social networks, particularly seeking female companionship, beyond familial and marital ties? Did she engage in moments of self-reflection, and how?

These questions can be considered from the perspective of women's culture. I draw on this concept from Gerda Lerner's explanation that women's culture encompasses 'the familial and friendship networks of women, their affective ties, their rituals'.[14] Following Lerner's path, Dorothy Ko introduces the informal and formal organisations of women writers that crossed geographical, temporal, and social boundaries in her research of elite women's rich body of writing in seventeenth-century China.[15] Chinese women's culture can be interchangeable with 'the communities of women', as Ko states, which could forge across class lines to include gentry wives, professional writers, courtesans, and sing-song girls. Meanwhile, it is not limited to women's self-perceptions, but relates to their evolving relationship with world of men and the imaginary space comprised of literary characters, historical figures, and legendary heroes.

Synthesising the aforementioned dimensions, this chapter explores Xie's writings subsequent to her divorce from Xiao Ming, examining Xie's Nora-like journey in urban cities as a status between the dual processes of disentangling and re-embedding. Disentangling encapsulates one's attempt to detach the self from 'the familial and social nexus in which one is deeply embedded in everyday life', while re-embedding highlights the social attributes of

[14] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 242. Seconding Joan Kelly's statement that 'woman's place is not a separate sphere or domain of existence but a position within social existence generally', Lerner stresses that women's culture cannot be defined as a 'subculture' because its subjects are not only partakers of friendship ties and emotions to which only women are privy but also live their social existence within the general culture. See Ellen Dubois, Mari Jo Buhle, Temma Kaplan, Gerda Lerner, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium', *Feminist Studies*, 6(1), 1980, 26-64. Joan Kelly, 'The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory: A Postscript to the "Woman and Power" Conference', *Feminist Studies*, 5(1), 1979, 216-227.

[15] Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*.

human beings and their endeavours to reintegrate into society once self-reflection is done.[16] By analysing Xie's interactions with other Chinese Noras in a broader context, I aim to reveal her journey as an embodiment of multifaceted self-building: crossing frontiers, communication, and contemplation.

Two Inarticulate Rebels

In *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography*, Xie highlighted the profound influence of New Fiction (xin xiaoshuo 新小説) on her pursuit of romance and freedom from her adolescence onward.[17] This compound term includes satirical works addressing the plights facing the Qing empire, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction that 'recuperate(d) and transform(ed) the Confucian structure of feeling', and translated Western romantic literature.[18] With the rise of 'the Fiction Revolution' (Xiaoshuo jie geming 小説界革命) in 1902, late-Qing reformers discovered fiction as a cure to social diseases, expecting that this 'vulgar' genre would make enlightenment messages more accessible to commoners.[19] Carrying the aspirations of reformers, this genre aimed to be readily embraced by commoners for the purpose of individual reform and national revitalisation. It also proposed a subversion of women's roles in Confucian sentimentality – a clement mother and a faithful wife – and encouraged the direct expression of romantic passion.[20] In the New Culture Movement of 1917, China's literary society further advocated complete anti-traditionalism, seeking to replace Confucian classics with vernacular (wenyan 文言) writing and increasing its reliance on Western romanticism. Due to modern literature's critical stance directed at the entrenched rituals of Chinese society, conservatives often perceived it as corrosive to young minds.

Xie's brother introduced her to New Fiction when she was in middle school. As a part-time librarian, she also had the convenience to delve into translations of Western masterpieces such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's

[16] Li Zhang, *Anxious China: Inner Revolution and Politics of Psychotherapy*. California: University of California Press, 2020, 18.
[17] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier* (nübing zizhuan 女兵自傳). Taipei: Sanmin chubanshe, 1980 [1956]. For the comparison of three versions of the book, see Chapter Two.
[18] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 61.
[19] In 1902, Liang Qichao founded the magazine *Xin Xiaoshuo* (New Fiction) in Yokohama, Japan. His impressive 'Xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi' (The relationship between fiction and the government of the masses) marks the beginning of the Fiction Revolution.
[20] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 31.

Confessions, and Alexandre Dumas' *The Lady of the Camellias,* as well as Chinese romantic stories, including Su Manshu's 蘇曼殊 *The Lone Swan* (Duanhong lingyan ji 斷鴻零雁記) (1912), which depicts the tragic love between a man and two ladies.[21] Amidst proposing to break off her engagement with Xiao Ming, Xie faced vehement objections from her parents due to her literary preferences. She recalled that her father, a local gentry, complained to her mother: '[Xie Bingying] only read fiction about free love and some newspapers and magazines about girls who commit suicide because their marriage has been prearranged by their parents, or boys who break up with their family as they oppose rituals. This kind of stuff influenced her so much, so she comes back to challenge her parents and etiquette!'[22] He blamed the situation on modern education: 'I don't know what kind of devil school exists these days, but everyone who goes there becomes infatuated. When they return home, they all clamour to call off the engagement. As long as a marriage is suggested by parents, no matter how good or bad it is, they will not admit it'.[23] Although Xie employed direct quotations to enhance the credibility of her parents' statements, evidence such as her mother's advocacy for her schooling at the age of ten suggests that she might simplify her parents into figures opposed to 'new' knowledge, thus amplifying the courage of the protagonist, the little warrior, to her readers.

When her parents angrily reiterated that 'parents are more dominant than heaven [to children]', and that 'objecting to a marriage equals objecting parents', Xie asserted her position: 'How can parents know what kind of wife or husband their children want? Marriage is *an event of lifelong significance*, so, for sure, one has to make one's own decision in order to find a good match'.[24] The phrase 'an event of lifelong significance', directly borrowed from Hu Shi's eponymous play, had become closely associated with Chinese women's quest for freedom. Like the protagonist Yamei, Xie also grappled with the dual oppressions of religion and filial piety instilled by her family, who insisted that a marriage, determined by the Four Pillars of Destiny and arranged in a previous life, was unalterable. Xie's rebuttal showcases the influence of modern literature, extending from 'An Event of Lifelong Significance' to metaphors like cannibalism in Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' (kuangren riji 狂人日記) (1918). After one quarrel with her parents, Xie reminded herself not to be 'eaten up' by Confucian rules: 'The

[21] Xie Bingying, *The Collection of Xie Bingying* (Xie Bingying wenji 謝冰瑩文集). Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1999, 162-166.
[22] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 103. All Xie Bingying's texts are translated by the author of the thesis unless otherwise stated.
[23] Ibid, 102.
[24] Ibid, 103.

archaic society, a relentless demon, opens its bloody mouth every day, devouring young people who have no courage to struggle. Are you willing to be swallowed by it too?'[25] Similarly, Lu Xun's novella 'Kong Yiji' (孔乙己) (1919), which captures the decay of the old Confucian scholarly tradition, assigns the protagonist the secular name of Confucius – 'Kong Yiji'. This directly contrasts with what Xie's father taught her to read in her childhood: 'Kong Yiji, the high lord; Confucius, the reverent teacher'.[26]

Notably, although Xie portrayed her mother as an aggressive figure in forcing her to marry, her mother's voice in the ongoing debate remained secondary and fragmented in comparison to that of her father. When her father criticised Xie for forgetting the teachings of the *Tale of Female Martyrs* (lienü zhuan 烈女傳), a book emphasising that 'a virtuous woman does not marry twice', Xie's mother satirised that Xie must have long since ceased reading the book. However, before she could complete her sentence, the father quickly seized on the notion that Xie had been influenced by the new novels, which led her to 'oppose her parents and the Confucian rites'. Once again, the mother's response aligned with and followed the lead of the father's assertions, although in a gawky way:

> 'What a joke! How dare you oppose the Confucian rite?' Mother was getting a more and more imposing gesture: 'It is thousands of years of the holy sage's rule set up ... (she did not know how to finish the sentence, so I used dots instead). No one dares to oppose it. Do you, you girl, dare to oppose the Confucian rites? You really should think about how the chastity arch (貞節牌坊) was erected, ah!'[27]

In contrast to her father, who could substantiate his arguments by invoking classical references, the mother merely echoed her husband's convictions, exhibiting fierceness without presenting substantial reasoning to support her position. For the young woman, her mother behaved as an impermeable adherent of not only Confucianism but also her father's ideologies.

Employing direct quotations to depict dialogues in an autobiography can cast doubt on the narrator's reliability, especially when recalling events that span over a decade. Hence,

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[25] Ibid, 111.
[26] Xie Bingying, *Bingying's Reminiscence* (Bingying yiwang 冰瑩憶往). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1991, 91.
[27] Ibid, 103. The brackets belong to the author.

through the coloured language of the narrator amid the family conflict, readers perceive more of the daughter's perspective on her parents rather than grasping her parents as authentic individuals with complexities. Meanwhile, in Seymour Chatman's six signs regarding the perceptibility of the narrator in a text, commentary stands out as the aspect demonstrating the highest degree of explicitness.[28] In her work *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2002), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan elaborates on this, noting that a specific type of commentary, namely in-text interpretations, reveals the narrator's moral stand, because they 'often provide information not only about their direct object but also about the interpreter'.[29] When the narrator parenthetically labelled a moment of her mother's silence as a lack of ability to articulate herself, she actually exposed her own existence and moral position, offering readers a glimpse into the narrator's contemptuous judgement towards her mother. As the mother's complaints crescendo, Xie's focal point of the familial conflict shifted from the father-daughter or parent-daughter dynamic to a mere mother-daughter relationship.[30]

As Xie made subsequent attempts to escape home, the father's presence significantly diminished in her narrative, while her mother emerged as a dominant figure who forcefully intervened to bring her back. Xie's brothers and sisters-in-law warned her about the futility of resisting her mother's will, recounting their own experiences where all their marriages had been dictated, and none of their refusals had been successful. Under the oppressive sway, they felt compelled to become complicit in thwarting Xie's runaway. A repetitive pattern emerged each time Xie was taken back by her mother: the enraged mother fiercely berated her daughter, while the daughter remained silent. Her silence reinforced the impression of the mother as an hidebound figure who rendered effective communication impossible. However, although the mother was depicted by her children as an unyielding dictator, she, in reality, lacked a fully autonomous voice. A question arises: Did Xie keep silent out of fear of her mother, or did she see no value in engaging in dialogue with her, recognising her as merely an intermediary, a shallow sounding board for Confucianism and her father?

The answer can be found in Xie's depictions of her father during her attempts to escape. In contrast to the strained mother-daughter relationship, Xie persisted in her efforts to elicit

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[28] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978, 220–252.
[29] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge, 2002, 99.
[30] Here may involve a dispute over whether the words in parentheses were comments by the character (the past self) or the narrator (the present self). See Chapter two for Xie's writing style.

empathy from her father, perceiving him as more open to understanding her. She was unwilling to believe that her once loving and caring father would now adopt a distant demeanour and 'side with mother' after reading her heartfelt letter exclusive to him. Afterwards, even though her father concealed all letters from her friends, Xie believed in his kindness because she 'heard' that he acknowledged her resolve but could not support her only because of her mother's stance. The incident where her father was 'trembling with anger' following her third failed attempt to escape is merely briefly mentioned, and Xie, in her role as daughter, attributed more resentment towards her mother.[31]

Empathy concerning freedom and personal aspirations appeared to to be more prevalent between a young man and an older man, rather than between a young woman and her elders. Lu Xun's 'The Passerby' (guoke 過客) (1925), for example, also employs the 'walking away' motif. The play centres around a male traveller who, compelled by a mysterious call, embarks on a solitary journey to an unknown destination. He stops on the roadside and seeks water from a white-beard old man living in a mud hut. A ten-year-old girl under the guardianship of the old man serves the two men and listens to their conversation. This play is often read as an allegorical working through of Lu Xun's own impasse of uncertainty: Confronted with profound uncertainty, the passerby's unflagging determination compels him to press forward, embarking on a path even as his feet are covered in blood, and all while surrounded by a landscape of graves.[32] The relationship between the three characters has also sparked extensive discussion among scholars. Some, including Yoshida Tomio and Kiyama Hideo, interpret the old man and the girl as external projections of the passerby's inner self, effectively making the entire play a self-dialogue by the man.[33] Similarly, Lu Xun's disciple Hu Feng sees the passerby as the author's 'inner extrication', for whom the old man represents the past and the girl symbolises hope.[34] While the play ends without a resolution, there is still a vague sense of

[31] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 110–140.
[32] See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, 101-104. Lu Xun's rare explication of his own work also lends itself to such a reading. He wrote: 'If one insists on going on, in spite of being certain that what lies ahead on the road are graves, then there is the possibility of resisting despair. I believe that resisting despair is much more difficult and requires more tenacity and valour than fighting on the account of hope'. See 'Letter written to Zhao Qiwen', March 11, 1925, *Lu Xun quanji 11*, 477–478.
[33] See Yoshida Tomio, 'On Lu Xun's Wild Grass', *Journal of Chinese Literature*, 16, 1962, 92; Kiyama Hideo, 'On the Logic and Method of Wild Grass', *The Memoirs of the Institute of Oriental Culture*, 30, 1963, 183.
[34] Hu Feng, *Sword, Literature, People* (jian, wenyi, renmin 劍 文藝 人民), Shanghai: Nitu she, 1950, 126. There are other interpretations, for example, Onoue Kanehide offers a different perspective by understanding the passerby and the old man as confrontational. Despite the Christian metaphors present in this play, Onoe contends that the dialogic structure of the play is more derived from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), and that

hope represented by the new path the passerby sets out on, a 'road that looked like, yet didn't look like a road'.[35] In this regard, 'walking out' becomes 'the only significant act in an existence threatened with meaninglessness', a decisive choice made by the subject, and therefore contains what Leo Ou-fan Lee terms 'a positive and humanistic connotation'.[36]

For the seemingly solitary passerby, it is not difficult to encounter an elder capable of engaging in a meaningful conversation. The old man discloses that he also heard the beckoning voice that guides the passerby:

> Old Man: That may not be why. The sun has set; I think you had better rest for a time, like me.
> Passer-by: But the voice ahead is telling me to push on.
> Old Man: I know.
> Passer-by: You know? You know that voice?
> Old Man: Yes. It seems to have called to be before as well.
> Passer-by: Is that the same voice that is calling me now?
> Old Man: That I can't say. It called me several times, but I ignored it; so then it stopped, and I can't remember it clearly.
> Passer-by: Ah, you ignored it … [He thinks this over, gives a start and listens.] No! I must still go on. I cannot rest. What a nuisance that my feet are torn and bleeding. [He prepares to leave].[37]

The passerby and the old man's shared perception of the mysterious call indicates that although the old man did not possess the same courage to venture into the unknown as the young man, he used to be a qualified candidate. Despite concerns, the old man blessed the passerby's journey upon realising his determination to forge ahead. The brief exchanges between them evoke a sense of empathic attraction, as they both share a similar past and contemplate the long

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the relationship between the passerby and the old man is comparable to the story of Zarathustra and the prophet, where, like the prophet, the old man symbolises traditional religious and moral authority, leading humanity towards escapism and nihilism, away from the real world. See Onoue Kanehide, 'Lu Xun and Nietzsche', *Journal of the Sonological Society of Japan*, 13, 1961, 106.

[35] The road is a common metaphor for life's journey in Chinese literature. Lu Xun also compares life to a 'long journey' in *Letters Between Two* (Liangdi shu 两地书) (1933). Whether it is on a 'divergent road' or an 'end of the road', as Lu Xun states, he would choose to 'just take a walk for now'. *Lu Xun quanji 2*, 193.

[36] Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 102–103.

[37] Lu Xun, *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1956, 335–336.

path. However, the girl shows reluctance to approach the passerby. She initially mistakes him for a beggar, but the old man corrects her. When the passerby decides to continue his journey, the girl offers him a piece of cloth to wrap up his wounds. When he tries to return the cloth, she looks frightened and falls back because the passerby has touched the cloth with his unclean hands, refusing to accept it: 'I don't want it! Take it away!' On the passerby's second attempt, she becomes fearful and hides herself in the earthen hut. Finally, the old man suggests that the passerby hang the piece of cloth on the wild lilies and roses that the girl had pointed out earlier.[38] The girl's assistance to the passerby, therefore, seems to be driven purely by ecumenical kindness, rather than a comprehension of the meaning behind his journey.

Under the veneer of symbolism, this play unfolds within an interpersonal dynamic that echoes China's long history of emotional attachments established among men outside the kinship system, a nexus that revolves around what Haiyan Lee calls 'horizontal homosocial ties'.[39] Susan Mann raises a similar concept of 'shared heart' (tongxin 同心) to interpret male friendship circles, that is, the oaths of sworn brothers bound them not to mere fraternal camaraderie but to a common goal, which provided reciprocal protection for most members. Male bonding holds great power in Chinese history, even to the extent of raising concerns among rulers that their regime might be subverted.[40] By contrast, the absence of a female speaker in public gatherings would not be surprising. Keeping a daughter respectably at home to serve the role of caregiver was the hidden cornerstone of this masculine social structure. In 'The Passerby', the weary traveller appreciates the old man for satisfying his thirst, despite the fact that the old man merely converses with him and arranges for the girl to provide them with water.

Xie's quest for empathy from her father reveals an unconscious effort to engage herself with a father-son conflict: She was an exponent of her brother, who recommended she read New Fiction, a source she drew upon when expressing discontent towards her parents. Whether adhering to her brother's advice or requesting understanding from her father, Xie gravitated towards seeking support from male patrons while turning herself into an audible conduit in an invisible male conversation. Paradoxically, a pivotal step in this pursuit involved distancing herself from her mother.

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[38] Ibid, 337–338.
[39] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of The Heart*, 30
[40] Susan Mann, 'The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture', 1607.

The ironic silence existing between Xie and her mother indicates the Chinese Nora's dilemma in finding understanding and supportive female predecessors within their social circles, except for those portrayed in literature or distant role models. In Xie's recollections of her painful foot-binding and marriage, her dissatisfaction was consistently aimed at not only her mother but also other women in her hometown. They either ridiculed her for her resistance or urged her to conform obediently to feminine duties. Xie's aunt, who advised Xie to listen to her mother, 'was an absolute "fatalist", believing that Heaven predetermines anything'.[41] For Xie as a child, 'aunt assuredly believed in Buddhism, chanted sutras every day, and was a vegetarian. She was even more superstitious than my mom'.[42] Xie's female neighbours used the word 'outsider' (wairen 外人) to describe young women who received a modern education and rejected prearranged marriage. Since Xie's mother fabricated stories about how submissive her daughter was, they complimented her for knowing how to 'discipline' modern girls.[43] Instead of offering patronage and mentorship that lay the foundation for their daughters' development, female elders seemed to primarily assume the role of enforcing traditional norms and expectations. Xiang, a friend with whom Xie had enlisted, succumbed to family pressure and agreed to marry after three unsuccessful attempts to escape. After a final dispute about whether a woman should persist in defying 'old rituals', the two comrades who had once marched abreast never met again.[44] Patriarchal forces subjugated women, transforming gender oppression into covert self-regulation within their communities. This often occurred through the control exerted by older women over the bodies and choices of younger women.

The primary factor restricting support among women was not necessarily the absence of resources; instead, a more prevalent issue was the deficit in emotional connection between mothers and daughters. In cases where a Chinese Nora decides to depart, her mother is usually portrayed as either absent or acrimonious. In her study on how the compelling impact of traditional rituals turned wives into submissive followers of their husbands, Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker points out that these women, initially victims of patriarchal families, gradually evolved into new perpetrators, thereby perpetuating the cycle of gendered roles for the

[41] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 121.
[42] Ibid, 121.
[43] Ibid, 114.
[44] Ibid, 143.

subsequent generation.[45] Gail Hershatter agrees that elite women in late imperial China seldom celebrated their relationships with their children but rather with their in-laws.[46] This feature was not solely due to the social tendency to prioritise male inheritors but also stemmed from Confucian cultural norms that emphasised a mother's self-sacrifice and a child's obedience instead of articulations of love. Notably, such emotional estrangement in mother-daughter bonding, prevalent during Xie's mother's era, did not undergo significant improvements in the daughter's time. Initially focused on heterosexual romance and subsequently on revolutionary supremacy, by the 1930s, women's allegiance had shifted towards the nation-state. As noted by Lingzhen Wang, the revolution-oriented society 'asked women to sacrifice or at least delay their own individual fulfillment, their own emotions'.[47] Not only heterosexual love but even maternal idealisation risked being regarded as sentimental.[48]

Nevertheless, what tormented Xie was not a social restriction on maternal attachment, but rather her awareness that her mother's actions that violated modern knowledge were a manifestation of caring about her. The mother believed in the causality between the bound feet, an arranged marriage, and her daughter's happiness, while the daughter also longed for her mother's affectionate caresses, which vanished overnight when she refused to marry a man she disliked. Despite concern for her daughter, the expression of Xie's mother was limited by the language she possessed or was allowed to use. Consequently, the inadequacy of shared language and channels of expression often led to dissonance or misinterpretation between mother and daughter, overshadowing the existence of love. Xie's mother received a certain level of education, but her knowledge was mostly confined to works such as the *Last Rule for Teaching Daughters* (jiaonü yigui 教女遺規), *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (lienü zhuan 列女傳), and the *Daughter's Sutra* (nüer jing 女兒經), which taught young women how to be diligent wives and filial daughters-in-law.[49] Her mere focus on female virtues, in particular the belief that there was no respectable alternative to marriage for women, not only hindered her from engaging with Xie's father's speech on Confucianism but also revealed that she and her

[45] Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literatur*e. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982.
[46] Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women in China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2011, 180. For the expression of emotions in Confucianism, see Lee, *Revolution of The Heart*.
[47] Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-century China*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, 100.
[48] Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother and Narrative Politics in Modern China*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, 1-18; Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 99.
[49] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 21.

daughter belonged to different cultural systems. In other words, the blockage in their communication was not inherent but rather acquired.

Being aware of her mother's love beneath her harsh attitude, Xie refrained from runaway after the third failure. In fact, Xie's mother is an inarticulate rebel who fought not for her own sake but for her daughter. Although her consent to Xie attending school was based on the hope that Xie would finally return home to marry, this decision faced considerable criticism in Xinhua County. Villagers denounced schooling for women as a violation of gender norms. However, undeterred by the opposition, she stood firm and ultimately ensured that Xie became the first female student in the history of their hometown.[50] Before her fourth attempt to escape, Xie decided to proceed with the wedding ceremony to fulfil her mother's wish, despite the harm it caused her personally: 'I saw that my mother was suffering too much. I pitied her and could not bear to see her in such deep sadness. I was willing to give her a little temporary comfort'.[51] Although Xie understood that this respite would ultimately bring more pain to her mother, she responded to her mother's emotional needs to prepare for her wedding.

Only in the absence of spoken language did the communication barrier between Xie and her mother begin to dissipate. In 1931, Xie returned home from Beijing after the failure of her marriage with Fu Hao, a husband of her own choice. Her mother did not welcome her in front of guests, but, in a tender moment reminiscent of Xie's childhood, she gently caressed Xie's face and whispered her concerns at night. Xie tasted her mother's bitter tears falling on her own lips, feeling an overwhelming 'supreme love hidden in the depths of her [Xie's mother's] heart'.[52] While Xie pretended to be asleep, not wanting to interrupt her mother, the warmth of a mother's love healed her from the pains of displacement and emboldened her to continue her journey. Her silence now carried a new significance. Instead of solely seeking affirmation from male elders, Xie drew strength from the physical touch of her mother. In 1936, Xie's mother lost her ability to speak because of a stroke, yet she still conveyed her love to her daughter through tender touches and kisses on her deathbed. This silence stands in contrast to the earlier scene, where the representatives of the 'new' and the 'old' engage in a debate based on their representative classic texts. Xie's account leaves us uncertain as to whether she and her mother ever reached a true mutual understanding through a conversation. Rather, silence replaces the

[50] Ibid, 22.
[51] Ibid, 144.
[52] Ibid, 255.

autobiographical narrative's biased portrayal of the characters, allowing the sorrow and nostalgia of the romantic subject to permeate and ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the 'little warrior'.

The second wave of feminism saw the breaking of silence by women as the initial step to raise awareness about women's private issues being not just personal, but political problems stemming from structural oppression. However, for mothers and daughters in the early twentieth century, breaking this silence can be one of the most challenging aspects of the liberation process because women need to find an applicable language in the first place. As revealed in Xie's retrospective work, silence played a pivotal role as the first backdrop against which intimate mutual understanding became possible. When Xie and her mother broke away from the language imposed upon them by different patriarchal discourses, they naturally exchanged each other's pain through the intimacy of bodily touch. It is during moments of silence, in the absence of their voices being heard in public, that mutual understanding becomes easier.[53]

Nonetheless, attributing the mending of the stained mother-daughter relationship solely to the impact of Xie's failed marriage or the passage of time would be an oversimplification of the seemingly suspended time between her running away from home and her eventual return. The in-betweenness was perhaps the most overlooked part of the Chinese Nora's journey. Her narrative transcended a mere physical displacement from one location to another subsequent to her departure. Instead, it encompassed an intricate interpersonal and introspective voyage, interwoven with encounters that embody 'the continuous flow of peoples, cultures, and desires, and are important conductors in symbolic sensory circuits'.[54] The following sections, therefore, will posit that Xie's interactions with fellow women, both familiar faces and newfound companions, became vital touchpoints in this journey of embedding herself in society. Meanwhile, her metamorphosis extended beyond external connections, encompassing a profound process of self-contemplation that distanced her from varied social expectations.

[53] See Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, 'Silence', in *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015, 183–192. Eviarar Zerubavel. *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
[54] David Crouch, Rhona Jackson, and Felix Thompson, *The Media and the Tourist Imagination: Converging Cultures*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 12

Noras in Motion

In her study on the working-class neighbourhood in nineteenth-century New York City, Christine Stansell observes that despite residing in 'dank basements' and 'alley shacks', women's 'domestic lives spread out to the hallways of their tenements, to adjoining apartments and to the streets below'.[55] Similarly, Zhao Ma points out that the tenement neighbourhood in Beijing, despite its reputation as a site of poverty and hardship, served as a crucial space for female labourers to cultivate meaningful connections, seek and offer emotional support, and develop strategies for their own sustenance and well-being.[56] The impoverished circumstances might seem incongruous given Xie's previous achievements: By the late 1920s, she had already garnered recognition for her diaries detailing military life. These pieces were published in the *Central Daily Supplement* (Zhongyang ribao fukan 中央日報副刊) (hereafter *CDS*), serving as an inspiration for Chinese women to explore alternative pathways beyond gender roles. However, on her tenth day in Shanghai, Xie was mistakenly apprehended because the dilapidated residence where she was staying turned out to be a hideout for criminals involved in murder and kidnapping. She was almost executed until Sun Fuyuan, the editor-in-chief of *CDS*, bailed her out. During the year drifting around this metropolis, Xie and her female friends continued to grapple with financial difficulties, finding it challenging to feed themselves and keep warm in the winter. Yet on the other side, Shanghai was also the initial setting for a cohort of Chinese Nora to forge social connections beyond the constraints of their familial ties, transcending the mere climactic moment when they decisively shut the door behind and left home. This experience has garnered limited scholarly attention despite its significance in character building.

Lu Xun's speech on the plight of modern Chinese women, 'What Happens After Nora Walks Out' (Nala zouhou zenyang 娜拉走後怎樣) (1923), seems to have found its real-life counterpart in Xie. In the speech, Lu Xun situates the destiny of women in the realm of power and money, two critical components of the patriarchal family and insurmountable barriers to female independence.[57] Before Lu Xun comes to the well-known conclusion, he draws the audience's attention to Ibsen's other play, *The Lady from the Sea* (1888). Despite the seduction

[55] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, 41.
[56] Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives*, 165.
[57] Xia Li, 'Nora and Her Sisters'.

of freedom at sea, Ellida, a housewife, finally chooses to stay home as her husband offers a tempting but tricky promise: 'You are free to choose your own path. Completely free'.[58] This bestowed autonomy thereby renders the maintenance of a conjugal life a decision seemingly stemming from Ellida's free will and an awareness of her family responsibilities. By contrast, the lack of economic independence leaves Chinese Nora with new problems rather than a solution: they would either degenerate into prostitutes or resubmit themselves to the patriarchal home. Lu Xun further clarifies that women are not incapable of going out like their male counterparts, but, as members of the dispossessed class, they need at least a physical or ideological destination and financial support to sustain their journey.[59] Similarly, the conviction of the omnipotence of capitalism pervades the works of Elfriede Jelinek, a Marxist novelist who asks a similar question concerning Nora's financial plight as Lu Xun in a 1977 play.[60] As Jelinek notes, without transforming the socioeconomic system, 'walking out' merely signals another round of women's circulation among men, 'as much a commodity as a factory, a site or a currency', for men to gain personal wealth.[61]

Despite concerns, the Nora trope of women's liberation persisted into the 1940s, coexisting with the acclaim for heroic female figures. As Chang-tai Hung discusses China's wartime mass culture, 'if Nora symbolised liberated women in the May Fourth era, Hua Mulan effectively symbolised resistance in wartime China'.[62] These enduring female symbols 'carried contemporary messages: condemnation of social injustice and a call for equality between the sexes, a continuation of the May Fourth assault against the Confucian tradition'.[63] As shown in an illustration from 1940 (Figure 1.1), a woman wearing a modern jacket and *qipao* is encouraged to demonstrate perseverance and determination in breaking free from the shackles of 'old rituals' and 'dependency', choosing either to compromise or to move forward. However, those attentive to women's economic circumstances, as well as those and those who

[58] Henrik Ibsen, *The League of Youth, A Doll's House, The Lady from the Sea*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Classics, 1965, 327.
[59] This idea that 'freedom is not something that money can buy, but it can be sold for money' was seconded by many reviewers in the 1930s. See, for example, Zhuqing, 'Thoughts on Reading "What Happens After Nora Walks Out"' (dule nala zouhou zenyang de ganxiang 讀了娜拉走後怎樣的感想), *Tian'nan*, 7 (2), 1937, 48–49.
[60] Xia Li, 'Nora And Her Sisters'.
[61] Tinch Minter, 'Afterword'. *Plays by Women: Volume Ten: What Happened After Nora Left Her Husband*. London: Methuen Drama, 1994, 64.
[62] Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1994, 74.
[63] Ibid, 67.

perpetuating the idealised image of modern women, tended to focus on a singular icon, overlooking the interactions among various Noras and their means of mutual support.

Figure 1.1: 'Two Paths: What Daughters of Our Time Should Know' (liangtiao menlu shidai nüer yingyou de renshi 兩條門路 時代女兒應有的認識), in News (Xinwen bao 新聞報), 12 Decmber,1940, 0015.

Following her divorce from Xiao Ming, Xie was introduced by her elder brother to teach Chinese at Changsha Provincial No. 5 High School. However, her appointment as the sole female teacher at the institution immediately encountered opposition, leading to her eventual persuasion by the headmaster to resign. Joined by Ai Zhen, a talented sixteen-year-old art student from an esteemed family of educators, Xie embarked on a voyage to Shanghai. Ai Zhen asserted that 'love' and 'beauty' were the essence of her existence. Unable to bear the idea of an arranged marriage with an unfamiliar man following a failed suicide attempt prompted by love, she resolved to escape to Shanghai alongside Xie. Throughout their journey, Xie, an adult who had more life experience, naturally assumed the role of a protector for Ai Zhen. Due to insufficient funds, the two young women had to live in a communal cabin and share a single bed. The burden of survival weighed squarely on Xie:

> Ai Zhen drifted back to sleep. I was still seated, nursing my injured head until the break of dawn.
>
> Breakfast was served.
>
> There were only two meagre meals of coarse rice without any vegetables in the communal cabin every day. To go with the plain food, the tea server brought in murky tea to prepare soup for the passengers. I bought two pieces of dried tofu. Ai Zhen complained that food was too little. She questioned why I hadn't bought salted eggs and fried cinnamon fish. I told her that we were left with a mere three dollars from our entire savings, and we had to leave a tip for the tea server as well.[64]

Both Ai Zhen and Xie were Chinese Noras who left their parents for freedom because of an arranged marriage. However, their journeys were of two distinct phases. Ai Zhen, freshly liberated from her previous bonds, found herself in a state of emotional vacuum, both physically and psychologically detached from anyone except for Xie. Sharing similar circumstances of making life-altering choices, Xie became the sole sister upon whom Ai Zhen relied. When Xie advised Ai Zhen not to follow her in case of danger, Ai Zhen asked her, 'My sister, could you stand to see my family destroy my small, weak life?' and asserted that the only consequence she could envision was death if Xie did not save her.[65]

On the other hand, Xie, who had endured a short period of unemployment, found herself compelled to prioritise survival over lofty idealism. Leveraging existing connections became imperative for her journey. On the way to Shanghai, Xie constantly relied on the support of her acquaintances. One of her classmates from the Central Military Academy assisted them in bypassing the police inspection before the ship departed. Upon their arrival at Hankou for a transfer, Liu Mutang 劉慕棠, another classmate who later joined Xie's HWBSC during the War of Resistance, graciously offered them accommodation for the night. Nora's cross-city displacement also required the forging of new ties in unfamiliar surroundings. Despite never having spoken before, the tea server recognised Xie as a veteran who had once marched to his hometown. To ease the hardships of Xie's voyage, he proffered a deck chair for her to rest. Additionally, he agreed to help them locate Xie's friends after the ship reached Shanghai.

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[64] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 188–189.
[65] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 171.

For Chinese Nora as newcomers, relocating to big cities after leaving small towns or villages was often less of a well-calculated plan than a response to the allure of a modern world. Upon arrival, they would realise that the city might not be as inviting as they had envisioned, especially when they travelled without much money or constant financial support from family. Among the hurdles they could encounter was finding a safe yet affordable place to stay before they further explored the city.[66] Short-term stays could expose them to immediate danger to their property and lives, as a seemingly decent hotel guest might unknowingly be living next door to criminals such as swindlers, pickpockets, robbers, or kidnappers, as illustrated by Xie's undeserved imprisonment in Shanghai. Unfamiliar men could also instigate feelings of threat among young women. While the tea server requested that Xie and Ai Zhen rest in a makeshift house to await his message, the two panicked when they inadvertently failed to open the front door. Suspecting that the tea server might attempt to rape them, Xie and Ai Zhen considered jumping off the window to protect themselves.

During the early phase of her wandering life, Xie's primary sources of support stemmed from the camaraderie she found with individuals who shared a similar fate instead of her public status as a woman warrior or renowned writer of military diaries. In a dire period when she had no sustenance for four days, Xie ventured to the Chunchao Bookstore (chunchao shuju 春潮書局) – the publisher of her *War Diary* – hoping to claim an advance payment of her royalties. However, the bookkeeper insisted that payment could only be disbursed during the impending payroll cycle:

> 'I don't even have the money for a tram fare, and yet I still come here running.'
> My hunger relentlessly gnawed. I had reached a point where I was so desperate that I forgot any sense of shame. My plea poured forth without any embarrassment. Despite all my words, the bookkeeper responded with cold smiles, showing no signs of sympathy. However, a kind-hearted young assistant noticed my situation and said: 'You can wait a little longer here. Many people are buying your books, and you can collect what they pay'. The bookkeeper angrily glared at this assistant. Yet since I was standing right there, he did not say anything, merely continuing to work with his abacus.[67]

[66] Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives*, 173.
[67] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 215.

Xie spent the day attending to customers at the bookshop, concealing her identity as the book's author. As she boarded a late tram to the dormitory, she coincidentally encountered a young man who had just purchased her book. Unaware that he was conversing with the author, the man eagerly praised the book and recommended it to Xie, suggesting that Chinese women like her should get a copy for themselves.

Translating sensation into language leads to a temporal distance between the narrator, the author, and the readers. As Micaela Maftei states, 'once the writing process is complete, the event hangs suspended between author and audience, trapped as though in amber'.[68] The lived experience will 'soon become untraceable, unreachable'.[69] Xie's encounter at Chunchao Bookstore reminds us that writing is a creation of past experiences, whereby even the writing moment becomes a part of the past, drawing a clear boundary between the author's life and her crystallised public identity. For the bookkeeper, the profit-generating author was detached from the actual Xie standing before him. Likewise, Xie felt a sense of detachment as she witnessed readers purchasing her own work, deliberately avoiding any association between the courageous female warrior depicted in her books and the less fortunate author in real life. The disparity between readers' admiration for her book and Xie's anonymous existence gives rise to a dramatic comparison. Although Xie is the protagonist within her narrative, she exists independently outside the rosy tale of a woman warrior. Her not-so-distant past as a soldier and recent experiences as a runaway Nora symbolically coexist, yet they do not define the whole picture of Xie's presence – a loosely rhizomatic network of young women.

Despite being laden with hardships and worries about the future, Xie's journey was not a solitary undertaking. Motivated by the imperative of ensuring her survival, Xie felt increasingly compelled to re-embed herself into the social structure by assuming a stable role. At a particularly desperate juncture, she even thought of working in a factory, while her friends urged her to revive her writing talent. Finally, a friend introduced her to the Shanghai University of Fine Arts (SUFA), a college that waived students' tuition and accommodation fees. At SUFA, Xie reconnected with Wang Ying, her middle-school friend, who kindly gave her a cotton jacket suitable for both daywear and as a nighttime quilt.[70] Another significant

[68] Micaela Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity*. New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 61.
[69] Ibid, 61
[70] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 213. In 1936, Wang Ying fought against Lan Ping (Jiang Qing) for the role of Sai Jinhua. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing put Wang Ying in prison,

bond was with Man Man, a fellow young woman who, like Xie, had fled her family. Their remarkably similar experiences led to a profound emotional connection: 'two infinitely traumatised hearts united, and we have been close friends ever since'.[71] Xie reciprocated her friends' generosity. Upon securing a five *yuan* advance from a bookstore owner for her *War Diary*, Xie immediately shared half of the amount with two financially strained friends.[72] On a different occasion, in order to send books concerning modern thoughts to elevate her friend, a failed Nora ensnared by an arranged marriage, Xie was detained for a few days under suspicion of being a communist.[73] A wide array of their activities, ranging from sharing living essentials, preparing food, attending school, engaging in conversations and gossip, to experiencing partings, marked the distinctive rhythm of itinerant Chinese Noras. On the periphery of the ethereal modern world, women of different backgrounds forged extra-familial networks in unprivileged settings, sought and provided mutual support, devised survival strategies, and practised new social roles. Such networks were a form of public community in which they could be known to more members of society and depend on interpersonal interactions for self-development.

Universities served as a common place where modern women established connections and engaged in discussions on 'awakenings' that were inspired by the May Fourth legacy, albeit in diverse ways.[74] The continuity of networks and the exchange of ideas relied on personal bonds among female students and their shared interests, including organising reading, singing, and acting groups, attending women's forums and social events, and participating in writing and publishing.[75] In January 1928, SUFA faced closure due to its affiliation with the leftist student movement. Many of Xie's fellow students had to return home, while some opted to marry. Xie pursued enrollment at BWNU in 1929, living off income from teaching, contributions to newspapers, and assistance from her friends. Before returning to university, she lived with Sister Zhou, another alumna from the Central Military Academy. For Xie, it was 'very interesting to live in a small house with a female friend, to do my own laundry, and to cook my

where she died. See Zheng Wang, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1964*. California: University of California Press, 2017.

[71] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 202.

[72] Ibid, 216.

[73] Xie Bingying, *Girl Rebel: The Autobiography by Hsieh Pingying*, translated by Lin Taiyi and Lin Wushuang. Shanghai: Minguang chubanshe, 1940, 116.

[74] See Zheng Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*.

[75] Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing*, 128–168.

own food'.[76] However, this mutual support among young women was fragile and contingent on the existence of the university and the duration of their degree. The female separations, akin to the closure of SUFA, can also be found in the dissolution of the women's team during the Northern Expedition, a topic explored in Chapters Two and Four.

Marriage could also lead to the finale of Chinese Noras' friendship. After the SUFA was dismissed, Man Man decided to engage with her lover and settled down. Xie felt a profound sadness seeing Man Man tortured by love: 'I cannot bear to be without her, and she cannot bear to be without me. It's truly sad that Mr Cui hindered her from leaving; otherwise, how delightful it would have been for us to be together!'[77] Ding Ling's 丁玲 (1904 – 1986) 'A House in Qingyun Lane' (Qingyunli de yijian xiaofang li 慶雲里的一間小房裡) (1929) illustrates the story of a lower-class Nora, Ah Ying, who chooses an alternative path. Ah Ying arrives in Shanghai seeking employment but ends up working in a brothel. In contrast to Lu Xun's portrayal of Nora's degeneration, Ah Ying feels grateful for the sisterhood she finds in the brothel and mocks her previous desire for marriage. At the end of Ah Ying's story, she buys the same lotus seed congee as her fellow sisters and keeps a lively eye on passersby with excitement. The way Ah Ying stands on the roadside and watches around is reversely akin to the girl in 'The Passerby', who is directed by the old man to return to her room. It is within a circle of energetic prostitutes, rather than in the company of male educators, that Ah Ying discovers a passion for life. This young woman's light-hearted monologue ironically implies that struggling within heterosexual relationships after leaving the parental homes might have compromised the freedom that modern women had already attained with an effort.

Ah Ying's means of communication may be even narrower compared to that of Xie's, but she re-embeds herself in new connections. From a masculine stance, disentangling from a patriarchal family does not guarantee women a solid social standing, without which their journey is doomed to end in tragedy. That is, women were only seduced to leave their boudoirs by the declaration of freedom without adequate preparation, leading to an inability to establish a respected identity within the social nexus.[78] However, the sense of buoyancy and joyfulness experienced by women in the suspended status between these two households – the parental

[76] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 222.
[77] Ibid, 221.
[78] Erica Wilson and Candice Harris, 'Meaningful Travel: Women, Independent Travel and the Search for Self and Meaning'. *Tourism*, 54 (2), 2006, 161–72.

home and the husband's home – subtly undermined a system dominated by individuals' instrumental value, despite the time-bound nature of the in-betweenness. While it is undeniable that women's social value is more difficult to recognise in comparison to men's, dissecting the problems of social structures should not be at the expense of belittling individual choices. The enduring sentimentality among intellectuals regarding women's prospects can be seen as, in a sense, a means of projecting their unease by sidestepping some of the more fundamental issues at hand, as will be discussed in the following section.

Contemplative Nora: My Conversation with Me

The Chinese Nora's interpersonal interactions contributed to the development of her social identity, fostering proactive engagement in the broader milieu following her departure from the parental household. A holistic sense of self also includes introspective dimensions. Between the processes of disentanglement and re-embedding lies a space for contemplation, which requires the detachment of an individual from familial and social entanglements woven into daily existence.[79] Xie's contemplation in her Nora-like journey manifests a self-dialogue and a silent conversation with the implied reader – the 'author's hypothetical audience[s]' who ideally understand her feelings.[80] Focusing on the significance of contemplation in the Chinese Nora's self-exploring journey, this section begins by exploring the context in which Nora's emotional expression was stifled by male sentimentality in modern China. Then, the attention turns to Xie's monologues during periods of detachment from social bonds, with a primary focus on three junctures: Xie's voyage to Shanghai, her introspective dialogues in marriage, and her reflections before her return to her hometown.

Xie's autobiographical writing brings the focus of Nora's stories back to her own feelings and vision. This is not simply a question of shifting perspectives. Chinese literature has never lacked expression from a female viewpoint by male authors. Yamei's last words to her parents – 'this [marriage] is my lifelong significance, so I should make the decision myself. I'm taking Mr Chen's car and leaving now!' – not only inspired a frenzy of women's emancipation but also paved the way for male writers to explore women's inner struggles as indicators of strides toward modernity. Ye Lingfeng's 葉靈鳳 'The Spring Breeze of Blossom Temple'

[79] Li Zhang, *Anxious China*, 18.
[80] Peter Rabinowitz, 'Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences'. *Critical Inquiry*, 4, 1977, 121–141, 126.

(Tanhua'an de chunfeng 曇花庵的春風) (1926) and Yang Zhensheng's 楊振聲 'A Letter' (Yifeng xin 一封信) (1934) both detail the psychological and physical state of women being tormented by intense lust in the first person. The vicarious sentimental excess permeates a masculine understanding of women's experience of 'walking out', a topic that, to borrow Rey Chow's words, possesses a 'position of narcissistic power in implying an Other who will respond'.[81] However, female eroticism risked being the medium through which men vent their excessive feelings, bringing a modern version of what David Wang terms the 'politics of male sentimentality' as he observes late Qing erotic fiction.[82] When male intellectuals adopted a voyeuristic lens to depict 'passive, narcissistic women' engulfed in 'romanticised suffering', they, in fact, presented the latter not as genuine subjects but as mere a projected voice.[83] Women served as an 'empty signifier into which the male author/reader may project his desire' and a 'non-referential, iconic image', be that an abandoned wife, a girl longing for love, or a woman warrior.[84]

It is not insignificant that it had to be a female subject who operated Nora's articulation in the sentimentality. Under the call of national emancipation in the 1930s, however, modern women tended to reject the talented traditional women who indulged themselves in 'emotional and purposefully apolitical' verse and 'feeling and flowery diction' and rather highlight their new identity as national subjects by eliminating 'the feminine aesthetic in national culture'.[85] In other words, an idealised modern woman was easily stirred to nationalistic zeal, whereas she had to erase 'the lyrical pathos associated with the talented women of the past' to turn her sentiments into radical actions.[86]

What we are looking for is the emotional life behind Nora's powerful proclamations, but it is not easily perceived even in works that question this literary trope. Despite the focus on Nora's tragedy in Lu Xun's 'Regrets for the Past' (Shangshi 傷逝) (1925), Zijun remains

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[81] Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 127.
[82] David Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997, 37.
[83] Maureen Robertson, 'Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Mediaeval and Late Imperial China'. *Late Imperial China*, 13(1), 1992, 63–110, 69.
[84] Ibid, 69.
[85] Joan Judge, 'Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century'. *American Historical Review*, 106 (3), 2001, 765–803, 796-802.
[86] Shaoling Ma, *The Stone and the Wireless: Mediating China, 1861–1906*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, 131.

bereft of her own voice and the story revolves around a hypocritical advocate of modern women who performs 'unambiguously, albeit allegorically, as a murderer'.[87] When Juansheng preached 'dictatorship of the traditional family, breaking old habits, gender equality, Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelley' to Zijun, she 'smiled and nodded, with a curious shine in her eyes'. Later, as he pointed to a bust of Shelley, she 'glanced then bowed her head, seemingly shy'. Juansheng's pleasure of travel resides within in an imagined West, shaped not by his actual encounters with the West or 'confrontation with the political realities of Western imperialism', but rather by 'a repository of imported images derived from texts, photographs, and films'.[88] His obsession with a distant Eden – masterpieces of philosophers, a bust of the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Hollywood movies – marks the daily lives of urban intellectuals in the mid-1920s. Juansheng's autonomy transcends mere exposure to exoticism but is embedded in his self-reflexivity, which conflates reality and imagination.

However, it remains elusive whether Zijun has the same capability to look beyond her fixed position; her gaze seems empty. Drawing from Gillian Rose's analysis of landscape-like women in oil paintings, Zijun is depicted as being 'oblivious' to her exposure and offering 'no resistance to the regard of the spectator'.[89] In geographical discourse, seeing and knowing are often intertwined, suggesting a rhetorical relationship between the absence of sight and the absence of knowledge.[90] The possession and explanation of the visual further 'justify' Juansheng's identity as Zijun's educator. For Juansheng, Zijun could see nothing but love, so she 'continued slowly and calmly on her way, as if there were no one in sight', while he is the feeling subject who has the ocularcentric privilege of travelling and is conscious of passers-by's 'searching looks, sarcastic smiles or lewd and contemptuous glances that set me shivering unless I was on my guard'.[91]

After Juansheng asks Zijun to elope with him, 'I' saw that Zijun 'tried to avoid my eyes', yet 'I knew she had given me permission, [although I was] not knowing what she said or did not say'. From then on, whenever Zijun 'gazed into the air and stared at it as if she were lost in

[87] Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2001, 71.
[88] Eileen Cheng, 'In Search of New Voices from Alien Lands: Lu Xun, Cultural Exchange, and the Myth of Sino-Japanese Friendship'. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73(3), 2014, 589.
[89] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, 96.
[90] Ibid, 99-101.
[91] Ibid, 117.

thought', 'I knew that she was again pondering the ideas I had given her'.[92] In Juansheng's account of their final encounter, his depiction of Zijun remains fixated on her silence. Once more, he admires Nora's resolve, wishing Zijun to depart their loveless family as decisively as Nora did. Through Juansheng's lens, Zijun appears akin to a 'child in hunger and thirst' yearning for affection, depicted as unable to express herself without his guidance and nurturing.[93] Juansheng's notes contain merely four direct quotes from Zijun, and two of these are accompanied by his negation and suspicion. To borrow Maureen Robertson's question about women's articulation in Chinese literature: How did women represent their gender consciousness in a discourse already scripted by male intellectuals?[94]

It is inevitable that women's voices would carry echoes of the male-dominated world. However, as women moved beyond literary tropes to engage with social life, the dissonance in adventure stories became apparent. Despite Xie's fondness for travel, her journey to Shanghai was not solely propelled by her voluntary inclination. As Xie stated, what differentiated her experience from that of certain fictional female characters was that her decision to leave was not due to a committed lover or help from men, but because of a sole idea that she would never accept an arranged marriage. It is thus unlikely for her to replicate scenarios similar to Yamei's establishment of a new family, as depicted in 'An Event of Lifelong Significance', or to follow the trajectory of a young woman in Feng Yuanjun's 冯沅君 (1900 – 1974) 'Journey' (Lüxing 旅行) (1924), who travelled with her lover without her parents' knowledge and returned home as if nothing had happened.[95]

After leaving her parents, Xie initially stayed with her brother's family, but because she had no job, 'whenever my sister-in-law complimented me, I felt she had a sarcastic tone, urging me to leave their house'.[96] Reluctant to burden her elder brother and fearing he might contact their parents, Xie secured her livelihood as a teacher at Changsha Provincial No. 5 High School.[97] The school administration's ostracism of women played a pivotal role in her determination to Shanghai, a more inclusive city:

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[92] Lu Xun, 'The Passer-by' (Guoke), *Lu Xun quanji* 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005 [1925], 116.
[93] Ibid, 127.
[94] Maureen Robertson, 'Voicing the Feminine', 63–110.
[95] Some women joined the army during the Northern Expedition to escape the patriarchal family, but this pathway was unavailable after 1927 and recovered when the War of Resistance broke out in 1937.
[96] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 161.
[97] Although Chinese women in former times had various kinds of travel activities, their travel lacked freedom of choice. Long-distance travel without the permission and company of male family members, such as the husband,

> From this incident, I began to realise that a woman could not stand on her own against the old forces of Chinese society. It was a very good lesson for me. Regardless of the trial and suffering that might lie ahead, I shall not retreat into a reclusive existence, distancing myself from society, nor shall I succumb to the influences of the past. Surely, in this wide world, there should be a way out for me! Forward, I must proceed![98]

It is when this symbolic act of 'moving forward' is combined with the tangible journey of crossing geographical spaces that Nora transforms from a mere character into a lived individual. Following days of enduring hunger, physical strain, illness, and a constant fear of potential assault on the ship to Shanghai, her vibrant ambition began to dissolve into an uncertain haze about the life that lay ahead. After Ai Zhen had peacefully drifted into slumber with a vision for their future, Xie sat beside this younger sister, acknowledging to herself her helplessness and loneliness:

> Three days and three nights on the ferry were almost over, and when the ship was about to enter Wusongkou, how bewildered I felt!
> I was like a lonely boat without a rudder, floating in a rough sea! I was like a weak lamb lost in a forest of roaring tigers and leopards; I was like a lonely goose that had lost its flock, wailing in the air all day long, flying over the Pacific Ocean, over the Himalayas, and over the ends of the earth. But where was my home to return!
> A chill came over me.
> What would I do when I got to Shanghai?
> Gazing at the white Yangtze River, the rolling waves gave me new signs. Flow. There must be a way out only if I flow on like water![99]

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brother, and father, was inappropriate. See Yang Zhang and Michael J. Hitchcock, 'The Chinese Female Tourist Gaze: An Ethnography of Young Women's Blogs on Macao', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 20 (3), 2017, 315–330. The Republican feminist Lü Bicheng's (1883-1943) popularity as a solo woman traveller would seem to be an exception. However, that was based on her privileges being out of reach for ordinary women: Lü was unmarried for life, of high political status in the Republican government, and wealthy. See Lu Li, Lü *Bicheng's International Travel and Self-Discovery: Travels in Europe and America*. Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2018.

[98] Xie Bingying, *Girl Rebel*, 126.

[99] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 191.

While the determination to progress was evident on both occasions, the driving force behind it underwent a transformation from a resolute battle against 'the old forces of Chinese society' to a self-oriented contemplation. Xie realised her desire for a safe 'home', an anchor from which she could find inner equilibrium and then reconnect with the broader world. Reducing the multifaceted journey of a Chinese Nora merely to financial problems would oversimplify her path, which was interwoven with concerns about interpersonal relationships, uncertainties regarding the future, emotional conflicts, and familial complexities.

SUFA served as the first provisional anchor in Xie's Nora-like journey. Despite enduring penury, Xie found solace in the companionship of Man Man and her circle of friends, who provided her with both financial aid and emotional support. However, this transient phase of contentment culminated in the school's closure and the dispersion of their classmates. Subsequently, while pursuing part-time studies at BWNU, Xie married Fu Hao, who shared her political aspirations, and they had a daughter. The aura of free love dissipated amidst consistent suspicion, indifference, and poverty, leading to an irreversible gap between the imagined home and reality. As Xie recalled, 'I wished every night that he would come to check on me before he fell asleep, or to see the baby sleeping – but I was disappointed every time'.[100]

Realising that genuine affection was absent even in a marriage based on free love, Xie saw suicide as the only solution. In describing her psychological turmoil, she alternated positions by sentences starting with a dash. This stylistic choice symbolises a transition between the author and the character-narrator, marking a shift between her present and past selves. The present self is characterised by a blend of external and internal focalisations, while the past self is conveyed through monologue.

> —— Die! The last train from Tianjin will arrive at half past twelve. Why don't I leave the baby here, lie on the tracks, and let the train crush me asunder? Just wait to see him [Fu Hao] find the news of a bloody female body on the tracks tomorrow morning!
> —— Or [I can] just hang from a rope in this room. He won't come in anyway. Just tie the rope a bit tighter and hang my body in the air. I am sure I will be dead in ten minutes at the most.

[100] Ibid, 237.

> And so, I put that thick rope that bound the quilt around my neck, which was as thin and withered as dry wood. When I was about to hang it on the beam (I lived in a one-bay tiled rouse with no ceiling. I could see the beam immediately when I opened my eyes), I suddenly looked at the baby sleeping in her bed. She looked so beautiful and serene. When she smiled, those two little dimples were so lovely. She tempted me to lean in and kiss her. My tears dripped down her tender, fair face. Thinking that she would go with me to the grave, perhaps soon after my death, I lost the courage to kill myself.
>
> —— This baby is born to me. I should fairly raise her and not leave her motherless when she just comes to earth. Even if I were to kill myself, I should put her in place first; otherwise, Qi [Fu Hao's pseudonym] will not care for her. If he remarries and that woman does not like the baby, how could her future be imagined?[101]

The present self, who writes the story at the extradiegetic level, knows the intradiegetic young woman's subsequent experiences.[102] Descriptive modifiers like a 'thick rope that bound the quilt' and a neck 'thin and withered as dry wood' demonstrate the present self's 'knowledge' of the setting and the past self's circumstances. Seeing from a distance, the author supplements the narrative with additional details about her past living environment in brackets, presuming that readers unfamiliar with her story will benefit from this information. On the contrary, the monologue of the past self contains few depictions of how she 'saw' the external world, but primarily comprises a stream of consciousness filled with exclamations and questions, reflecting a state of agitation and restlessness.

Instability is another hallmark of the past self. As Xie found that Fu Hao had no intention to console her when seeing her in distress, the narrative shift between the first-person pronoun and the second-person pronoun suggests her inner turmoil:

> Despite hearing my sobs and sighs, he didn't even turn his head to look at me. My suicidal thoughts were resolute again.
>
> —— Alas! You are already a woman abandoned by her lover! What do you hold on to in this world? Look at you; you are living such a miserable life yourself, and yet he can read books in peace. By Heaven, is that man truly human, or does he possess a heart of iron?

[101] Ibid, 237-238. The dashes and brackets belong to the author.
[102] For the narrative level, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 94–95; Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980, 255–256.

—— The baby – why should I concern myself with her? In any case, she belongs to the nation, whether alive or dead. Why [should I] feel any remorse for her? I might be an adult, but society cannot even ensure my survival, let alone that of such a fragile baby like her. —— Die! Just die recklessly![103]

Navigating multiple social positions was a difficult process for an individual whose sentimentality was set within the boundaries of revolution. In response to Xie's confession that she had lost all energy, her superiors of the CCP criticised her for being too emotional, stating that abandoning her responsibilities for the sake of love was incorrect.[104] Amid the conflicting norms about a woman's existence, the narrator reported feeling fragmented regarding her identity, developing a second person to share intolerable pressures imposing on her daily life. Women in Western societies are offered two alternative coping mechanisms to deal with fragmentation and contradictory pressures: turning to feminism or becoming sick.[105] However, refusing arranged marriages and choosing one's own lover, one important aspect of turning to feminism in Republican China, lost its rosy allure in Xie's experience. Instead of alleviating the pressures, it intensified the contradictions, paradoxically leading to emotional despair. Therefore, becoming physically sick seemed more pertinent, as it would also free one from risks of ideological censorship. Xie refused the accusation that it was her emotion or love that was in trouble. She stressed that the mistake she made should be attributed to her tiredness, 'laziness' and the 'loss of strength' and the suicidal idea was more out of discomfort.[106]

The narrative style in Xie's reflection on marriage and suicide undergoes iterations. It evolves from the solitary, singular voice of the past self, which was supplemented by insights from her present self, into a more intricate interplay of distinct voices: the first-person persona and the second-person self, and occasionally a third-person perspective. The extradiegetic author gradually takes a more concealed stance, minimising her interruption and veiling herself behind the interwoven dialogue of different voices. As Vladimir Bakhtin analyses in the theory of dialogism, the interplay between these diverse voices generates a complex realm of inner dialogue in which two or more seemingly contradictory dimensions interact and transform one

[103] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 238.
[104] Xie Bingying, 'Liquidation' (Qingsuan 清算), *Qianlu* 前路. Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1932, 152. Xie joined the CCP in 1929 and remained a member until her expulsion in 1931, see Chapter Two.
[105] Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the subject: deconstructing the text'. In Warhol, Robyn R. and Diane Price Herndl. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997 [1985], 597–598.
[106] Xie Bingying, 'Liquidation', 116.

another to create new meanings. This dialogue unveils various facets, including the protagonist's self-perception, interactions with others, and the perceptions others hold of him. It also articulates his existence, cognitions, emotions, and reflections. The author 'knows everything' about the characters, but 'is located outside them'.[107]

The entirety of the composition presented itself as discourse about a palpable existence, which, as Bakhtin states, belongs to 'the word of a "second" and not of a "third" person.[108] In this case, the second person served as a self-referential signifier but maintained a subtle distance from the traumatised subject, allowing her to conceal her presence. Every facet of the narrative converged upon the past self, who focused inward and resonated with her fragmentation. They elicit responses, pose inquiries, engage in debates, and launch interrogations.

Meanwhile, the second-person pronoun has a stronger empathic effect on the reader. Based on Bettina Kluge's five-segment continuum on 'you narratives', Sandrine Sorlin develops a six-point 'you narratives' model that can be applied to both fiction and non-fiction, including autobiographical works and trauma narratives.[109] In Kluge's continuum, You 2 is when the speaker hides behind the second person, generalising her own experience as something other people might have also experienced (Figure 1.2).

You 1	You 2	You 3	You 4	You 5
'You' meaning 'I'	'You' meaning 'I' as representative of a larger entity	Anyone	'You' in front of me as representative of a larger entity	'You' meaning the person in front of me

Figure 1.2: Continuum of the 'you narratives' (Kluge, 2016: 504, cited from Sorlin, 2022: 12)

Sorlin further highlights the importance of readers of second-person narratives, stating that the encounters between characters, the narrator, and readers constructed by 'you narratives' 'undeniably make an ethical demand on readers to show some responsibility or at least

[107] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 64.
[108] Ibid, 64.
[109] Sandrine Sorlin, *The Stylistics of 'You': Second-Person Pronoun and Its Pragmatic Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, 1-34. For Kluge's 2016 continuum, see Bettina Kluge, 'Generic Uses of the Second Person Singular: How Speakers Deal with Referential Ambiguity and Misunderstandings'. *Pragmatics*, 26(3), 2016, 501–522.

compassion for the "other"'.[110] By making readers take on more roles, 'you narratives' create a communally shared process of sense-making. In terms of the textual effects, pronouns as a 'person deixis' orient readers to the character's situation, drawing closer to or even projecting themselves on the character.[111] As linguists have shown, the second-person pronoun is a better attractor than other pronouns because it further implies a personalisation that makes the information appear to be more relevant to the self and readers and impacts memory.[112] Even though some reviews of Xie's autobiography in the Republican era point out that the narrative may not be an entirely faithful representation of her life, the author's infusion of 'sincere emotion' throughout the text imparted a genuine quality to her persona, evoking a sense of authenticity in the audience.[113] Consequently, even though the narrative style may not strictly adhere to conventional autobiographical norms, it holds profound 'literary value' and resonates as an emotive 'fairy tale', thus rendering it a poignant and worthwhile read, particularly for younger audiences.[114]

Assisted by a few friends, Xie began her long journey back home in 1931 after she decided to divorce Fu Hao. Her first stop was in Wuchang, Fu's hometown, where she visited his mother. Half a month later, she returned to Hunan. As Xie recalled, she intentionally avoided seeking companionship, choosing instead to retreat directly to the seclusion of the Kuntao Pavilion atop Yuelu Mountain – a place that held significant memories from her adolescent years and was also where one of her beloved brothers passed away. Xie viewed this solitary sanctuary as her refuge. The fond memories of the idyllic past embedded in its landscape beckoned to her, rendering it the sole haven where she believed she could seek tranquillity:

> I was reluctant to return to this sombre dwelling once more; but now, where else could I find shelter except here? I surrendered to my ache, settling into the humble chamber that was once my abode. The adjoining, larger room had been my second brother's, a threshold I found myself lacking the courage to cross. In the seclusion of this mountainous forest,

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[110] Sorlin, *The Stylistics of 'You'*, 22.
[111] See, for example, Charles Fillmore, *Lectures on Deixis*, Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 1997.
[112] See Anthony J. Sanford and Catherine Emmott, *Mind, Brain and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 177, 255.
[113] See Bo Hou, 'Reading A Woman Warrior's Autobiography' (du yige nübing de zizhuan 讀一個女兵的自傳), *Heping ribao*, June 26, 1946, 0007
[114] Su Fei, 'A Woman Warrior's Autobiography' (yige nübing de zizhuan 一個女兵的自傳). *Women's Life (Shanghai)*, 3 (5), 1936, 30–33, 31.

> my contemplation of embracing a monastic existence seemed to surface effortlessly, weaving together memories of my days long gone.[115]

During this period of seclusion only with her daughter, Xie was engulfed in vivid recollections, reminiscing about times spent with her family, cherished friends, and even a date with her first love by the river. The healing power of nature was evident. Each day, Xie meandered in the whispers of the wind caressing the maple leaves. In her imagination, the crimson foliage resembled a solemn casket, while the babbling stream echoed an elegiac lament. These intimate moments with nature, along with the invoked memories, provided Xie with a chance to find respite, a disentanglement from secular responsibilities and connections.

Memory assumed a fresh role as a cornerstone in Xie's endeavour to redefine 'home'. This intangible presence supplied her with constructive elements for reconstructing the inner self. Following an extensive period of secluded writing and solitary strolls, Xie discovered that she had, in her own words, 'extricated myself from an ocean of desolation', emerging with a renewed sense of composure and resilience. To borrow the phrasing of Nikolas Rose, this transformation was not an outright withdrawal into oneself, but rather a process of inwardly reshaping the individual's 'relations with others so that it will best fulfil its own destiny'.[116] The newly manifested sense of self-containment should not be construed as a shift towards individualism, but rather as a stride towards enhanced regulation of emotions and the social nexus. Xie felt prepared to return home and, specifically, to reunite with her mother.

Notably, the changes happened not only to Xie but also to her mother. Upon seeing Xie, her mother scolded her for being unfilial and indifferent towards the family. However, late at night, her mother silently entered Xie's room, gently covering her with a quilt and gazing at her face. Sensing her mother's presence, Xie feigned sleep to prevent any conflict:

> Mother stared at me with a lamp. After two or three minutes, she sighed heavily:
> 'Alas! [Xie was] Thinner, thinner, much thinner than when she left home'.

[115] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 230.
[116] Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 159.

> She gently caressed my face, forehead, and messy hair with a warm, soft hand. Suddenly, a cold tear fell from the corner of my mouth.[117]

In that moment, emotions silently intertwined between mother and daughter. Xie finally confessed that the weight of being separated for years – a span fraught with its share of hardships – weighed heavily on her spirit, causing the significance of her endeavours to lose some of its lustre, almost rendering her struggles bereft of purpose:

Aware of the distress her presence might cause her mother, Xie chose not to reveal that she was awake. Instead, she listened quietly to her mother sobbing for nearly an hour. Xie sensed a profound release – as if the last of her internal knots had been untangled. While her time on Yuelu Mountain had provided the solace necessary for her self-reflection and muster the courage to reintegrate into the social fabric, the reconciliation between mother and daughter proved to be an even more profound affirmation of her chosen path. It acted as an anchor, grounding her as she further embarked on her new journey. According to Judith Butler, 'the agency of the subject appears to be an effect of its subordination'.[118] The subject formation contains both the act of subordination and the subsequent emergence of becoming a subject within the subordinate context. Xie's journey was marked by her powerlessness and following emotional upheaval. Nevertheless, her self-reflection on it provided her with a unique vantage point that reshaped her understanding of intimate relationships, ultimately aiding her survival. Becoming a new mother and a daughter again gradually made Xie realise that human ideals were founded upon lived connections between individuals rather than mere transcendental constructions from political movements or the collective practice of a political programme.

Conclusion

'Nora' serves as a compelling embodiment of the fluidity of modern Chinese women as she navigates a path of constant motion: from her father's house to her husband's, from her husband's house to a public sphere, and at times traversing the threshold between these spaces. However, distilling the intricacies of her journey into a mere portrayal of a solitary figure transitioning between locations, ultimately disappearing into the crowd, or conforming to a

[117] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of a Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 256.
[118] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 12.

socially prescribed role, would be an oversimplification that fails to capture the nuanced dynamics at play. While it is true that social ethos and literary archetypes might have initially spurred Xie's departure, she soon recognised that such linear trajectories actually lacked the practical guidance needed for her lived experience because they could bypass the emotional, social, and economic issues that often constitute the core of women's suffering. But rather than being satisfied with this realisation, this chapter goes further to explore how the fugitive Nora interacted with both others and herself on the route, as well as how she continued to intersect with and complicate the existing social nexus, cultural sensibilities, and notions of personhood.

Overall, while the initial focus rested on Xie's familial discord with her mother, the crux of the entire odyssey lay in the metamorphosis of the mother-daughter bond. In the beginning, Xie's narrative did not afford her mother – a so-called custodian of old rituals – the role of a meaningful conversational partner. Despite the shared anguish, their exchanges remained shrouded in silence. Instead, Xie, as a daughter, tended to seek support from male figures, even though their capacity for empathy towards her plight could be limited. Her quest for understanding frequently led her astray, devoid of genuine resonance. It was not until she returned home after years that both mother and daughter cast aside the ideologies that had once fueled their conflicts and instead expressed their love for each other. The daughter's earlier hostile silence gradually gave way to moments of profound intimacy characterised by tears, heartfelt touches, and warm embraces.

Xie's navigation through the phases of disentangling and re-embedding within the social fabric catalysed the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, exemplified by her persistent search for a sense of 'home' throughout her walking-out journey. She discovered solace in the companionship of her female friends, a support network that aided her during moments of emotional turmoil and financial troubles. Although this mutual support could be easily fragmented in the face of external forces, the bond of sisterhood rekindled during the turbulence of the 1930s and 1940s, particularly when Xie devoted herself to the War of Resistance with her HWBSC, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

The culmination of Xie's journey lay within her contemplation. Bradley Lewis underscores the significance of self-narratives in shaping our narrative identity, suggesting that 'these culturally located "self" stories and the priorities within those stories combine with other

cultural stories to scaffold our narrative identity and provide us with a compass for living'. [119] The introspective reflections of the Chinese Nora transcended mere narration, metamorphosing into a practice of profound import. Rather than being mere accounts of experiences, they were a vital tool for constructing and steering her evolving self. This helps us contextualise Xie's seemingly conservative turn as we approach Chapter Five. When Xie reflected on familial war for young readers in the 1970s, she ardently denounced the idea of resorting to suicide or elopement due to fleeting passions of love: 'The absence or loss of love undoubtedly represents life's greatest pain. However, it should not dictate one's future or life. You must not become captive to love; you must transcend it'.[120]

[119] Bradley Lewis, 'What to Do with the Psychiatry's Biomedical Model?'. *Krankheirskonstruktionen und Krankheitstreiberei*, edited by Michael Dellwing and Martin Harbusch. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS, 2013, 389–410, 398. Cited from Li Zhang, *Anxious China*.

[120] Xie Bingying, *Message From the Green Window* (Lüchuang jiyu 綠窗寄語). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1971, 76.

Chapter Two: Iterating Memories of the Northern Expedition

Introduction

Contemporary discussions regarding women's wartime engagement are burgeoning, encompassing women from different parties, professions, and regions.[1] Most studies emphasise the War of Resistance and the Chinese Civil War periods, as women's military activities in the late 1920s appeared to be less extensive in comparison. However, against the backdrop of the KMT-led nationalist revolution and Communist influence, a significant juncture emerged in July 1926 with the formation of the First KMT-CCP United Front. This cooperation not only marked the beginning of the Northern Expedition – a military campaign against the Beiyang government and regional warlords – but also the debut of a group of female cadets who had just enrolled at the Central Military Academy following a series of public debates on women's enlistment.[2] As Xie recalled, many of her female classmates joined the military academy to evade arranged marriages.[3] In a sense, some Chinese Noras seemed to have discovered an alternative means to secure independence.

From April to July 1927, Xie marched with the NRA in the southeastern region of Hubei, mainly tasked with attending to wounded soldiers and propagating revolutionary ideas among local peasants (Figure 2.1). Throughout this march, Xie diligently maintained diaries, a majority of which she promptly forwarded to Sun Fuyuan 孫伏園, the editor-in-chief of the

[1] For interviews with female veterans of the Long March, see Young (2001); for communist women in the Jiangxi Soviet, see Hershatter (2019); for case studies of women warriors and spies, see Edwards (2016); for female nurses during the War of Resistance, see Barnes (2018); for medical courses for high school female students, see Zhou (2014); for Taiwanese women during the Japanese colonisation, see You (2005).

[2] On International Women's Day of 1925, Hong Yun published an article in *Chinese Soldiers* (Zhongguo junren 中國軍人), urging Chinese women to enlist in the army by following the examples of Hua Mulan, the Amazons, and female soldiers in the Russian Red Army. Months later, Jin Huishu, another young woman who wrote to petition the KMT and the Whampoa Military Academy, appealed for women's enrollment in the military academy. See Hong Yun, 'Women and the Army' (Junren yü funü 軍人與婦女). *Chinese Soldiers*, 3, 1925, 7–10; Lü Fangshang, *The History of Republican China* (Minguo Shi Lun 民國史論). Taipei: The Commercial Press in Taiwan, 2013, 449–450. News critics maligned Hong Yun and lampooned the notion of female enlistment. Later, *Chinese Soldiers* published a reply in which Li Zhilong defended the need to enrol women in the military academy while referring to Jin Huishu's two letters. See Li Zhilong, 'On the Recruitment of Female Cadets into the Whampoa' (Lujun junguan xuexiao zhaoshou nüsheng wenti 陸軍軍官學校招收女生問題)'. *Chinese Soldiers*, 6, 1927, 44-48. For women's pre-modern enlistment, see Chenwen Hong, *Heroine of One Thousand Faces: Memoirs by Four Women Soldiers in the Great War and Postwar Period*. Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Connecticut, 2019.

[3] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956].

CDS, as a precaution against loss on the route. Sun published her letters in *CDS* upon receiving them. Additionally, Sun's friend, Lin Yutang 林語堂, translated some of them into the English version of *CDS*. Bolstered by the endorsement of Sun and Lin, Xie had gained nationwide recognition by the end of the Northern Expedition. In 1929, a compilation of her wartime writings, titled *War Diary*, was published by Chunchao Bookstore.[4] While Xie was not the sole female soldier in Chinese history nor the first, *War Diary* stood as the pioneering instance of a woman warrior cohesively documenting her battlefield experiences. *War Diary* featured a vernacular language (baihua 白话), a form of written Chinese that had emerged since the New Cultural Movement to differentiate modern literature from traditional forms. Lin acclaimed Xie's writing style in the preface to *War Diary*, noting that she 'recounted her feelings with a fresh tone and smooth rhymes. The writing of a young, high-spirited woman who was determined to transform the universe is naturally worth reading. Bingying said that it was not "essays", but Fuyuan and I were just afraid that she would write some sophisticated "essays"'.[5] Many readers wrote to the publishing house, conveying that they were deeply touched and inspired by the natural flow of emotions in *War Diary*. They eagerly sought to know the genuine and endearing 'Little Bingying'.[6]

[4] With *War Diary*, Xie became nationally famous thanks to Sun Fuyuan and Lin Yutang's promotion. They were both from the Yusi group of writers in Beijing, together with the Zhou brothers. Lin translated extracts of *War Diary* into English and published them in his *Letters of a Chinese Amazon and Wartime Essays* (1930).

[5] Lin Yutang, 'Preface to Bingying's *War Diary*' (Bingying congjun riji xu 冰瑩從軍日記序), *Chunchao*, 1(3), 1929, 35–37, 36.

[6] See Mao Yibo, 'From Chunchao to *War Diary*' (cong chunchao dudao congjun riji 從春潮讀到從軍日記), *Chunchao*, 1(6), 1929, 137-140. Li Baiying, 'To the Author of *War Diary*' (jiezhe chunchao gei congjun riji zhuzhe 借着春潮給從軍日記著者), *Chunchao*, 1(7), 1929, 115–123. Jian Shen, 'Read Ms Xie Bingying's *War Diary*' (du Xie Bingying nushi congjun riji 讀謝冰瑩女士從軍日記), *Chunchao*, 1(8), 1929, 107-117. Li Li, '*A Few Words After Reading War Diary*' (dule congjun riji hou de xianhua 讀了從軍日記後的閒話), *Qinghai*, 2(1), 1929, 43–50.

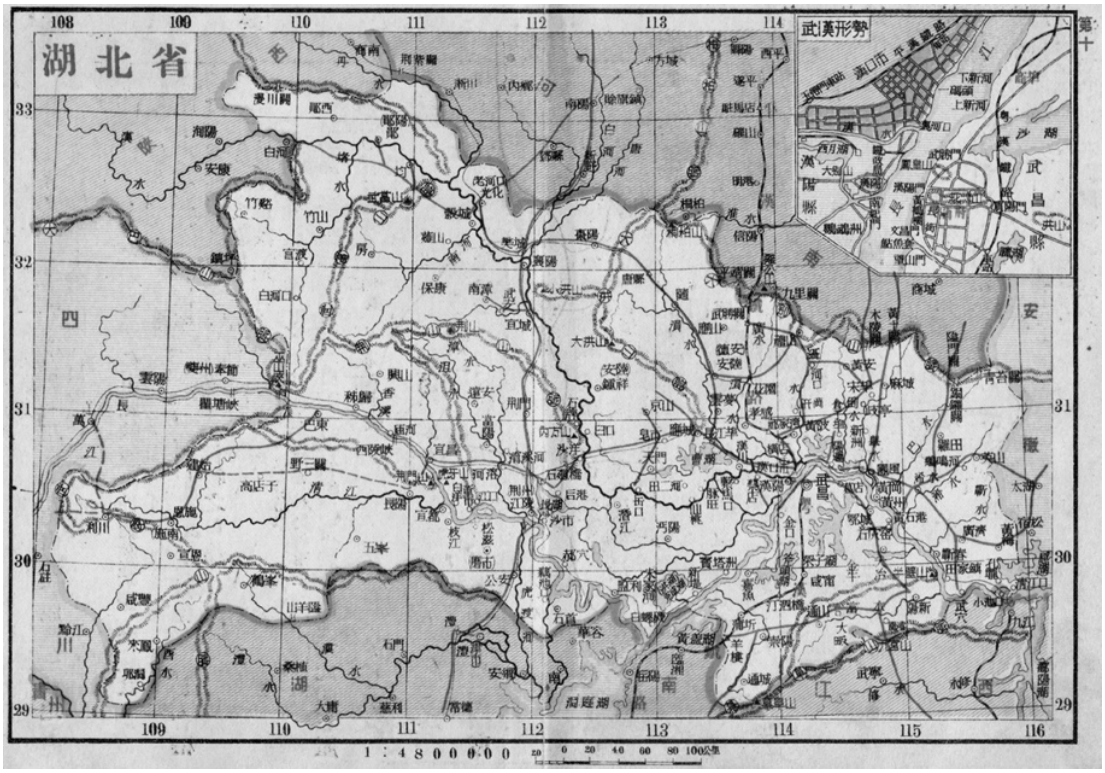

Figure 2.1: Map of Hubei, cited from Miniature Map of the Republic of China, Wuchang: Yaxindi xueshe, 1936. Xie's army started from Wuchang, advancing southwestward and passing through the Tingsi Bridge, Xian'ning, Puqi, Jiayu, Fengkou, and Xindi along their march.

While at the same time, July 1927 witnessed the split between the CCP and Wang Jingwei's regime in Wuhan, followed by Chang Kai-shek's reassertion of control within the KMT and the purge of Communists. The failure of the KMT-CCP United Front disillusioned intellectuals, and the ensuing disbandment of the women's team plunged female soldiers into familial tragedies once again. In the afterword to *War Diary*, Xie expressed her distress regarding the plight of her comrades:

> The brave and esteemed women's team – you were so proud during that time. Yet, suddenly, the land lost its brightness, and the sky was covered by ominous black clouds again. You have returned to a harrowing and dark existence, fraught with evil tigers and vipers.[7]

[7] Xie Bingying, *War Diary*. Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1933 [1929], 52.

Despite public suspicions regarding the violence inherent in the proletarian dictatorship, the tragic loss of workers and prestigious Communist intellectuals during the Shanghai Massacre granted the CCP moral high ground to label the KMT Right as the counter-revolutionary. This fueled a surge of leftist literary groups in the late 1920s. The acclaim garnered by *War Diary* was not only attributed to Xie's personal endeavours but also to the prevailing revolutionary sentiment of that era. Given Xie's extensive interactions with peasants and involvement with local associations during the Northern Expedition, her writings served as the source material for leftist writers lacking direct rural and battlefield experiences. Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈, a communist writer and the main organiser of the Sun Society (taiyang she 太陽社), drew inspiration from Xie's work to conceive his novel, *The Moon Breaking Through the Clouds* (chongchu yunwei de yueliang 衝出雲圍的月亮) (1930).[8] The female protagonist, Manying, was also a student trained at the Central Military Academy and became a soldier participating in the Northern Expedition. Manying's diaries mirror the tone of Xie: 'I think my spirit is great because... because I am a soldier fighting for the liberation of human beings. A 'soldier' is a million times more valuable than a 'lady', is she not?'[9]

Although Xie's public image has consistently been associated with the ideas of 'woman warrior' and 'female rebel' since her publications about the Northern Expedition, her recollections of the late 1920s underwent a process of reevaluation and revision in the decades following the war. Therefore, concentrating solely on episodic fragments of her writings would limit the understanding of her evolving emotional life as a whole. In the 1933 version of *War Diary*, while the main body remained consistent with the original 1929 version, several additions were made. Xie included her preface titled 'A Few Words for the Reprint' along with four essays in the appendix: 'Letter to Brother Before Departure', 'To Female Classmates', 'Revolutionised Love' and 'Self-Critique of War Diary'. The first three essays were written during her time at the Central Military Academy, while the last one was written before the publication of the 1933 version. In 'Self-Critique of War Diary', Xie eluded her past communist connection, stating that she was not satisfied with the so-called revolutionary literature in China because 'those slogan-like words never have much impact on readers':

[8] Ding Jinhua, 'War Experience and Xie Bingying's Battlefield Novel' (Zhanzheng tiyan yu Xie Bingying de zhandi xiaoshuo 戰爭體驗與謝冰瑩的戰地小說), *Taiwan xiandangdai zuojia yanjiu ziliao huibian*. Tainan: Taiwan wenxueguan, 2014, 298.

[9] Jiang Guangci, *The Moon Breaking Out of The Clouds* (Chongchu yunwei de yueliang 衝出雲圍的月亮). Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1930, 5.

> I think *War Diary* is a very stale thing. It has never left me with a good impression. I believe it is something that has already become the past because now it is 1931 and definitely not an era like 1927!'[10]

In *War Diary*, a substantial portion revolves around Xie's effort to mobilise peasants against landlords and her commendation of the peasant movement in rural China. However, as she distanced herself from the communist cause, her depictions of the peasants underwent a gradual shift in her later works. From the 1930s to the 1950s, Xie revisited her experience at military school and the Northern Expedition in the three main versions of her autobiographies. Nevertheless, she eluded explicit references to the war itself and vaguely mentioned how she joined the 'army'.

In the initial version of Xie's autobiography, *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography* (1936), she detailed her childhood, school days, involvement in the Northern Expedition, and familial conflicts. In 1946, Xie completed the second part of her autobiography, covering her successful escape from a prearranged marriage and her encounters in the War of Resistance. This was merged with a revised version of the first part, culminating in a collection titled *Ten Years of a Woman Soldier* (1946*)*. Two years later, Xie relocated to Taiwan and reworked the book as *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier* (1956), a finalised version upon which subsequent versions were based. Although narrating the same occurrences, Xie's alterations to some details of war stories are subtle expressions of her questioning of the communist revolution. Meanwhile, despite her identities as an active organiser of leftist movements and a communist in Beiping after the dismissal of the women's team, she avoided discussing any of her past interactions with the CCP and the Northern League for Leftist Writers (beifang zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 北方左翼作家聯盟, hereafter the Northern League) in her autobiography.[11] In a letter to her friend Wei Zhongtian, Xie clarified that: 'I was not the founder of any leftist league [in the 1930s]. I was preoccupied with teaching and schooling. There was no time for political

[10] Xie, *War Diary*, 135–137.
[11] In 1928, the KMT established the central government in Nanjing and renamed Beijing as Beiping Special City, referred to as Beiping, depriving it of its political status.

work'.[12] In 1984, she complained to Yang Xianru that a collection published in mainland China was a distortion of her original work:

> My friend bought me *The Collection of Essays by Hong Kong-Taiwan Female Writers*, published in the Mainland. Two of my essays were selected; one was 'Ai Wanting' and the other an extract from *The Autobiography of a Woman Soldier*. In the latter, the editors amended two places without my permission. The original text was 'we sat in the coach – it was too dull, so we began to sing', but they changed it to "sing the *Internationale* – raise up, you who do not want to be slaves". How dare they! Another change to the plot was that my brother introduced me to '*Socialist A-B-C*'… These lines were not in my book![13]

However, by checking the original texts in the *Cosmic Wind* (Yuzhou feng 宇宙風) (1935–1947) from 1936, it can be found that the Mainland editors did not alter any of her sentences. A cognizant reader might discern a form of unreliability at the intertextual level between the two versions. In the preface to a reprinted *The Autobiography of Woman Soldier*, Xie announced that she has already deleted 'thousands of words', including the lyrics of *Internationale*, and believed that this made her work more accurate than previous ones. She insisted on the revision, 'although someone blamed me for that – they preferred the original version'.[14]

Since all the above works cover Xie's experience during the late 1920s and early 1930s, their inconsistencies constitute an interesting unreliability peculiar to autobiographical writing. Drawing on Dan Shen and Dejin Xu's (2007) theoretical framework regarding unreliable narration in autobiographies, this chapter seeks to reconcile a woman's lived experiences with the constructive powers of her texts. Meanwhile, I ground myself in a poststructuralist-feminist perspective to approach Xie's textual space, perceiving it as a realm of self-reflection that is not exclusively dictated by external forces. This chapter commences by introducing Chinese women's autobiographical practice in the early twentieth century and how this genre has been shaped by their evolving self-understanding. Then, it conducts a comparative analysis of Xie's

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[12] Wei Zhongtian, *Forever Friendship: Correspondences from Xie Bingying to Wei Zhongtian* (Yongheng de youyi: Xiebingying zhi Weizhongtian shuxinji 永恆的友誼: 謝冰瑩致魏中天書信集). Beijing: Zhongguo sanxia chubanshe, 2000, 33.

[13] Ibid, 'To Yang Xianru' (Zhi Yang Xianru 致楊纖如), 47–48.

[14] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of a Woman Soldier* (Nübing zizhuan 女兵自傳). Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1985, 10.

autobiographical writings relating to the Northern Expedition, scrutinising their distinct content and style. Finally, it examines the sociohistorical contexts in which Xie revised her works, referencing recollections and correspondence from her friends to explore her (re-)representation of memories. By contextualising her revisitation of war memories in China's revolution in the twentieth century, this chapter aims to separate the nationalist morality that we hold about a woman warrior and bring questions about her autonomy into clearer focus.

Women's Autobiography and The Chinese Pathway

As gender discourse delineates societal division into the male public sphere and female private sphere, traditional Western theories on autobiographies have associated notions of sociohistorical narratives with masculinity.[15] That is, while men provide a portrait of their times, women's autobiographical writing seems merely to render visible aspects of their daily lives. The growing attention to the latter simply integrates it as a new subset into the history of male-biased literary history. This mirrors the Confucian trappings in China's traditional literary perspective, where male authors use autobiography as a genre geared towards the public sphere, expressing their interpretation of history, recording what is culturally and socially valuable, and presenting a coherent social self.

However, since the 1970s, critics have problematised the idea of autobiography as a representation of the meaningful life stories or retrospective confessions of isolated, 'great' men, considering it a patriarchal and Western construct.[16] After the linguistic turn, poststructuralism moves from the essentialised human subject to the discursive norms of texts. As Janet Ng points out, the past standards for autobiography have become ineffective, and 'to modern writers, truth is no longer captured through a repetition of visible reality. It is in the method of figuration'.[17] Intersecting with poststructuralists' critique of the author-subject and

[15] Anne Fleig, 'Gender Studies', *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction: Volume I: Theory and Concepts*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf. Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, 54–61, 57.
[16] For analyses of women's autobiographical practice, see Susan S. Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice'. *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Shari Benstock. London: Routledge, 1988, 34-62; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices'. *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. 3-52.
[17] Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010, 9.

subjectivity, feminist research in autobiography has shifted its focus from the investigation of an entity's testimonials towards how women constructed their identities via fragmentary writing practices.[18]

However, if a work becomes fully absorbed into the linguistic system of pure textuality and dismisses the influences of the author and the social context, feminist studies on women's autobiographies risk disregarding the everydayness of the writing/speaking subject and overlooking the crucial referentiality of class, race, and sexual orientation in women's lives.[19] Since any study operates within a specific sociohistorical background, contextualisation will be needed when scholars transplant the theory of autobiography into another culture. In her study of Chinese women's autobiographies during the Republican era, Lingzhen Wang demonstrates that it is important to capture gender construction within discursive structures. In twentieth-century China, multiple forces intersected within a material location – the female subject. Her autobiographical writing represents not merely adherence to discursive norms but a more complex negotiation involving East and West, life and writing, self and textuality, as well as history and literature.[20]

Women's autobiographical writing was a controversial site of Chinese modernity. On the one hand, Chinese women have started the modern autobiographical practice since the late Qing and flourished it as an expressive venue for self-creation during the early twentieth century, when the awareness of the self as a political entity deepened.[21] Overseas female writers usually served as role models for Chinese women's search for individuality.[22] Towards the end of Xie's *Autobiography of a Female Soldier* (1936), she rationalised her autobiographical acts by referring to modern dancer Isadora Duncan's *My Life* (1927), leftist

[18] Nancy Chodorow, *Individuality, Gender and Sexuality: Theory and Practice*. New York, London: Routledge, 2012.
[19] Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, *Life/lines: Theorising Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press,1988, 13.
[20] Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 10.
[21] Except for Xie Bingying's writings, some of the prominent texts include *An Autobiography of Lu Yin* (Lu Yin zizhuan 廬隱自傳) (1934) by Lu Yin (1898–1934), *My Tragic Life* (Beiju shengya, 悲劇生涯) (1936) by Bai Wei (1894–1987). Other autobiographical stories were published in English, such as Chen Hengzhe's (1893–1976) *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* (1935) and Su Hua Ling Chen's (1904–1990) *Ancient Melodies* (1953). Buwei Yang Chao's (1889–1981) *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* (1947) became accessible in English through translation. See Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 9.
[22] Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 14.

journalist Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of the Earth* (1929), and Hayashi Fumiko's *Diary of a Vagabond* (1930), from which Xie obtained inspiration to genuinely portray her experiences.[23]

On the other hand, during the process of nationalist revolution and modernisation, women's autobiographical writing often faced criticism for being self-indulgent, focusing on familial and romantic relationships, and lacking emphasis on China's century-long search for modernity.[24] While certain writers, such as Eileen Chang (1920 – 1995), transcended the notion of teleology in their writings, many women of the early twentieth century internalised these critiques and sought validation from external resources, be that social significance, market demand, or Western influence, to justify their autobiographical endeavours. Bing Xin 冰心 (1900 – 1999) felt compelled to showcase that their autobiographies were not merely centred on family life but rather reflected the broader societal events of their times.[25] In the preface to her autobiography, Xie also claimed that she 'felt no need as an ordinary person to publish an autobiography', but she did so because of the encouragement from enthusiastic editors.[26] By stating their disqualification in advance, women writers took a typical defensive gesture to secure their writing space, hinting at their writing as a potential act of defiance and transgression.[27]

However, the emphasis on collective voices could overshadow the emotional experiences of individuals, despite the fact that women managed to navigate the dual demands of their times – personal feelings and societal responsibility – through their autobiographical writing. Specifically, women's autobiographical writings since the late 1920s, set against the backdrop of civil and international wars, often demonstrate a similar tendency to focus on the subjects' endeavours to defy gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression, as well as their efforts to pursue education and professional lives through which they tried to save their country.[28] The problem is that these politically progressive contents might be seen as the sole distinguishing factor in women's writings of this era, leading to generalised interpretations.[29] For instance,

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[23] Xie Bingying, *A Woman Warrior's Autobiography* (yige nübing de zizhuan 一個女兵的自傳). Beijing: zhongguo guoji chubanshe, 2013, 3–4.
[24] See Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 6.
[25] Ibid, 6.
[26] See Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 22.
[27] Bing Xin also stated beforehand that her life stories were of little worth to be recorded. See Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters,* 4.
[28] Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 23–24.
[29] Jing Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 167.

Xie's writing has been expected to provide an insight into female experiences in revolutionary and military contexts, such as wartime mobilisation, medical care, and rural areas. The importance of the text remains subordinate to the historical significance it carries. Only by resisting the temptation to retell the paean of women warriors will we be able to properly grasp how women saw themselves and the land over which they travelled.

Feminist scholars in Western studies have recognised the concept of a generic female voice as a patriarchal construction that ascribes texts authored by women to a collective female voice while neglecting their distinguishable characteristics.[30] Likewise, in the context of Chinese literature, it is important to discuss the cultural space where women recycled old symbols and re-signified them. Questions arise in the case study of Xie: What did the autobiographical practice mean to her at different stages of life? How could it provide an alternative approach to defining her identities as a modern woman and a woman warrior without either ignoring or being overwhelmed by the sociohistorical context? To what extent can we perceive her autobiographical writings as authentic?

Shen and Xu categorise autobiographical unreliability into three levels concerning the relations between the narrator-author, extratextual facts, intertextual inconsistency, and the cognizant reader. lntertextual unreliability is exclusive to autobiographies. It manifests when readers discover inconsistencies between two or more autobiographies narrating the same personal experiences. Inconsistency in storytelling, whether in fiction or autobiography, is referred to as intratextual unreliability.[31] A sign of narratorial unreliability in autobiographies is misreporting. These two levels can be complemented by Yiheng Zhao's distinction between the writing styles of fictional narratives and documentary narratives. Zhao highlights five characteristics that may diminish an autobiographical text's reliability, contingent upon its ability to persuade discerning readers: 1) quoting characters in direct discourse; 2) continuously using direct discourse to form dialogue; 3) describing the moods or emotional states of other characters; 4) adopting other characters' points of view to describe situations; 5) providing excessive details about events.[32] Although the fictional component of an autobiographical

[30] See Benstock (1988) and Sharon O'Brien, 'Feminist Theory and Literary Biography'. *Contesting the Subject. Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, edited by William H. Epstein. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991. 123–133

[31] Dan Shen and Dejin Xu, 'Intratextuality, Extratextuality, Intertextuality: Unreliability in Autobiography versus Fiction'. *Poetics Today*, 28(1), 2007, 43–87.

[32] Yiheng Zhao, 'On Aotofiction' (Lun Zixiaoshuo 論自小説). *Jianghai Xuekan*, 2, 2019, 211–218.

work is difficult to determine simply by the proportion or frequency of specific traits that appear, their presence will make cognizant readers wonder whether the author has a good enough memory to precisely record the past. Finally, extratextuality refers to the ultimate yardstick for judging the unreliability of an autobiography – the 'facts'. It explains the discrepancies between the textual and historical worlds involved, although the latter may merely be another construction.

The narrative approach to investigating Chinese women's autobiographies can be justified in two aspects. First, although current studies have highlighted the uncertainty of memory and the potential confusion between the writing subject and the textual subject, modern Chinese autobiographies continue to be regarded as resources for assessing historical facts, exploring the authors' psychological dimensions, or comprising subsections of broader social themes.[33] Literary techniques and textual analysis have not received much attention. The belief in the authenticity of this genre bypasses the meticulously crafted text, emphasising the author's authentic explanation of her memory. Yet given the inherent ambiguity of memory and the subjective nature of the narrative stance, authors can construct a 'truth' that differs from their past selves yet is shaped by their current experiences. In other words, veracity resides in the motivation and intentions of the storytellers rather than in the resulting stories.[34]

Second, while discussions on the relationship between autobiography and the female self have been extensively explored in the Western context, there exists limited critical approach delineating how texts encapsulate the trajectory of self-development within the Chinese paradigm. In traditional context, the autobiography typically narrates the flow of the past through the voice of a mature author-I outside of the text and the inexperienced eyes of a less mature character-I in the text.[35] Compared to the book-length autobiographies that present the lifelong stories of great men in an extended manner, Chinese women writers' autobiographical works in the early twentieth century featured shorter chapters treating desultory facets or episodes of their lives. The fragmentary nature corresponded with the proliferation of the modern publishing industry. Xie's autobiographical writings were initially published as

[33] For the former category, see Jeffrey Kinkley, *The Odyssey of Shen Congwen*. California: Stanford University Press, 1987. For the latter, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, 'The Solitary Traveller: Images of Self in Modern Chinese Literature', *Expressions of Self in Chinese Literature*, edited by Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 282–307.
[34] William Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.
[35] Maftei, *The Fiction of Autobiography*, 9

serialised pieces in publications such as *CDS* and *Cosmic Wind* before being compiled into collections.[36] Scholars have also noted that, apart from their piecemeal structure, Xie's works about the Northern Expedition exhibit a style referred to as 'documentary life narratives' that coincide with the narrated time and narrating time.[37] These narratives may lack a retrospective tone but instead capture pivotal moments amidst the author's ongoing encounters with others, in which she reimagined the past, responded to it, and, by doing so, commented on the present.[38] However, a prevailing critical stance towards Xie's recurrent revisitation of memories over decades has yet to be established. Rather than regarding her 'autobiography of the present' as a factual recording of events, this chapter argues that it is her continual updating of memories with her present self that constructs a panorama and 'reality' of her life across temporal and spatial dimensions. Therefore, this chapter not only examines the fractured nature of the individual texts but also delves into how collectively they reflect the author's active negotiation with history, particularly within the context of war.

Intertextuality: The Peasant Revolution as A Renewed Signifier

From the late 1920s onward, leftist intellectuals began to distance themselves from the legacy of the May Fourth discourse by deeming individualism sentimental. Instead, they called for a literary turn to the collective revolution and the cultivation of a proper class consciousness.[39] In newspapers and official documents, peasants were frequently amalgamated with urban workers to represent the worker-peasant class, which was portrayed as enduring profound oppression inflicted by landlords and capitalists. On International Workers' Day in 1925, *Guide* (Xiangdao 向導), the mouthpiece of the CCP, released a special issue claiming that the significance of the day had evolved in China – it was not only a day exclusively dedicated to workers but also an occasion for the peasant class to evaluate the Party's abilities.[40] Even Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石, the leader of the KMT Rightists, wrote an open letter before the Northern Expedition to stress that the first objective in reorganisation

[36] Jing Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 177.
[37] Ibid, 167. Also see Guo Li, 'Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-Century China'.
[38] For the characteristics of Chinese women's autobiography in the early half of the twentieth century, see Jing Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 167; Jing Wang, *Jumping Through Hoops*, 23; Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 12.
[39] Lawrence Wang-chi Wong, 'Lions and Tigers in Groups: The Crescent Moon School in Modern Chinese Literary History', *Literary Societies of Republican China*, edited by Kirk Denton and Michel Hockx. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008, 299-305.
[40] 'May Day Special: The Chinese Communist Party's Message to the Workers, Peasants and Civilians of China on May 1, 1925' (Wuyi tekan: zhongguo gongchandang 1925 nian wuyi gao zhongguo gongnong jieji ji pingmin 五一特刊:中國共產黨一九二五年"五一"告中國工農階級及平民), *Xiangdao*, 122, 1925,1027.

was to reach a consensus that the success of the national revolution had to rely on the alliance with workers and peasants.[41] In this regard, while the overarching aim of the Northern Expedition centred on eradicating warlords and achieving national unification, it is unsurprising that Xie consistently endeavoured to peasant mobilisation and communist propaganda. In *War Diary*, she recorded her attempts to establish a peasant-centred intimate community that surpassed mere kinships. The CCP's emphasis on class struggle as the engine of historical progress, coupled with the establishment of leftist leagues in 1930, further fueled the demand for narratives concerning peasants (Figure 2.2).[42] As Marston Anderson points out, 'in the 1920s, realists had largely addressed educated fellow travellers', yet 'by the end of the next decade, the implied (if not the actual) readers of most realist fiction were instead members of the proletarian and peasant classes'.[43]

Figure 2.2: 'All writers of the Leftist League are to take part in the peasant-worker revolution, those in favour raise their hands!' Woodcut by Wang Yiliu, Mengya yuekan, 1 (4), 1930, 7.

The 1929 version of *War Diary* included not only Xie's diaries and correspondences during the Northern Expedition but also two postscripts: 'The Afterword' and 'A Letter to KL'. These were finished before the publication of *War Diary*, two years after the women's team

[41] Chiang Kai-shek, 'Report of the Great Union of the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers' (Gongnongbing dalianhe baogao 工農兵大聯合報告), Zhongguo nongmin, 6/7, 1926, 1.
[42] Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (University of Chicago Press, 1983): 34-35.
[43] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 201.

was disbanded. In 'The Afterword', Xie expressed in a solemn tone that she did not want people, in particular women soldiers, to resign themselves to accepting the current darkness of society as a natural state for humanity. Cautious about political censorship, she wrote down the slogans from her days at the Central Military Academy in English, hoping to inspire her comrades to persevere in their dedication to communist ideals:

> That was when we welcomed Leader Bao and the **International Workers Conference**. […] Everyone raised our hands and cheered: **'Complete the World's Revolution!" 'Down with the International Imperialism!' 'Down with white terror!' 'Down with all the Counter-revolutionists of China, of the world!' 'Long live the Proletariat!' […] 'We have no home. Party is our home'. 'We have no brothers and friends, but the comrades, workers, and farmers are our brothers and friends'.**[44]

Apart from being prevalent among young revolutionaries, jargon such as 'down with imperialism' and 'counter-revolutionists' were frequently used in the writings of political leaders. However, even during the peak of the Nationalist Revolution, the meanings behind these phrases remained abstract and generalised. Various parties and factions within those parties wielded these terms as a discursive weapon against one another, turning them into somewhat arbitrary political stigmas – sometimes even perceived as crimes punishable by execution.[45]

Nevertheless, this form of Enlightenment discourse was also probably the most important invention of the twentieth century in China. It appeared natural for intellectuals, deemed possessors of 'knowledge', to assume the responsibility of awakening the masses, primarily rural populations. In 1929 *War Diary*, Xie depicted peasants as uneducated barbarians:

> Peasants lack *knowledge*. Their brains are simple. Their thoughts are naïve. They do not have an in-depth understanding or judgement of anything. Therefore, those who direct them and those who lead them must train and organise them.[46]

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[44] Xie, *War Diary*, 48. The bold part is emphasised by the author. Leader Bao: Mikhail Markovich Gruzenberg, known by the alias Borodin (Bao Luoting). Borodin was a Bolshevik revolutionary and Communist International agent. He was an advisor to the KMT during the 1920s.
[45] Qisheng Wang, *Revolution Counter-Revolution* (geming yu fan geming 革命與反革命). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2010, 91.
[46] Xie, *War Diary*, 8.

Subjectivity forms the foundation for individuals to acquire and comprehend knowledge. However, in the case of Xie, while her concept of 'knowledge' held epistemological implications, in practical terms, it specifically pertained to the peasants' ability to grasp revolutionary slogans. In *War Diary*, Xie shared in correspondences with Sun Fuyuan an anecdote where she laughed at the illiteracy of peasants. She recounted that they 'amusingly' but mistakenly shouted slogans such as 'down with the director of the empire' (dadao diguo zhuzhen 打倒帝國主任) and 'down with local tycoons and evil gentry, reclaim the special pig' (dadao tuhao lieshen, shouhui tebiezhu 打倒土豪劣紳，收回特別豬).[47] As Xie explained, the mispronunciations by the peasants were due to their lack of understanding of the intended meaning behind the slogans. Even though they merely imitated the sounds of the revolutionary leaders, Xie added, this 'ridiculous' imitation remained necessary because 'if they do not shout out something, how can the tycoons oppressing them for so long be overthrown by them?'[48]

The knowledge imparted by intellectuals to peasants was disconnected from the latter's self-agency. As Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker elaborates, revolutionary activists 'discovered' the peasantry as oppressed victims, 'a subject to be used as a means for exposing that dark underside of Chinese society' that the modern successors to the old scholar-official elite had undertaken to reform. Whatever peasants wanted to do or say, they had been merely 'a site or metaphor, a blank page on which various political visions and ideological agendas have been inscribed, articulated, and contested'.[49] They were speaking, but their words failed to convey meaning. Their actions and languages were perceived through external forces. While important to the communist revolution, the significance of peasants lay more in their collective, often violent, presence than in their individuality. The actual content of slogans carried less weight for most peasants. More critical was the act of shouting, which changed their bodies from bending to standing and included them in repetitive rhythmic training for revolutionary purposes.

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[47] Ibid, 9. The correct pronunciation in Chinese should be 'down with imperialism' (dadao diguo zhuyi 打倒帝國主義) and 'reclaim the special zone' (shouhui tebiequ 收回特別區).
[48] Ibid, 10.
[49] Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerk, *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant 'Other' in Modern Chinese Literature*. California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 6.

According to poetry critic Mutlu Konuk Blasing, the rhythmisation of language is a form of socialisation that involves the social construction of subjects.[50] Yet Xie's perspective on the mobilisation of rural people, as depicted in *War Diary*, leaned more towards their instrumentalisation and the imposition of generalised identities. A similar stance can be found in her contradictory portrayal of rural women. On the one hand, Xie condemned the patriarchal families that confined women within domineering marital relationships, advocating for a thorough economic revolution to ameliorate their living conditions. On the other hand, she displayed a condescending attitude towards older women who were stunned by her short hair and unbounded feet and questioned whether a female soldier like her could find a 'boss' – a local way of referring to a husband. To spoof them, Xie and another female soldier pretended to be each other's husband, confusing rural women who differentiated genders based on hair length.

Notably, Xie praised peasants who had a radical understanding of revolution. In 1929 *War Diary*, she described the story of the Dongs, a peasant family she lived with, who suffered a lot because of warlords and bandits. Dong Haiyun, one of the family members, told Xie that his brother introduced him to revolutionary books, and he thus knew that his poverty was not inherent but the result of exploitation by warlords, landlords, and capitalists. What further astonished Xie was Haiyun's decisive action to discarded ancestral tablets and repurposed the ancestral hall into a stronghold for the revolutionary army.[51] This statement aligned with Xie's manifesto that 'we have no brothers and friends, but the comrades, workers, and farmers are our brothers and friends'.[52] Since revolutionaries merged private lives with their political ideologies, they had a clear concept of common friends and enemies and anticipated the peasantry to abolish the public-private distinction as well. Consequently, traditional notions of kinship, neighbourliness, and private property all fell by the wayside as people were categorised solely by class attributes. Despite pursuing a shared goal, Xie was amazed by the fervour in Haiyun's words and his determination to resist private ownership. For her, the heightened awareness of class struggle displayed by these peasants was a positive development that had the potential to inspire soldiers in return.

[50] Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 52-58.
[51] Xie, *War Diary*, 1933, 6.
[52] Ibid, 135.

Xie also admired the burgeoning peasant movement in Hunan in her letter to Sun Fuyuan: 'Your newspaper [*CDS*] often publishes information about Hunan's peasant movements. You must be aware of the fierceness of the rural populace, in particular the peasants in that region. Recently, their organisation and strength have noticeably increased'.[53] This sentiment appeared to be a direct response to Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan' from March 1927. In this report, Mao illustrated how the peasants instigated a mighty revolutionary upsurge capable of overthrowing the entrenched authority of landlords, as well as the necessity of adopting extreme measures in this pursuit:

> In this period, it was necessary to establish the absolute authority of the peasants. It was necessary to forbid malicious criticism of the peasant associations. It was necessary to overthrow the whole authority of the gentry, to strike them to the ground and keep them there. There is revolutionary significance in all the actions which were labeled as 'going too far' in this period. To put it bluntly, it is necessary to create terror for a while in every rural area, or otherwise it would be impossible to suppress the activities of the counter-revolutionaries in the countryside or overthrow the authority of the gentry.[54]

While Xie showed ambivalence towards various categories of peasants, Mao contended that the peasants were already competent leaders of China's revolution. However, their emphasis on a more vigorous peasant movement was consistent.

In the three versions of her autobiography spanning from the 1930s to the 1950s, Xie also depicted peasants, but with a notably understated and even negative stance. An incident highlighted was when Xie and her classmate missed their train to the Central Military Academy due to their shyness to ask dwellers for directions. Consequently, they had to wander from door to door in search of help and eventually ended up spending the night in an unnamed village. As Xie narrated, not a single villager was willing to provide them with a place to rest, and they were shadowed by two men whose looked at them with evil eyes. In the end:

> An elderly woman heard us. She went out to open the door in a hurry, but an unhappy countenance appeared when she saw that there were two women outside. The thing was,

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[53] Ibid, 7.
[54] Mao Zedong, *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (March 1927), see the full text on https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm.

she had a daughter-in-law who was giving birth. According to a superstitious belief, if it had been a man outside [when a woman gives birth], the baby would have been a boy. 'Madam, could we please stay here for one night? We missed the train'. We begged. 'You can't. My daughter-in-law is having a baby. We are too busy to keep you here. Go away and find another place'.[55]

Xie portrayed the rural woman as an aggressive and superstitious Other, while the two young women who 'begged' her for a bed were trapped in 'hell' in which they were afraid of being abducted. The villagers and the young soldiers were on opposite sides; one was strong and dangerous, and the other was weak and innocent. Peasants were no longer the inferior who needed to be protected or educated by revolutionaries, but people capable of threatening others. This depiction contrasts with *War Diary*, where, despite Xie's unwitting sense of privilege, she perceived rural women as uneducated and fragile, particularly highlighting the vulnerable position of young women within civil-military relations. During their march from Fengkou to Xindi, Xie took the hands of a little girl and asked her to show the soldiers the direction. The rural girl 'looked back at me. She was almost scared out of her wits. Her father immediately told her: "Don't worry! They are girl soldiers".' The narrator ironically asked her readers: 'Why are they [rural women] afraid of male soldiers but not of "girl soldiers"?'[56]

When comparing the two portrayals side by side, the autobiography's narrator took a dominant mode of focalisation that assumed omniscience by presenting the psychological activity of the elderly women before all the characters started a conversation. When an autobiographical text includes detailed descriptions of other characters' thoughts, the reliability of the first-person narrator tends to diminish. This raises doubts about whether certain elements have been 'created' by the narrator.[57] By colouring her past experiences with the lenses of her present self, Xie reminded readers how her most recent convictions deflected from *War Diary*.

Despite the fact that the narrators of *War Diary* and autobiographies all distance themselves from rural people, their points of view differ. In *War Diary*, peasants were docile

[55] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 62.
[56] Xie, *War Diary*, 42.
[57] See Shen and Xu, 'Intratextuality, Extratextuality, Intertextuality'. According to Shen, 'direct talking' is an important characteristic of autobiography. When a narrator's depiction of other characters' psychological activities surpasses realistic boundaries, cognizant readers tend to question the reliability of the narrative and ponder whether the narrator has intentionally shaped a biased version of events to align with objectives or motives.

to the soldiers. They required 'training' and 'organisation' in order to equip themselves with 'knowledge' and became an efficient force for revolution. While in her autobiographies, Xie challenged the leftists' idealisation of the masses, turning peasants from silent victims and slogan-megaphones to strange others. The inverted power relationship embodies the narrator's suspicion about class struggle – were peasants always on the side of justice? Should a revolution be the dictatorship of one group of people over another? From a more distant vantage point, Xie arrived at a distinct conclusion when reflecting the uncontainable and violent peasant revolutions during the Northern Expedition. She recognised that such upheavals, if not effectively managed, could result in a situation where the dynamics between strength and weakness were merely reversed without altering the oppression itself.

The transformation in Xie's depiction of peasants corresponds to her shifting perspective on the communist revolution. During the late 1920s, the acclaimed revolutionary army assumed the role of saviours, guiding peasants in releasing their anger against landlords – a phase that resonated with Xie's passionate commitment to revolution. However, when she revisited this period, having distanced herself from the leftist cause, Xie not only gradually omitted references suggesting her connection to the peasant movement but also separated herself from Communist leanings by assuming the words of the character she crafted. In her 1936 autobiography, the elderly woman would rather place her faith in enigmatic deities than accept the two soldiers representing class struggle. Her rejection serves as a symbol suggesting that the once appealing revolutionary ideals have lost their allure and trustworthiness.

The only essay that centres on the peasant movement in the 1936 autobiography, titled 'Three Old Prisoners', subtly places a greater emphasis on the confessions of landlords on the eve of their execution in the square than delving into the psychological aspects of the peasants as Xie did in *War Diary.* While the narrator claimed support for the peasants, there was a noticeable display of sympathy towards the landlords as they pleaded for mercy. In *Girl Rebel*, the English version of the 1936 autobiography, Xie further diverted attention away from her interactions with peasants, condensing her concerns for them in a single sentence: 'Because I lived quite close to the peasants, I wrote stories of them and their sufferings'.[58] The later versions of her autobiography accentuated this detachment, wherein her participation in the

[58] Xie, *Girl Rebel*, 1940, 43.

propaganda unit and her communications with local families during the Northern Expedition were almost absent (Figure 2.3).

Year	1936 (Mainland)	1946 (Mainland)	1956 (Taiwan)
1926	'Join the Army': 'He showed me *ABC of Socialism*, *An Introduction to Socialism* and books about social science and revolutionary theories'.	'He showed me books about social science and revolutionary theories'.	'He showed me books about new literature and arts'.
1927	'May of Blood': 'The International Workers' Delegation came to Wuhan, and leaders of the Workers and Peasants' Revolution also came to Wuhan!' 'The May, stained with the blood of the revolutionary martyrs, will be forever enshrined in our hearts'.	The same as 1936.	Deleted.
	'Three Old Prisoners': During the Northern Expedition, peasants in a village held a public meeting and sent three evil gentries to the headquarter for execution.	Deleted.	Deleted.
	'Night March': 'Fight for truth, light, and the oppressed classes of all mankind'.	'Fight for truth, light, and fellow fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters'.	The same as 1946.
	'The Incarcerated': Xie was imprisoned with two male comrades as the leftist 'thought suspects'.	The same as 1936.	Delete all about 'thought suspects'.
	'The Night Before We Disband': "We were forced to disband because the reactionary forces were too strong."	The same as 1936.	'There were a few troublemakers'. 'I cannot stay because of my foot pain'.

Figure 2.3: Inconsistencies about the Northern Expedition period in the three versions of Xie's autobiography.

In terms of wording, in her 1936 autobiography, Xie recalled her brother introducing her to the *A-B-C of Communism, An Introduction to Socialism*, some books about social science, and revolutionary treatises during her youth. However, in the 1946 and 1956 versions, as she further split from the CCP, references to 'the *A-B-C of Communism*' were revised to 'books about social science' and 'books about new literature and art'; and 'the farmers and their sufferings' were rephrased as 'mountain-dwelling skits'.[59] The later retellings replace specific references to peasants, socialist ideology, and rural mobilisation with more general ones. Moreover, they emphasise no longer the triumph of 'revolution' but the victory of 'truth', along with the freedom of 'fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters' rather than that of 'peasants and the working class'.[60] By revising her past texts, Xie constructed a new ideal world characterised by an intimate aura that encompassed familial terms regardless of class struggles.

[59] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 (1956), 34.
[60] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 (1956), 89.

In her memoirs from the late twentieth century, Xie further removed reference to Northern Expedition; instead, she revisited the difficulties she, a young woman, faced upon entering the Central Military Academy and the training the women's team undergone.[61] Differences in narrative centres show two drawings of a female soldier at the outset of her military career: the writings before the 1940s concentrate on the revolutionary passion and hardships encountered by a young communist who strove to unify the peasants – people she perceived as her true family. In contrast, the later writings substitute the traumatic wartime setting with a more optimistic picture, hastening the narrative pace to illustrate how a joyful soldier relished her adventures, as will be further analysed in the next section.

Direct Discourse, Dialogue and Commentary: Autobiographical Rhetoric

In addition to depictions of activities and events, the narrative style also serves as an important gauge for assessing the un/reliability of an autobiography. At the intratextual level, the unreliability of fiction is reflected in the discrepancy between the narrator and the implied author, whereas the intratextual inconsistency in autobiography may simply function as a sign of misreporting because this genre presumes a direct telling where the narrator, the author, and the subject are identical.[62] However, when the 'autobiography' in the book title already gives the reader an expectation of authenticity, the narrative style might instead undermine that expectation. Two narrative elements – direct discourse and commentary – offer readers cues to evaluate the extent of the narrator's involvement in the narrative. When it comes to the Northern Expedition, Xie's later writings adopt more rhetorical features that may undermine the narrator's reliability. To discern them and their functions at the textual level, this section first discusses the disparities between *War Diary* and Xie's autobiographies. Then, it delves into a more nuanced exploration of unreliability by juxtaposing the 1946 and 1956 autobiographies side by side. This section argues that Xie's reticence to the communist revolution mitigated the complexities of the Northern Expedition and partisan conflicts, turning her early military life into a more pleasurable participation for more general relevance.

[61] Xie, *Bing Ying's Reminiscence*, 21-32

[62] For fiction, see Tamar Yacobi, 'Authorial Rhetoric, Narratorial (Un)Reliability, Divergent Readings: Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata'. *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by James Phelan and Phelan and Rabinowitz. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 108–123, 111; for autobiography, see Gérard Genette, 'Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative', *Poetics Today*, 11, 1990, 755–774.

Upon scrutinising Xie's writings concerning the Northern Expedition, a prominent difference resides in the narrative duration of time – an aspect of temporal arrangement that involves the relationship between the time of the discourse and the time in the story.[63] Within Gérard Genette's framework delineating four types of narrative duration, intertextual ellipsis emerges as a dominant feature across Xie's works, featuring the variation in text length. The focus in *War Diary* remains singularly fixated on the march of the Northern Expedition, while the autobiographies encapsulate a more expansive duration of time within the author's life in shorter pieces (Figure 2.4). In addition to the noticeable reduction in battlefield descriptions from *War Diary* to the three autobiographies, the overall record of Xie's military activities during 1927 has gradually decreased in each of the autobiographies. The section titled 'Military Life' comprises 12 subsections in the 1936 autobiography, 11 in the 1946 version, and a mere 10 in the 1956 version. A substantial portion of them details the training phase preceding her march rather than chronicling her encounters on the battlefield.

Autobiographies			
	1936 (Mainland)	**1946 (Mainland)**	**1956 (Taiwan)**
Section: 'Military Life'	'Join the Army'	'Join the Army'	'Join the Army'
	'Two Rednecks Chasing A Train'	'Two Rednecks Chasing A Train'	'Two Rednecks Chasing A Train'
	'I Was Expelled'	'I Was Expelled'	'I Was Expelled'
	'Enlistment'	'Enlistment'	'Enlistment'
	'Broke the Romantic Dream'	'Broke the Romantic Dream'	'Broke the Romantic Dream'
	'A Few Undisciplined Soldiers'	'A Few Undisciplined Soldiers'	'A Few Undisciplined Soldiers'
	'May of Blood'	'May of Blood'	
	'Setting Off'	'Setting Off'	'Setting Off'
	'*War Diary*'	**'*War Diary*'**	**'*War Diary*'**
	'Three Old Prisoners'		
	'Night March'	**'Night March'**	**'Night March'**
	'The Night Before We Disband'	**'The Night Before We Disband'**	**'The Night Before We Disband'**
***War Diary* (1929/1933)**			
	'A Piece of War Diary'		
	'A Funny and Interesting Story'		
	'Three Pieces of War Diary'		
	'A Letter Sent from Jiayu'		
	'I Will Writer More Next Time'		
	'Marching from Fengkou to Xindi'		

Figure 2.4: Subsections and chapters specifically relating to Xie's encounters during the Northern Expedition are in bold.

[63] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 33. Genette suggests four types of narrative duration, including pause, scene, summary, and ellipsis.

Although there is no statistical correlation between the percentage of direct discourse in a text and the narrator's reliability, in terms of language, fictional works incorporate a higher prevalence of direct discourse, dialogues, and detailed descriptions of characters' thinking compared to documentary narratives.[64] In instances where auxiliary recording devices are unavailable to transcribe conversations and reconstruct scenes, autobiographical writing predominantly employs indirect discourse to acknowledge the limitations of the narrator's knowledge. In both versions of *War Diary*, direct discourse only intersperses inner monologues, while in Xie's autobiographies, it assumes a more prevalent role. The autobiography's narrator constructs a dramatic carnival-style scene to depict parents seeing their children heading off to the battlefield:

> Several older women bent down to beg our commander, who wore a slanting belt.
> 'My son can't go to war. He's everything that I've got...'
> 'My daughter can't go. If anything happens to her, I can't live!'
> There were cries, trumpets, laughter, and cheers.
> 'Don't be sad, old lady. We will win the battle.'
> 'Don't worry about your daughter, Madam. We are all children of our parents.'
> At last, all the people shouted together:
> 'Kill the enemy and return triumphantly!'[65]

The tension between the reluctant mothers and resolute soldiers was soon reconciled by the communal goal of national salvation, sublimating the farewell into a fanatical declaration.

A comparable plot can be found in *War Diary*. When Xie's army marched towards Jiayu, a woman asked a question that made her 'very upset': If a young woman like Xie was shot on the battlefield, what her parents would have to do. In a similar vein, Xie reassured the woman by saying that she had already made up her mind to be a soldier, and she must leave her parents because the revolution was about sacrificing a few for the majority's interests. However, unlike the scene of chanting slogans in autobiographies, the narrator of *War Diary* mainly presented the responses of listeners in an indirect way:

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[64] Zhao, 'On Autofiction'.
[65] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 (1956), 81-82.

> Many people nodded as if admiring my bravery. Some looked at the middle-aged woman, as if blaming her for the words that provoked me into delivering such a long speech. Some elderly women seemed to say, 'What a poor little girl!'.[66]

Using words of estrangement such as 'as if' and 'seemed', the narrator of *War Diary* limited her focus to what the character-focaliser could see, based on which she interpreted other people's deportments and expressions. By acknowledging that her observations were filtered through a personal perspective, the narrator admitted to readers the potential bias inherent and the impossibility of speculating on the inner thoughts of others.[67] By contrast, the narrator of autobiographies used more direct quotations when the narrating time was already in a distant past – a discrepancy that may raise suspicion about the accuracy of her memories.[68] She replaced the character-focaliser's self-reflection with dialogues and actions, sketching a cinematic image from an aerial view. The thoughts of parents sending off their children were less important. What the narrator underlined was that they were successfully persuaded to join the chorus of people shouting slogans. By dramatising the scene as a plain-speaking panorama, the narrator excluded alternative interpretations of characters and directed readers to perceive them in her designed manner.

The omniscient portrayal of external events and surroundings over the personal feelings of the female soldier is a feature that distinguishes Xie's autobiographies from *War Diary*. In depicting Xie's first sight of wounded soldiers during the Northern Expedition, the autobiography's narrator was concerned with the actions than her subtle psychological activities. The narrator began by describing how Xie reached out her head from the train window. This is followed by the wounded 'rolling around in a pool of blood in pain' and a fallen soldier who 'had a broken arm and his eyes still half closed'.[69] The description of actions presents a crafted sense of order. Another illustration can be found in a night march. The autobiography's narrator accurately recalled her movement when she accidentally fell into a pool: 'Suddenly, my right foot stepped into the water, but fortunately, my left foot stood firm, and my body did not fall down'.[70] In contrast, although closer to the time of the narrated event, the narrator of *War Diary* gave fewer accurate descriptions of the outside world but instead the

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[66] Xie, *War Diary*, 29.
[67] Uspensky, 85.
[68] Zhao, 'On Autofiction'.
[69] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 181.
[70] Ibid, 202.

woman warrior's inner struggles. When witnessing the wounded soldiers died, she was overwhelmed by a profound sense of grief: 'His groans, no matter who hears them, no matter how hardened a person may seem, will break their heart and shed tears'.[71] This marked the initial instance when the young soldier genuinely identified her presence on the battlefield and the cruelness of war.

Richer commentary also signifies the higher degree of intervention by the narrator, who annotates the characters' states of mind.[72] By making in-text comments, the narrator conducts what Gérard Genette calls the ideological function, that is, she can interpret the story for readers by taking a more 'didactic form of an authorised commentary on the action'.[73] The autobiography's narrator tended to control the interpretation of her story by inserting short comments. During the army's march to the front, a platoon sergeant stopped Xie from helping the wounded lying on the roadside and convinced her that the task at the front was more urgent. The glorifying and self-justifying 'my heart was full of a solemn and stirring feeling' provides an affective foil to his decision.[74] The narrator, while using positive comments to justify the order from her sergeant, rendered him the embodiment of reason and denied the young woman's spontaneous sympathy in the name of revolution. These modifiers reveal not only information about their direct object but also about the narrator, who guided the work with her own moral stance. By replacing the words of estrangement commonly used to describe other characters in *War Diary* with affirmative and precise presentations, the autobiography's narrator transformed personal assumptions into a communal attitude to summon companions more forcefully and effectively.

While the differences between the 1946 and 1956 autobiographies are less overt in comparison to the disparities observed when contrasting them with *War Diary* or the 1936 autobiography, the nuanced emotional variations make the 1956 autobiography a dramatised rendition of a woman warrior's tale. In the 1946 autobiography, the narrator simply expressed joy upon learning that the women's team could go to the front. The 1956 autobiography expanded this emotional portrayal, illustrating Xie's heightened elation to the extent that she ran around the military academy at four in the morning. When recounting her efforts to amuse

[71] Xie, *War Diary*, 3.
[72] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*.
[73] Genette, 256.
[74] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 83.

her friend with jokes during the march, the 1956 autobiography adds a supplementary phrase to the 1946 version, 'she [Xie's friend] laughed until tears flowed'.[75] This embellishment rendered a vivid scene without substantially altering the original meaning.

Despite the added modifiers, the 1956 autobiography gives no more background information regarding the Northern Expedition itself. The narrator obscures specific details about her medical and propagandist contributions at the front, prioritising a sense of achievement as a soldier. For her, the character-focaliser 'I' embodies more of a courageous protagonist in a military adventure story rather than an actual person. By detaching her narrative from the intricate realities of the brutal warfare and political struggles of the time, Xie created an image that is both encouraging and educational for the Chinese populace during peace time.

Positive emotion-evoking modifiers were more prevalent in the 1956 autobiography. When describing a night march during the Northern Expedition, it employs terms such as 'they [other soldiers] asked me with solicitude' and 'I answered him courageously' to praise the amicable atmosphere in the army.[76] In the 1946 version, no modifiers such as 'courageously' or 'comfortable' were used when the narrator described her experience of the night march. Furthermore, in the 1956 autobiography, there was an addition of several discussions related to the disbandment of the army and the female soldiers' reluctance to part with their guns, belts, and uniforms – details absent in the 1946 autobiography. These coloured descriptions contribute to the subject's image as an energetic warrior, demanding emotional resonance from a wider cohort.

Meanwhile, the 1956 autobiography attenuates the intensity of negative emotions. In the 1946 autobiography, upon discovering her name listed among those expelled from the military academy due to participation in a protest, Xie described feeling 'miserable'. However, in the 1956 autobiography, this sentiment was revised to 'sadness', implying a nuanced attempt to mitigate the mental strain imposed by military authorities on female soldiers.[77] Meanwhile, Xie adopted a more cautious approach regarding ideological content. In a speech when the commander explained the dissolution of the women's team, his statement was altered from 'the

[75] Ibid, 86.
[76] Ibid, 90.
[77] Ibid, 126.

reactionary forces being too strong' in the 1946 autobiography to 'a few troublemakers disturbed it' in the 1956 version. Furthermore, Xie revised the commander's final advice to the women as 'enduring some temporary discomfort', whereas the 1946 autobiography included a more poignant one that might undermine the public expectations of women warriors as inviolable figures:

> As long as your faith remains unchanged, as long as you always think of sacrificing for the revolution, then, at the present time, if there is no way out of life, it would not be wrong to become a warlord's concubine, only that you must not be intoxicated with material pleasures and forget your mission.[78]

An effect of reducing ideological content while amplifying theatrical details is the accentuation of a more innocent and purified image of the young soldier, who now focuses more on her own experiences than the complexities of revolution. In other words, by sidestepping a radical political orientation, Xie gradually guided the public perception towards viewing the woman warrior as a more universally relatable symbol of courage and mobilisation.

Extratextuality: Unreachable 'Truth'

To state that reality is the ultimate yardstick of autobiography would seem obsolete since there are well-established concepts in memory studies discussing how people can harbour varying judgements on the same event. The so-called 'reality' that corresponds to the autobiographical text can also be constituted by other texts open to multiple interpretations. However, it is equally important to note that the sociohistorical contexts were the basic references for the author to represent their past. We already know that Xie created a more agreeable image of woman warrior by revisiting her memories and shifting the focus from the Northern Expedition to the soldier herself. However, this transition did not occur immediately after the war; instead, Xie became a member of the CCP in the late 1920s and diligently propagated revolutionary ideas among urban workers, mirroring her previous efforts with peasants in rural areas. Were the changes in her writing because of her desire to maintain a good public image or avoid the threat of social disapproval? Can we interpret these changes merely as a form of subjective suppression or political censorship? What led to the tension

[78] Xie, Girl Rebel, 30.

between the author's emotional life and her communist commitment? In addition to examining the differences between Xie's text and those of others, as well as her text and the extratextual reality in terms of some basic 'facts', this section is more concerned with the possible causes of dislocations.

Xie's resistance to revisiting her encounters specifically relating to the 'Northern Expedition' can be placed in the broader context of political conflicts. In the late 1920s, peasant movements spread rapidly throughout China. The Wuhan Nationalist Government had little control over the local administrations, so the unleashed violence proved difficult to control. Since Chiang Kai-shek still faced pressure from both Wuhan and the northern warlords, land reform did not immediately cease after the White Terror, particularly in the rural areas of Hunan and Hubei.[79] The plans of the right-wing KMT and the entrepreneurs who supported it to expel the Communists, re-establish internal order, and maintain diplomatic stability had not succeeded in a broad sense.[80] When Xie and her comrades embarked on the Northern Expedition in April 1927, the peasant movement remained a military priority. The plans of the right-wing KMT and the entrepreneurs who supported it to expel the Communists, re-establish internal order, and maintain diplomatic stability had not succeeded in a broad sense.[81] The situation took a turn in late June when Feng Yuxiang announced his support for Chiang Kai-shek. In a public telegram, Feng demanded the dismissal of Borodin, the punishment of radicals in the peasant movement, and the submission of KMT members who resided in Wuhan to the Nanking authority.[82] Without the support of any significant military force, the Wuhan government's political position finally collapsed, leading to the disbandment of the women's team Xie was on.

Most Chinese intellectuals experienced a turning to the Left after the collapse of the KMT-CCP united front. This was a dark moment for the young revolutionaries. As Lin Yutang commented: 'Bingying is silent now. She is reluctant to write essays and has no spirit to rush forward'. 'Many of her friends are advising her not to waste her genius this way. But how can we help? Boudoir articles are inconvenient to write now, and "revolutionary literature" cannot

[79] Donald Jordan, *The Northern Expedition: China's National Revolution of 1926–1928*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976.
[80] Michael G. Murdock, 'Exploiting Anti-Imperialism: Popular Forces and Nation-State Building During China's Northern Expedition, 1926–1927'. *Modern China*, 35 (1), 2009, 65–95.
[81] Ibid.
[82] James Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-Hsiang*. California: Stanford University Press, 1966.

be fabricated by sitting in a Western building in the concession'.[83] After a year of drifting, Xie and Fu Hao moved from Shanghai to Beiping in late 1929. Xie enrolled at the BWNU to pursue her degree in literature. This relocation was also a starting point for her re-entry into the political realm. In fact, Xie was full of expectations for everything in Beiping as early as the Northern Expedition. She wrote in a cheerful tone to Sun Fuyuan:

> When we arrive in Beijing, we will surely make the city a red Beijing, a happy Beijing, a Beijing where the revolutionary spirit will suffuse the whole society, ha ha! Let's go! Old sir, you should also go forward with us! Come and take Beijing with us![84]

Upon arriving in Beiping, Xie undertook administrative responsibilities for several revolutionary newspapers with Fu Hao, operating both in Beiping and Tianjin.[85] In 1929, She hosted the executive committee of a literary magazine, *Nightingale/Nighthawk* (Yieh-Ying 夜鶯/夜鷹). A photo of all members of Yieh-Ying was published on Beiyang Pictorial (Beiyang Huabao 北洋畫報) in November (Figure 2.5). Xie stands in the middle and is marked by a black circle below her, indicating that she is the author of the famous *War Diary*.[86] As Lou Ningxian recalled, the Beiping Municipal Committee of the CCP decided to organise a literary group centred on Xie, and therefore set up the Yieh-Ying Literature Club at Peking University.[87]

[83] Lin, 'Preface to Bingying's *War Diary*', 37.
[84] Xie, *War Diary*, 48.
[85] See Wei Fan, *Research on The Northern League* (Beifang zuolian yanjiu 北方左聯研究). Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2013, 78.
[86] 'Members of the Yieh-Ying Literature Club, Beiping', *Beiying huabao* 北洋畫報, 6 (404), 1929, 2.
[87] Lou Ningxian, 'A Few Periodicals Published in Beiping, 1928-1939' (1928-1939 nian zai beeping chuban de jige kanwu 1928-1930 年在北平出版的幾個刊物), *LouNingxian jinian wenji* 婁凝先紀念文集. Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1994, 110-111.

Figure 2.5: A photo of all members of the Beiping Yieh-Ying Literary Club, Beiyang huabao 北洋畫報, 6(404), 1929, 2.

In 1930, the establishment of the League of Left-wing Writers in Shanghai encouraged literary activities in the north. The Northern Bureau of the CCP proposed that a similar organisation, later confirmed as the Northern League (beifang zuolian 北方左聯), should also be organised in the Jing-Jin areas. Subsequently, Pan Xun, a communist writer, invited Xie and other writers and teachers to discuss the idea.[88] Yang Xianru, one of Xie's communist colleagues, recollected that he attended a preparatory meeting at Xie's house, after which the Northern League was officially founded by a nine-person executive committee at Peking University in September, with Xie elected as one of its members.[89] Sun Xizhen, Xie's teacher at the BWNU, also affirmed that Xie was a co-founder of the Northern League, a CCP's peripheral cultural organisation under the leadership of the Shunzhi Provincial CCP Committee and the Beiping Municipal Committee.[90] Its declaration on establishment proclaimed that

[88] Lu Wanmei, 'Memory of The Unflagging Northern League and the Beiping Literary Union' (Yi zhandou de Beiping zuolian he Beiping wenzong 憶戰鬥的北平左聯和北平文總), *Beifang zuoyi yundong huibian* 北方左翼運動匯編. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1991, 342.

[89] Yang Xianru, 'Another Thing About the Norther League' (You xiangqi beifang zuolian yishi 又想起北方左聯一事), *Zuolian huiyilu* 左聯回憶錄. Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2020, 419.

[90] Sun Xizhen, 'About the Northern League' (Guanyu beifang zuolian de shiqing 關於北方左聯的事情), *Beifang zuoyi yundong huibian*. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1991, 286-287. According to the memoirs of its members, although the league was inspired by the success of the Leftist League in Shanghai and its participants

because class antagonism and hatred had increased in China since the failure of the revolution in 1927, the Northern League had to take the proletarian position to revolt against the bourgeoisie – the oppressive rulers – and strive for freedom of speech and the liberation of the working class.[91] Later in November, the Northern Bureau of the CCP issued an instruction emphasising that all student branches in Beiping should propagate Marxism-Leninism, criticise the Three People's Principles (sanmin zhuyi 三民主義), and resolutely fight against counter-revolutionaries, including 'school stooges', the KMT, 'the reorganisers' and 'the liquidation faction'.[92] Despite the influence of the CCP, the Leftist League in Shanghai operated more as a literary organisation than a political one. However, most participants in the Northern League were students and young CCP members in Beiping and Tianjin. Only a few professional writers showed willingness to engage in their work, and Xie was perhaps the most famous one.[93]

Although the Northern League was not officially established until 1930, *Nightingale/Nighthawk* was also included in its index of periodicals, which included Fu Hao's essay and poem in memory of the women's team in the Northern Expedition.[94] As an active communist, Fu was arrested by the KMT the second year he and Xie arrived in Beiping, and Xie had to make money for the whole family alone. In 'Liquidation' (qingsuan 清算) (1932), a comprehensive summary in which Xie explained her breakup with Fu Hao, her struggles in extramarital relations, and her suffering of leaving Beiping, Xie described the painful scene where she visited Fu in the prison. The 'servile followers of the bourgeoisie', Xie recounted, rudely refused her request to say a few more words with her husband:

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tended to imitate the predecessor's organisational rules and structure, there was no administrative relationship between the two Leagues in the two cities. See Li Junmin, 'The Launching and Preparatory Work of the Northern League' (Beifang zuolian de faqi yu choubei gongzuo 北方左聯的發起與籌備工作), *Zuolin jinianji* 左聯紀念集. Shanghai: Shanghai baijia chubanshe, 1990, 26.

[91] 'Theoretical Program of the Northern Department of the Chinese Leftist Writers' Union' (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng beifangbu lilun gangling 中國左翼作家聯盟北方部理論綱領), *Zhuanhuan*, 2, 1931, 3.

[92] Northern Bureau, 'Instructions to The Special Committee of the CCP on Issues About The Left League and Cultural Movement' (Zhonggong beifangju guanyu zuolian he wenhuayundong deng wenti gei baoshu tewei de zhishi 中共北方局關於左聯和文化運動等問題給保屬特委的指示 [1930]), *Beifang zuoyi yundong huibian*. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1991, 41.

[93] Yang Xianru, 'Memories about Writers of the Northern League' (Beifang zuoyi zuojia zayi 北方左翼作家雜憶), *Beifang zuoyi yundong huibian.* Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1991, 299.

[94] Ibid, 493.

> Why didn't they understand that they were imprisoning their own kind – the warriors who were creating a new world for them and all human beings? I felt sad for all of us! Why were we born as human beings without the freedom to speak?[95]

Subsequently, she placed her daughter in Sun Xizhen's care. During each visit to see the baby, she actively engaged in discussions with her colleagues on how to promote Marxist theory through initiatives involving urban workers.[96] Many members of the Northern League described Xie as a hardworking comrade who retained unwavering determination despite financial hardship. Yang Xianru recalled that Xie was intensely occupied with lectures, teaching, writing, revolutionary activities, and babysitting: 'Her baby girl was sometimes left unattended since she needed to go to class. Therefore, whenever we – her close friends – came to her house, she always shouted the greeting, "hold the baby!"'.[97]

In 1997, Fu Hao records in chronological order how he met Xie at the Central Military Academy, their correspondences when Xie was sequestered by her parents for a prearranged marriage, their conjugal life in Shanghai and Beijing, his imprisonment, and their daughter's contact with Xie as she grew up. Fu's narration and Xie's autobiography complement each other in detail, but discrepancies can be found in the accounts of the following events:[98]

	Fu Hao (1997)	Xie Bingying (1932)
Living in poverty in Beijing (1929-1930)	The couple could not stay in hospital after Xie gave birth because they could not afford the cost. They could not afford the baby's milk either.	Fu was happy when the baby was born, but soon afterwards, he returned home late because of playing cards. Fu ignored Xie and their daughter, who was crying out of hunger.
The reason Xie left Beijing after Fu's imprisonment (1931)	Fu told Xie that since they could not live together now, she had complete freedom in choosing her favourable lifestyle. Xie decided to leave Beijing for Wuchang, with the intention of supporting Fu's mother, raising their daughter, and waiting for Fu for the rest of her life.	Xie left Beijing in despair and thought of suicide several times because of the dual strikes in political ideals and marriage. On her last visit to the Fu in prison, she had a feeling that they would never see each other again.
The reason Xie went to Shanghai (1931)	After Fu's mother took the child, Xie was afraid that her mother would force her to remarry or lock her at home again. She had no choice but went to Shanghai.	After returning to Hunan, Xie reconciled with her mother and gained the courage to restart. She left her daughter with Fu's mother upon the latter's request.

Figure 2.6: Differences between Fu Hao's and Xie Bingying's accounts of their lives in Beijing.

[95] Xie Bingying, 'Liquidation', 118.
[96] Sun Xizhen, 'About the Northern League', 286-287.
[97] Yang Xianru, 'Memories about Writers of The Northern League', 301-302. According to Fan, it was not easy for writers to make a living in Beiping in the 1930s because the publishing industry there was not as well-developed as in Shanghai.
[98] Fu Hao, 'A Marriage Between Xie Bingying and Me' (Xie Bingying he wo de yiduan hunyin 謝冰瑩和我的一段婚姻). *Shi ji xing* 世紀行, 7, 1997, 30-31.

Fu's writing adopts a more 'factual' tone at the textual level, as it involves less direct discourse and dialogues. Nevertheless, ambiguity exists in his speculations regarding Xie's thoughts and the idealisation of his own actions. Rather than addressing the political struggles that resulted in Xie's forced departure from Beijing, Fu attributed it to a personal decision. Meanwhile, Fu claimed that he delayed remarrying until the 1940s because he dedicated his efforts to raising Fu Bing, his daughter with Xie, until she was thirteen years old. However, in addition to Xie's accusations that Fu showed little concern for their daughter, Fu Bing seldom mentioned her father in her diaries, referring only to her grandmother. This suggests that Fu might not have played a significant role in her upbringing.

Despite controversies, Fu attested to Xie's care for their daughter and her participation in communist activities after the Northern Expedition. Accounts of Xie's former colleagues also corroborate her affiliation with the CCP. Xie was the leader of a Communist branch after she relocated to Beiping. According to Qi Shurong, Xie's classmate at the Central Military Academy, this branch was established at BWNU around March 1928 with the instruction of the Beiping Municipal Party Committee. It had three party members: Qi, Duan Ying, and Xie.[99] Duan confirmed this by remembering her first meeting with Xie: 'I enrolled at the Women's Normal University in Beiping at the end of 1928. It was a coincidence that I shared one room with Xie Bingying, the female writer acclaimed for her *War Diary*. My organisational archives were later transferred from Shanghai to Beiping, and I was led by Hu Xikui, who assigned me and Xie to the same branch'.[100] Qi's and Duan's memoirs differed concerning the precise month Xie joined the CCP, yet the events they recounted matched. Wu Huazhi further stated that Xie was the secretary of the CCP branch of the BWNU.[101] According to a former KMT official being introduced to the CCP branch by Xie in 1930, Xie always complained about the

[99] Qi Shurong, 'Participated in Some of the Early Leadership of the Beijing Party organisation' (Canjia Beijing dangzuzhi zaoqi lingdao de yixie 參加北京黨組織早期領導的一些), *Beijing geming huiyilu* 北京革命史回憶錄第一輯. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1991, 335.

[100] Duan Ying, 'Fragments of Memories of My Relationship with The Left League' (Wo he zuolian guanxi de pianduan huiyi 我和左聯關係的片段回憶), *Zuolian jinianji* 左聯紀念集. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1990, 171.

[101] Wu Huazhi, 'Information About the Beiping Party around 1939' (1939 nian qianhou Beiping dang de yixie qingkuang 1939 年前後北平黨的一些情況), *Beiping dangshi ziliao tongxun* 北平黨史資料通訊, 7, 1983.

unreasonable dominance of the KMT, and 'after testing me many times [in case I was still leaning towards the KMT], she finally showed me a Communist publication'.[102]

Nonetheless, unlike Xie's imagination of the 'red Beijing', the CCP branches were not united but fraught with internal fissures.[103] Dissatisfied with Wang Ming's seizure of the CCP leadership on the Fourth Session of the Sixth Central Committee on January 7, 1931, Luo Zhanglong organised a Non-Standing Committee and sent two members to establish an Emergency Preparatory Office in Beiping. Xie was involved in this incident as a progressive activist. A month later, secret activities opposing Wang Ming were uncovered by defectors and characterised as anti-CCP. Five left-wing writers were killed in prison.[104] Although Xie was a new party member, the ideological issues she was embroiled in were of great concern to the CCP authorities during that time. Later, she was expelled from the CCP and was pressured to hastily leave Beiping without an official justification:

> [One day in March 1931] I left Beiping. I will never forget the rush when I left and the tragic scene where many of my friends pawned their clothes to pay the train fare for me. As for the reason I left Beiping, it is known only to myself and my closest friends.[105]

The circumstances surrounding Xie's voluntary involvement in the Special Committee remain ambiguous. In her works, Xie acknowledged receiving penalties for some of her essays and social engagements, highlighting her emotional state of depression and hopelessness during that period. However, she provides minimal elaboration on her decision-making process or inclination to work for specific factions. For Xie, the compelled departure from Beijing represented a significant setback. Her financial constraints were such that she could not afford a proper berth on the steamer from Nanjing to Hankou for her baby without the generous support of her friends, even though she was once willing to endure a meagre existence in

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[102] Yan Xiuyi, 'Early Activities of The Beiping Revolutionary Mutual Support Society' (Beiping geming hujihui de zaoqi hudong 北平革命互濟會的早期活動), *Beijing gemingshi huiyilu* 北京革命史回憶錄第二輯. Beijing: Beijing chuabanshe, 1991, 90.

[103] Xie, *War Diary*, 1933, 48.

[104] Xu Xuhong, 'Xie Bingying and the Left Alliance: From Lu Xun's two letters to Wang Zhizhi' (Xie Bingying yu zuolian: Cong Lu Xun zhi Wang Zhizhi de liangfengxin tanqi 謝冰瑩與左聯: 從魯迅致王志之的兩封信談起), *Xinwenxue shiliao* 新文學史料, 3, 2013, 93-103, 93. Also see Yang Xianru, 'Clips of Beiping Underground Party Struggle in The Early 1930s', 5.

[105] Xie Bingying, 'About *Lushan Collection*' (Guanyu lushanji de hua 關於廬山集的話), *Lushan ji* 廬山集. Shanghai: Guangming shuju 1932, 11-12.

Beijing solely to uphold her revolutionary passion.[106] It was not until the 1980s that Xie's former communist companions began to commemorate her. In a 1983 reminiscence, Yang Xianru recalled the CCP's criticism of Xie for her 'impure thoughts'. While Yang harboured reluctance in hastily labelling Xie, a close comrade, as an adversary, he had to delineate a clear demarcation from Xie in order to demonstrate his own 'party spirit' to the authorities.[107]

The Leftist League also distanced itself from Xie, focusing instead on her romantic relationships. In 1932, a member of the Northern League approached Lu Xun to ask if he could contact Xie for a manuscript. Lu Xun replied with a flat refusal, saying that Xie had left the Leftist League for a long time and her '*zuofeng* (作風)' was problematic.[108] The term *Zuofeng* was frequently associated with the ideological stance of intellectuals. In 1925, an article published in *Beijing News Supplement* (Jingbao fukan 京報副刊), another newspaper Sun Fuyuan edited besides *CDS*, criticised the radical *zuofeng* of *Tattler*, proposing that a more effective approach might be to persuade conservatives to join the revolution rather than confront them with vehement opposition.[109] Nonetheless, as leftists took dominance with escalating national affairs in the late 1920s and 1930s, an increasing number of writers were urged to shift their *zuofeng*. In 1934, a reviewer criticised Shen Congwen for 'wearing the gaming glasses to observe the pain of soldiers and making it comical', because Shen's works were not 'an honest reflection of the life of the lower class'.[110] By contrast, Zhang Henshui's visit to northwestern China and his new works about peasants' lives were complimented as a sign of his willingness to give up his previous *zuofeng* of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies school, which 'was designed solely for the entertainment of the leisure class and turned away from the public, just as what Tolstoy called fake art'. Literature attained deeper significance

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[106] Xie Bingying, 'Return to the South' (Nangui 南歸). *Ten Years of a Female Soldier* (Nübing shinian 女兵十年). Beijing: Beixin shuju, 1947, 89.

[107] Yang Xianru, 'The Underground's Struggle in Peiping in the 1930s', 5.

[108] Zhizhi Wang, *Impressions on Lu Xun* (Lu Xun yinxiang ji 魯迅印象記). Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980, 36, 38.

[109] *Tattler*, or *Yusi* 语丝, was a Chinese weekly journal on new literature founded in 1924. It addressed serious and weighty matters with a light touch, employing simple, clear language that disregarded convention, often delivered with a sharp, biting style. Shang Xifan, 'The Style of *Yusi*' (Yusi de zuofeng 語絲的作風), *Jingbao fukan* 京報副刊, 37, 1925, 70–71.

[110] Yang Jiuzhen, 'Shen Congwen's Style' (Shen Congwen de zuofeng 沈從文的作風), *hanxue zhoukan* 汗血週刊, 17 (17), 1934, 264-266.

when it delved into people's adversity, anguish, and injustice: 'You need to change your *zuofeng*. You definitely turn – but do you turn back? Turn right? Or turn left!'[111]

Notably, the public debate regarding Xie's *zuofeng* also revolved around her complex romantic involvements. As the late 1920s witnessed a transition from private love to love for the masses, heterosexual relationships risked being defined as sentiments of the petite bourgeoisie.[112] In 'Liquidation', Xie implicitly referred to the CCP's attribution of her predicament to love issues:

> I wrote them [the CCP authorities] a letter of more than 6,000 words. I said that with no energy to live any more, how can I still strive to work hard? They, of course, criticised me for being too emotional, saying that giving up responsibility for love was incorrect. Yet they should not have blamed me. I was neither passive nor lazy, but I hurt too much. No one could ever find a way in such a situation, and I was losing all my vitality and strength day by day.[113]

A discussion on Xie's romantic relationship began after 'Liquidation' was published, the main platform was the feminist magazine *Women's Voice* (Nüsheng 女聲). A review admitted that Xie's rebellion against the patriarchal family 'threw a bomb into the feudal society'. However, the author refused to acknowledge Xie as a qualified 'revolutionary woman' because her love 'tricks' with male lovers impeded her revolutionary cause: 'Revolutionary women must focus on striving for freedom and equality for the majority of women; the pursuit of individualism is merely a Romantic behaviour!'[114]

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[111] Chen Mengyi, 'Change the Style' (zhuanbian zuofeng 轉變作風), *Shiri tan*, 30, 1934, 7–8. In 1942, Mao Zedong used the combined phrase "rectifying style" to indicate ideological problems within the CCP and made it a key term in the political rhetoric of the communist movement. As Kirk A. Denton points out, the rectification of style by Mao is 'the principal tool' for the Party to forge 'a collective community with shared values, something necessary for mass mobilization and social transformation, but also for the foundation of a totalitarian state'. See Kirk A. Denton, 'Rectification: Party Discipline, Intellectual Remolding, and the Formation of a Political Community', *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, edited by Ban Wang. Leiden&Boston: Brill, 2011, 51–63, 51–52. As early as 1929, Mao had written on the need to 'Correct Mistaken Ideas in the Party'. See Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, vol 1*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975, 35–36.

[112] Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother and Narrative Politics in Modern China*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, 1-18; Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 99.

[113] Xie, 'Liquidation', 152.

[114] Lian Wan, 'Ms Xie Bingying After "Liquidation"' (Qingsuan yihou de Xie Bingying nüshi 《清算》以後的謝冰瑩女士), *Nüsheng* 女聲, 11(2), 1934, 24.

Xie's friend, the poet Liu Yazi, came to her defence: 'Indeed, Bingying often changed her romantic partners during her life', but it was a rumour that she prided herself on playing with men. Liu argued that this era no longer adhered to the notion of 'a woman being faithful to one husband unto death'; instead, 'love is fluid and can be changed at any time when necessary'.[115] Another reviewer adored Liu and Xie's friendship but thought it would have been better for him to reveal more of Xie's personal story, so that readers could sympathise with the reasons for her frequent changes of romantic partners. Similarly, the editor of *Women's Voice* argued that while they did not mean to attack any woman compatriots, 'we need to examine whether Ms Xie Bingying's acts of love are worthy of forgiveness'.[116] These debates showed a retreat from the individualism prominent during the May Fourth period to the conservatism of love for the sake of revolution. Nonetheless, *Women's Voice* already maintained a relatively objective stance towards Xie. Commentators in other newspapers took a more critical attitude, alleging that Xie held the doctrine of 'the more lovers, the better', satirising her for abandoning her husband in prison for another man, and gossiping about whether she cohabited with a high-ranking army official.[117] It was during this period that Xie began to write the first version of her autobiography, in which the content concerning the peasant revolution and communist ideals decreased. The de-emphasis of specific events not only accentuates the image of an exemplary 'woman warrior' who enjoyed participating in the war but also avoids discussing the subsequent political struggles after the Northern Expedition, by contrast to the postscript to her *War Diary*.

The 1946 autobiography was published just one year after the War of Resistance. In this biggest war of twentieth-century China, Xie organised the HWBSC and went to the forefront again, where she witnessed far more bloody atrocities than in the Northern Expedition. During this time, Xie had good reasons to transform her writings about the Northern Expedition to show a stronger, more symbolic, and more effective call for the national revolution. The notion of uniting all forces in the fight against Japan and endorsing the Nationalist Government began

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[115] 'Liu Yazi Complained About The Injustice on Xie Bingying' (Liu Yazi wei Xie Bingying shenyuan 柳亞子爲謝冰瑩伸冤), *Nüsheng,* 2 (3), 1934, 19–20, 19.

[116] Yang Yu, 'About Xie Bingying's Romantic Relationships' (guanyu Xie Bingying de lianai 關於謝冰瑩的戀愛) *Nüsheng,* 2 (15), 1934, 19-20, 19.

[117] See for example, Niu, 'Xie Bingying Has Many Lovers' (Xie Bingying zhi airen duo 謝冰瑩之愛人多), Laoshihua, 9, 1933, 12; 'Xie Bingying Holds "The More Love The Better" Ideology' (Xie Bingying bao duoduoai zhuyi 謝冰瑩抱多多愛主義), *Chongshi jikan*, 19, 1935, 121. 'Xie Bingying's Husbands' (Xie Bingying de zhengfu guanxi 謝冰瑩的丈夫關繫), *Yule (Shanghai)*, 2 (37), 1936, 734.

to supplant narratives centred on class struggle, as will be elaborated in Chapter Four.[118] The shifting of focus is not necessarily disrespectful to the peasant figures, but she no longer used them as a means of evaluating her own leadership or sense of mission, implying the honesty and lucidity of a subject who admitted that her views have changed.

In addition to her personal antipathy to the CCP, the climate in KMT-controlled Taiwan had an impact on her third revision of her autobiography in the 1950s. Xie never included her articles written for the Northern League's publications in her later collections, and she did not return to mainland China after relocating to Taiwan in 1948. In a 1984 correspondence to Wei Zhongtian, Xie refuted the assertions made by her former colleagues and Wei regarding her involvement in the CCP, the Northern League, and anti-Chiang activities, making specific references to her safety and connections in Taiwan: 'It is your freedom to write essays [about me]. But you should not erase the facts, and you should not create rumours to hinder my safety. Although your article was published in Hong Kong, my friends in Taiwan also saw it, and they advised me to ignore it'.[119] She suggested to Wei that friends should refrain from discussing politics among themselves and emphasised that Mainland editors should respect the author's amendment of her works, as this was an issue concerning respect for changes in ideology: 'Let's be fair, each of us has our own ideological stance, and it would be unethical to arbitrarily censor someone's article! To put things into perspective, if I were to change that editor's article to a completely different thought from his, would that be acceptable?'[120]

The oppressive political censorship in Taiwan and the KMT's policy of 'retaking the Mainland' during the martial law period led to Xie's revisions of her works, especially the deletion of left-wing statements. As an important activist and writer, Xie was invited by Chang Tao-fan, the leader of the Chinese Literature and Arts Association (Taiwan) (CLAA), to promote anti-communist cultural events. In 1954, CLAA launched the 'Cultural Cleansing Campaign' (wenhua qingjie yundong 文化清潔運動) to investigate 'Red Poison', 'Yellow Evils' and 'Black Crimes' in books and magazines and cease issuing publications with suspicious political positions. Since ideological and moral norms differ from one

[118] Xie Bingying, 'Mobilising the People and Fighting the War to the End (dongyuan minzhong yu kangzhan daodi 動員民眾與抗戰到底)'. *Anti-Japanese War Diary* (抗戰日記). Dongda tushu youxian gongsi, 1981 [1938], 345–438.
[119] Wei, *Forever Friendship*, 38.
[120] Ibid, 26, 48.

sociohistorical environment to another across time, a faithful representation of past behaviour can be unwelcome and unacceptable in the present. In this regard, many of Xie's articles in Taiwan conclude with a specific reference to the urgent task of counterattacking the Mainland under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, who aimed to liberate the Chinese populace from the CCP's hegemonic governance.

It should be noted that Xie's revision of her autobiographical writings happened as early as the 1930s, two decades before her relocation to Taiwan. She was able to write with her own aesthetic merits without obligating her work to conform to social responsibility by idealising the proletariat and the peasantry, which, as seen from the works by communist female writer Ding Ling, was almost impossible to achieve in Maoist China.[121] Indeed, discrepancies between two or more autobiographies narrating the same personal experiences often arise from a deliberate transformation of facts aimed at making the narrator more palatable to the prevailing audience.[122] Through the avoidance of certain terminology, Xie steered her current readers towards interpretations containing fewer communist overtones. Yet, this manoeuvre is a betrayal of her past self. Revising her autobiography was also an autonomous act of the writing subject. As Xie demonstrates in her 1980s letter, she was resistant to Mainland editors 'amending' her writings, the implication being that she refused to permit external revision of her memories, in particular by the socialist patriotic discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the complexity and significance of unreliable narratives in Xie's autobiographical writings. It thereby challenges interpretations of some of her works as propaganda or constant monolith. As a member of the only women's team who took part in the Northern Expedition, Xie has left the richest first-hand account of this war that united the KMT and the CCP. This chapter analyses the narrative style of individual texts, their differences, and the extratextual 'reality' outside of Xie's texts, revealing how she weaved this experience into her memories across different stages of her life journey. In contrast to the narrator of *War Diary*, who details the woman warrior's medical and propagandistic work as well as her personal feelings about the encounters during the march, the autobiography's narrator dramatises the experience as a generic adventure story to fit the changing political situation after the

[121] Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
[122] Shen and Xu, 'Intratextuality, Extratextuality, Intertextuality', 66.

Expedition. The second edition of her autobiography was published on the eve of the end of the War of Resistance, and the third during the Cold War, with self-reflection decreasing in each edition. By doing so, Xie released herself from the heavy memories of her communist journey. As Laurie Vickroy points out, sociocultural impacts affect survivors' mental mechanisms when they deal with traumatic events.[123] Therefore, when Xie recounted her past within different social groups, she experienced a procedure of re-situating and redefining her personal wound. At the same time, with fewer ideological debates, her writing became a lighthearted read that inspired patriotism and was more friendly to readers of all times and places. As the autobiography continued to be reprinted in mainland China, Taiwan, and the West, the public image of the female soldier became even more crystallised.

One's understanding of the authenticity of an autobiography influences their assessment of the reliability of the writer. For traditional Chinese autobiographers, credibility rests on an impersonal stance that keeps subjectivity at a distance.[124] But for Xie, it rests in a rather modern personal voice derived from an individual's present thinking, free from the obligation of stringent accuracy in remembering. Although her alterations and even embellishments of memories make her narrative less reliable than she claims, her revisiting of experiences is still valuable as a mode of recording history from an individual perspective. Xie incorporated her own life experience and change into the revision of her memories, constructing what meant a renewing 'reality' for herself. Since the wartime generation is disappearing, it is important to recover their nuanced emotional struggles beyond grand narratives.

By constructing and reconstructing memories, Xie redefines her writing practice as a way of being that is ongoing, fluid, and incomplete. Although the repeated revisions and avoidance of leftist ideology might bear unfavourably on young readers in terms of understanding the historical facts of the Northern Expedition, the purpose of analysing unreliable narratives is not to condemn the writer's misreporting or to weigh the priorities of morality and history. Rather, it suggests that autobiographical writing is more closely and intricately connected to an individual's past, present, and future against the backdrop of grand social changes, which places more responsibility on readers' interpretations.

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[123] Laurie Vickroy, 'Voices of Survivors in Contemporary Fiction'. *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 130–51.
[124] Jing Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 12.

Chapter Three: Self and Other: National Shame in Japan

Introduction

Rather than emerging from internal historical evolution, China's national consciousness was primarily imposed by encounters with foreign forces beginning with the Opium War (1839 – 1842). Chinese intellectuals became increasingly concerned about national strengthening and the rise of nationalism following consecutive international defeats.[1] Recognising the existence of foreign others was an important context in the development of the modern construct of Chinese national identity. During the late Qing and early Republican periods, Chinese students receiving Western education brought back new knowledge for national survival and participated in the anti-traditional and anti-imperialist revolutionary agenda. A tension, even a goal conflict, between the ideal of becoming independent global citizens and the urgency of nation-building appeared to be a defining feature of the era.[2]

National shame was a manifestation of this tension. First, the experience of shame at the turn of the century was not only related to China's traumatic encounters but also presupposed an enhanced self-concept incubating in the self-other relationship that differed from the Confucian concept of shame, which focused on a moral evaluation of the self. In the modern sense, shame is a self-contained, inward-directed, but other-mediated form of self-experience. The development of self-identity requires difference, with which the self can 'convert difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty'.[3] Therefore, as a means of communication, shame interferes with but also facilitates the development and transformation of subjectivity.[4] Individuals experience shame in their interactions with and emotional reactions to the differentiated other, a process involving internalising the other's perspective

[1] For the beginning of China's national identity, see Samuel S. Kim and Lowell Dittmer, *China's Quest for National Identity*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, 245-257. William A. Callahan questioned the linear view of history, which takes the Opium War as the starting point for China's national shame, suggesting that civil wars such as the Taiping Rebellion had caused just as much devastation, although it might do not fit in with the moral narrative of national humiliation: foreign imperialism encouraged by domestic corruption. See William A. Callahan, *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 199–218.

[2] Xiaoqun Xu, *Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Individualism in Modern China, The Chenbao Fukan and the New Culture Era, 1918–1928*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014. Shuang Shen, *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

[3] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 64.

[4] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel', *GLQ*, 1, 1993, 1–16, 4.

on themselves to evolve a new social self.[5] As George Mead demonstrates, by adopting the attitude of the other towards themselves, people see themselves as an 'objective whole' with their own 'experiential purview' and 'consciously integrate and unify the various aspects' of their selves 'to form a single consistent, coherent and organised personality'.[6]

Second, unlike the 'reason' and 'emotion' dichotomies in Western studies of the history of emotion, emotion in modern China often pointed to collective performance and political oppression.[7] Because the ruling class in the Republic of China (ROC) tended to arouse popular patriotism with memories and imagery of a humiliated past, personal memories about national shame were integrated to form a 'collective memory' about the nation, to borrow Jan Assmann's words, within which a unified cultural identity can be built.[8] This phrase had gained popularity since the public outcry against the Twenty-One Demands in 1915. The ROC observed National Humiliation Day as a national holiday from 1927 until 1940, implying that citizens should strive to secure their nation from the status of national insecurity.[9] The events to which the term 'national shame' refers at various historical junctions can be different, and the repetition of tangible and intangible rituals of remembrance has turned it into a generalised emotional mobilisation of tears, anger, and revenge psychology, penetrating people's daily lives to form an updated everyday memory about the nation. National shame is also a discourse that transcends the KMT and the CCP's ideological divide to describe modern Chinese subjectivity.[10]

There has been a rich discussion on how national shame can be harnessed for China's revolutionary designs and political mobilisation.[11] When it comes to the individual level,

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[5] Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
[6] George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, 309.
[7] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
[8] Callahan, 'National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism', 199–218. Zheng Wang. 'National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China'. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52 (4), 2008, 783–806. This distinction between 'everyday memory' and 'collective memory' is proposed by Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka in 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity' (1995) to discuss how post-war Europe built their cultural identity.
[9] Callahan, 'National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism', 203.
[10] Ibid, 206.
[11] See, for example, Kailing Xie, 'The Affective Life of the Nanjing Massacre Reactivating Historical Trauma in Governing Contemporary China', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 11 (3), 2021, 1000–1015; Elizabeth Perry, 'Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in The Chinese Revolution', *Mobilization: An International Journal* 7 (2), 2002, 111–128. For the emotional mechanism of the Yan'an Rectification, see Kirk Denton, 'Rectification:

however, most emphases have been placed on male intellectuals' articulation of shame in the early twentieth century, in particular about China being part of the 'inferior' party in the competition with the West and Japan.[12] What were the differences between Chinese women writers' perceptions of shame and those of men? Did the national shame that overwhelmed male students in Japan in the 1920s exert the same effects on women? If they were not the same, what were the differences and why? Referring to Xie Bingying's writing in Japan, this chapter makes a fresh contribution in three aspects. First, it restores shame to a personal articulation rather than reproducing it in the dimension of how political and cultural systems have repressed or sublimated public discourse. Second, rather than well-known male political figures, it explores the emotional struggles of a female Chinese student and her lived experience of shame in Japan. Third, by focusing on the autobiographical writing, I shift away from the existing scholarship of this woman warrior, which largely considers her work as a rebellion against tradition and a eulogy of patriotism, and move to an examination of the mechanism of national shame in the formation of a self-conscious modern woman.[13] Specifically, Xie's imprisonment in a Japanese police station reveals how she negotiated with herself and those around her when facing more tangible forms of shame caused by the dual oppression of gender and national identities – how did national shame serve both as an emotional concept and as a woman's personal experience, and how did the two dimensions interact to reshape a woman's understanding of others?

This chapter starts with Xie's two trips to Japan for higher education during a time when Sino-Japanese relations were tense, as well as why she returned to China. Drawing from William M. Reddy's theoretical framework of emotion, this chapter argues that although national shame was a political discourse that justified the government's manipulation of collective action, it could also serve as an emotional refuge that released Chinese students in Japan from the overwhelming emotional regime of nationalism. For late Qing students, reflecting on shame gave was temporary liberation from outside pressure. During the ROC era,

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Party Discipline, Intellectual Remolding, and the Formation of a Political Community', in *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011, 51–63. For an elaboration on the communists' political mobilisation under Mao Zedong, see Yu Liu, 'Maoist Discourse and the Mobilization of Emotions in Revolutionary China', *Modern China*, 36 (3), 2010, 329–362.

[12] For Yu Dafu, see Kirk A. Denton, 'The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's "Sinking"', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 14, 1992, 107-123. For Chen Duxiu, see Limin Chi, *Modern Selfhood in Translation: A Study of Progressive Translation Practices in China (1890s–1920s)*, Singapore: Springer, 2019, 26–28.

[13] For the exploration of patriotism and war in Xie Bingying's writings, see Li Guo, 'Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-Century China'.

it remained an emotional refuge that reconciled Chinese students' loss of self-dignity in a foreign country, but the inferiority mentality it instilled eclipsed the existence of the individual with an omniscient Other, causing destructive emotional suffering.

This chapter then focuses on Xie's experience of shame in a Japanese prison. It contrasts Xie's writing with Yu Dafu's confessional novel, providing a nuanced analysis of the gendered variants of shame.[14] It argues that Xie experienced shame not only due to her national identity as a Chinese individual, but more significantly as a result of her gender. The former was premised on the Japanese invasion of China and the inequitable treatment experienced by Chinese students in Japan. It was widely depicted by male writers in the 1920s. The latter came directly from the Japanese men's gaze at Chinese women, but, in fact, it was rooted in the manipulation of the female body by China's nationalist discourse. This chapter suggests that the humiliation suffered by women came from both foreign powers and the cost of the modern transition. Finally, the women's intimate community formed by Xie and female Japanese prisoners alleviated the emotional suffering caused by national shame. While the prison is a symbol of imperialist violence and oppression, the cell in which Xie was confined served as a new emotional refuge featuring mutual empathy, providing her with a cosmopolitan perspective to appreciate the kindness of ordinary Japanese people.

During Xie's arrest and imprisonment, the Japanese police confiscated her diaries and photographs that she had gathered over an eight-year period.[15] This chapter is therefore mainly based on a collection of her surviving essays, *When I Was in Japan* (*wo zai riben* 我在日本) (1984), some of which were first compiled and published in *In Japanese Prison* (*zai riben yüzhong* 在日本獄中) (1943), alongside other essays concerning her experiences in Japan.[16]

[14] I–novel (Shishosetsu, 私小説), a literary genre with great individuality in Japanese literature where the events in the story correspond to the author's life.

[15] Xie Bingying, *Hunan's Wind* (Hunan de feng 湖南的風). Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1937, 191.

[16] *When I Was in Japan* is divided into two volumes, the first of which describes Xie's two visits to Japan and her interactions with Japanese and Chinese friends, including the female journalists Takenaka Shigeko (1875–1968), who assisted Xie in leaving Japan, and Kamichika Ichiko (1888–1981), and the founders of the 'Chinese Literature Study Group', Takeda Taijun (1912–1976) and Takeuchi Yoshimi (1908–1977), and her professor Sanetou Keishuu (1896–1985); the second containing the entire book *In A Japanese Prison*, which was originally published in 1943 and republished in 1948 and 1953.

Two Journeys to Japan: Shame as A Collective Justification

The increasing number of female Chinese students in Japan contextualised Xie's journeys. In comparison to Europe and the United States, studying in Japan was a cost-effective option for Chinese students with average family circumstances. The first female students accompanied their husbands or brothers to Japan in 1901. There were less than two dozen female students in 1902. Despite the small number, many of them played important roles in the revolutionary movement against the Qing and in reshaping the cultural meaning of gender at a time when national survival became an obsession for Chinese intellectuals.[17] Female students multiplied to almost 100 within five years and remained stable until the early 1930s, when the overall number of Chinese students rose.[18] Around 600 female students had registered by June 1937, accounting for one-tenth of all Chinese students.[19] Unlike the late Qing and early Republican periods, most female students in the 1930s had received higher education before they went abroad. They usually entered public universities, but Waseda University, a private research university Xie matriculated, was also a popular choice. Some young women registered but did not attend lectures. They established political groups outside educational institutions, founded revolutionary magazines, and acquired knowledge of Marxism in leftist organisations.[20]

Following her expulsion from the CCP in 1931, Xie went to Japan with her royalties for two manuscripts, *Letters to Youth* (qingnian shuxin 青年書信) (1930) and *Young Wang Guocai* (qingnian Wang Guocai 青年王國材) (1933). Unlike her female predecessors who came to Japan for revolutionary purposes, she saw the journey as the start of a new chapter in her life – one that allowed her to distance herself from past political struggles and dedicate herself to translating literary masterpieces. On the cruise to Tokyo, Xie anticipated that now she could fulfil her ambition of completing her college education, which had been interrupted by the Northern Expedition and family issues:

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[17] For female Chinese students in Japan and their revolutionary activities during the late Qing, see Judge, 'Talent, Virtue, and the Nation', 765–803. Joan Judge. 'Beyond Nationalism: Gender and the Chinese Student Experience in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century'. *Women and Culture in Modern China, 1600–1950* (Jindai zhongguo de funü yu wenhua 近代中國的婦女與文化), edited by Jiu-jung Lo and Miaw-fen Lü. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2003, 359–393.

[18] Keishuu Sanetou, *History of Chinese People Studying in Japan* (Zhongguo Ren Liuxue Riben Shi 中國人留學日本史). Beijing: Life, Reading, New Knowledge Bookstore, 1983, 55.

[19] Yichuan Zhou, *History of Modern Chinese Women Studying in Japan* (Jindai Zhongguo Nüxing Riben Liuxue Shi 近代中國女性日本留學史). Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2007, 240.

[20] Many of them went to Japan because they were wanted by the KMT for attending communist activities, see Sanetou, 1983.

> Since childhood, I have loved the joys of travel: the sights, sounds, and smells of the mountains and the sea. When the Empress carried me from Huangpu harbour to Huadong, I felt as joyful as a little bird that had escaped from its cage. I watched the waves of the boundless jade-green sea under snow-white clouds. My heart was a seagull, one moment soaring, the next plunging. Although I felt sad leaving my country and my dear friends, I set aside my worries and felt infinite joy when I thought of the bright future ahead.[21]

However, Japanese imperialism had violently devastated China since the 1930s. Following the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931, Chinese students in Japan began striking, particularly those from the four northeastern provinces, i.e., Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Jilin, and Rehe. From October onwards, an increasing number of students returned to China, as did all the officials of the ROC Student Association. After the protest subsided, students returned to Japan to pursue their studies. The number of Chinese students surged from 1933 to 1935, reaching almost 8,000 in total. Although 1936 saw a gradual decline, around 6,000 students were still registered in the first half of 1937. During this period, the number of Chinese teachers giving language sessions in Japan had surpassed that of Japanese teachers.[22]

In July 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident marked the beginning of a full-scale war between China and Japan, after which students funded by the ROC government left Japan en masse. Although the Japanese Ministry of Education issued an open letter saying that school staff should not further 'stimulate' Chinese students, only ten percent of students remained in Japan by November compared to June.[23] By contrast, Manchukuo became the leading force in sending students to Japan, followed by Wang Jingwei's regime, the puppet state of Japan in eastern China. The two times Xie studied in Japan were right after the Mukden incident and before the War of Resistance. Like many of her contemporaries, she returned to China before completing her programme and rejoined the army to help her country fight against the Japanese invaders.[24]

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[21] Xie Bingying, *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography*. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1956, 261–262.
[22] Sanetou, 104–107. For the reasons for the sizable quantity of Chinese students abroad at the time, see Zhou, 2007, 225, 235–238.
[23] Yichang Zhou, 'The Number of Students Studying in Japan in Modern China (Jindai Zhongguo Liuri Xuesheng Renshu Kaobian 近代中國留日學生人數考辯)'. *Literature, History and Philosophy* (Wen Shi Zhe 文史哲), 2, 2008, 104–22, 109.
[24] Jing M. Wang, *When I Was Born*, 167.

Yet for Xie, the first return to China was not a voluntary choice, but a compulsory one. Soon after she arrived in Tokyo in September 1931, the Japanese army occupied northeastern China, and the casualties were soaring. The Chinese Students' Association decided to secretly hold a memorial for the martyrs of four provinces, with Xie as a representative. When the conference president talked about taking revenge on the Japanese warlords and defeating Japanese imperialism in the auditorium, the police rushed in and attacked students, after which the Japanese government deported all members of the association. Xie did not expect to leave in such a shameful way: 'When I thought of the word "deportation", I felt unbearable humiliation. We were not bad people. We did not break their laws. We were decent international students. How could they deport us?'[25] But she borrowed a Chinese proverb, 'a man can be killed but not humiliated' (shi kesha bu keru 士可殺不可辱), to demonstrate why their education had to make concessions for national survival. In early 1932, following the January 28 incident when Japanese marines landed in Shanghai and bombed the city, Xie joined the ambulance corps organised by Paulun Hospital to provide first aid at the front. In the autumn, she worked at Xiamen High School as a Chinese teacher and founded a literary magazine, *Lighthouse* (dengta 燈塔), which ceased publication after two issues.[26] The next year, she returned to Changsha to focus on writing in her familiar environment.

As the effects of the Mukden Incident waned, Xie arrived in Japan in 1934 and studied in the School of Western Literature at Waseda University. As can be seen from the diary of a late Qing student, Qing students found no hindrance to moving during their stay in Japan, whether it was because of their dissatisfaction with housemates, the location of apartments, or the neighbourhood.[27] Yet the situation worsened for Xie, a self-funded student who could not afford accommodations managed by official academic organisations. Some Japanese landlords refused to rent houses to her after knowing that she was a Chinese student: 'I cannot tell how many times I have been insulted by this kind of humiliation since I arrived in Tokyo'.[28] Xie added that it would be even more difficult to rent a room as a single woman.[29] The refusal was

[25] Xie Bingying, *When I Was in Japan* (Wo Zai Riben 我在日本). Taipei: Dongda tushu youxian gongsi, 1984, 15.
[26] Bettina Knapp, 'Xie Bingying (born Ming Gang) (1906-2000)'. *Great Women Travel Writers: From 1750 to the Present*, edited by Alba Amoia and Bettina Knapp. New York and London: Continuum, 2006, 232–247, 242.
[27] Huang Zunsan, *Diaries of Huang Zunsan* (Huang Zunsan Riji 黃尊三日記). Jiangsu: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2019.
[28] Xie Bingying, 'The Flat Manager (Gongyu de Guanli Ren 公寓的管理人)'. *West Wind*, 7–12, 1937, 674–680, 675.
[29] Xie, *Hunan's Wind*, 159.

so common that Chinese students found it meaningless to argue with the Japanese landlords: 'Things would get very annoying if you questioned them about why they didn't rent to Chinese people. They would ramble on about how we were noisy and unhygienic'.[30]

After Xie had ultimately settled into her apartment, however, Japanese detectives broke into her room in April 1935 and arrested her for refusing to attend the reception held for Pu Yi, the puppet emperor of the Japanese-controlled state of Manchukuo. As Xie recalled, more than a hundred students from Korea and Japan and more than eighty Chinese students were arrested for the same reason during those days, including the well-known writer Ba Jin. Chinese students appealed to the Chinese embassy to voice their grievances regarding their arrests and the harsh interrogations they endured. Yet the minister advised them to concentrate on their studies and not ask about political affairs, implying the official's incompetence in defending the rights of their citizens.[31] Xie's friends released her on bail after three weeks in custody. She then returned to Shanghai from Tokyo in the summer of 1935.

It should be noted that both incidents that led to her sense of shame – organising a commemorative event and refusing to attend Pu Yi's reception – were collective occurrences targeting Chinese students rather than exposing herself alone to the gaze of the Other. When the students acknowledged the perceived failure of national ideals as a collective, national shame served to unite those who shared a common national identity, expressing love for their nation and rage towards the vicious outside. The expression and acceptance of emotions within a community can provide members with validation, and thus alleviate individuals' psychological pressure when facing humiliation.[32] Personal identity, therefore, depends on continued relations with the community, which implies collective action and avoids putting certain qualities of the self into question.

A memorial service is a signature event of collective national remembrance, usually accompanied by pre-arranged decorations and a formulaic programme of activities. The memorial service Xie attended in Japan was held in the name of the Chinese Students' Association rather than in the name of individuals. On the morning of that day, a white banner

[30] Ibid, 159.
[31] Xie Bingying, 'The Puppet Regime Coming for "Tribute" to Japan and the Chinese Students in Japan' (Kuilei chaori yu liuri xuesheng 傀儡"朝"日与留日學生). *West Wind*, 13, 1937, 38–42.
[32] June P. Tangney, Jeff Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, 'Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior'. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 2007, 345–372.

reading ‘Memorial Assembly for the Martyrs of Northeast China’ was hung in the centre of the auditorium. Wreaths and elegiacs were placed on both sides of the aisles. According to Xie, these decorations were secretly prepared by male students, and female students were not informed in advance about the preparations, implying their lack of knowledge regarding the details and agenda of the memorial service. Nonetheless, following a momentary sense of astonishment, these women swiftly assimilated into the commemorative event, thus partaking in this shared instance of national shame, a solemn occasion predominantly orchestrated by men. This gendered division of labour, with men taking up the roles of organisers and women participating, resonated with the pattern observed in the enactment of the Nora narrative within early twentieth-century China. Once the students assembled, the emcee signalled the commencement, and the chairman initiated his speech, urging for ‘revenge for the martyrs and the downfall of Japanese imperialism’.[33]

This formality of observance had already been common at the national level. In the 1920s, national shame moved from articulations at the social level, such as debates on national affairs in newspapers, student marches, and protest speeches, to officially organised commemorations and rituals, with which it developed into a nascent emotional regime attached to nationalism. Observances concerned the manipulation of what and how the public should remember. For instance, one set of official KMT guidelines stipulated how schools, factories, government departments, and the military were to commemorate national days step by step:

> Anniversary meetings were to begin at 7 a.m. and last for one hour. After the singing of the party anthem, everyone was to bow three times before the party flag, the national flag, and the portrait of Sun Yat-sen. This was to be followed by a reading of Sun’s deathbed testament, five minutes of silence, and finally a lecture on the subject of the anniversary.[34]

The ROC government aimed to instill citizens’ loyalty to the nation through observances and made the instructions a routine part of everyday use. Meanwhile, it prohibited personal activities related to national shame, such as street demonstrations, thereby ensuring that the stimulation of patriotic sentiments safely fell under official supervision. The memorial service held by Chinese students in Japan was an imitation of the official ceremony. It encompassed a

[33] Xie Bingying, *When I Was in Japan*, 13.
[34] Paul Cohen, ‘Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in 20th China’. *Twentieth-Century China*, 27(2), 2002, 1–39, 11.

group of inexperienced, young patriots in a collective action that celebrated their national identity and solidarity.

In terms of the official ceremony, however, the process of routinisation and repetition overload can dilute the original hurt of national shame, arousing participants more with feelings of being insulted than reflections and more with xenophobia than empathy.[35] This is not to imply that the emotions expressed under public performances were inauthentic, as nationalist ideas did become part of a citizen's sense of self via mechanisms in the formal education system, such as school history textbooks.[36] However, individuals' lived experiences that do not align with the official version of national history may be invisible. For Xie, her nuanced perceptions of shame were underexamined within the gaps of collective actions. When one's self had to confront the other as a self-contained entity, it was more likely to feel threatened and struggle to establish its own existence. In this regard, the next section will explore how shame, initially a foundation supporting nationalism as a unifying emotional regime, could become an emotional refuge that, in some ways, eased the nationalist pressure on individuals. It also explores the variations this refuge took for Chinese students in Japan and how it both manipulated and eventually exhausted their vitality.

Transform Shame as An Emotional Refuge, 1900s – 1920s

Before addressing how Xie conveyed her sense of shame to the audience, I will first examine how shame operates under the behemoth nationalism, serving as a means of psychological sustenance for the individual in modern China. In *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (2001), William M. Reddy establishes a productive framework for emotion. Emotional regime and emotional refuge are two of the central concepts. An emotional regime is a 'set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them', serving as 'a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime'.[37] As a type of 'speech act' within the emotional regime, emotive 'has an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion'. It has physical cues, such as facial expressions, and is expressed through 'emotional effort',

[35] Cohen, 'Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in 20th China', 12.
[36] Cohen, 'Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in 20th China', 2. Perry, 'Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution'.
[37] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 29.

'emotional suffering', and 'emotional liberty'. Emotional effort aims at fulfilling a goal within the emotional regime, while individuals experience emotional suffering when a goal conflict happens. Emotional liberty symbolises the freedom 'to undergo or derail conversion experiences and life-course changes involving numerous contrasting incommensurable factors', leading to a challenge to the reign of high-level goals that govern emotional management. When the emotional suffering exceeds the capacity of attention, the emotional refuge is a relationship, activity, or organisation that 'provides safe release from prevailing emotional norms'.[38] Emotional regime and emotional refuge are not opposed to each other, as the latter may reinforce or threaten the former.

Expanding upon Reddy's framework, this chapter suggests that foreign invasions and the historical mission of transitioning to a modern state elevated nationalism to an overarching emotional regime in twentieth-century China, around which the authorities incorporated commemorative rituals, activities, slogans, and collective emotions into everyday languages and mindsets. Shame became the main emotion of the era. Paul Cohen insightfully examines Chinese intellectuals' repeated evocation of national shame during the twentieth century and their varied emphases at respective historical junctions.[39] As a Manchu regime, the Qing court had little interest in fostering nationalist sentiment and citizenship among the Chinese, so the issue of national shame was raised almost exclusively by a small group of intellectuals who blamed the imperviousness of their fellow countrymen. In the early Republic era, criticism of Chinese characteristics prevailed, suggesting a weakness that Chinese people should overcome: although defeat and humiliation provoked them to a moment of national anger, they would soon return to a state of indifference due to forgetfulness.[40] Struggling with the search for international recognition and a thriving nationalist consciousness, the nascent ROC government oscillated between maintaining political stability and mobilising popular patriotic sentiment. The way it controlled commemorative events illustrates how national shame was increasingly manipulated by the state to serve its changing interests.

Research examining individual experiences of national shame often focus on intellectuals due to their prominent role in advocating for national salvation. Notably, their perception of

[38] Ibid, 128–129.
[39] Cohen, 'Remembering and Forgetting National Humiliation in 20th China'.
[40] See, for example, Xiao, 'A Respectful Warning to My Forgetful Compatriots' (Jinggao wujianwang zhi guoren 敬告吾健忘同胞), *Shibao*, May 10, 1915, 2; Gongzhen [Ge Gongzhen], 'Do Not Forget the Present Humiliation' (Wuwang cishi zhi chiru 勿忘此時之恥辱), ibid., 8.

national shame shifted at the turn of the twentieth century. Traditional intellectuals' expression of shame was usually associated with Confucian self-cultivation, making it an emotion that helped individuals discipline personal sentiments. Scholars with opposite political stances understood shame in a similar light. For instance, following the defeat of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, the governor of Huguang and one of the late Qing's most influential scholar-officials, began his essay with the famous Confucian concept of 'knowing the shame' (zhi chi 知恥) in 1889, equipped with which Zhang believed the Chinese could protect their land and culture.[41] Huang Zunsan 黃尊三, a government-sponsored student who later supported Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary ideal, satirised Zhang for commanding students to kneel before him when they met in 1905, saying, 'it is contemptible that such a high-ranking Chinese official only cared about his own vanity and did not respect our character'.[42] Yet despite the pursuit of equality and the disdain for the Qing bureaucracy, Huang, like Zhang, also recognised Confucian shame as a driving force for both personal growth and national defence.

Unlike students in the 1920s, late Qing students' experiences of national shame related more to the authorities, such as the Japanese government's investigation of international students' letters, than to their interpersonal relations with ordinary Japanese people.[43] When students believed that they had encountered injustice from the Japanese government or schools, they angrily denounced and went on strike as a protest. Students who advocated democratic revolutions took the opportunity to show their discontent with the Japanese and Qing governments.[44] Some met other revolutionaries in order to establish a revolutionary army.[45]

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[41] 'Knowing shame is close to bravery' (zhichi jinhu yong 知恥近乎勇) is a Chinese phrase from *The Book of Rites*, which admires the courage to reflect one's faults and change them. Zhang Zhidong, *Exhortation to Learning* (Quanxue pian 勸學篇). Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chuban, 1998.

[42] Huang Zunsan, *Diaries of Huang Zunsan*, 5.

[43] See Xisuo Li and Lairong Li, 'Reinterpretation of the Regulation Incident of Late-Qing Students in Japan (Qingmo Liuxuesheng Qudi Guize Shijian Zai Jiedu 清末留日學生「取締規則」事件再解讀)'. *Studies in Modern History* (Jindai Shi Yanjiu 近代史研究), 6, 2009, 21–31.

[44] See Liang Qichao, 'An Account of the Public Outrage in the Tokyo Academic Community and A Statement of My Opinion (Ji Dongjing Xuejie Gongfen Shi Bing Shu Yu Zhi Yijian 記東京學界公憤事並述余之意見)'. *Yinbingshi Collection, Extra Episodes* (Yinbingshi Heji: Jiwai Ji 飲冰室合集·集外集). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, 294–305. 'The Official Document of the Governor of E Exhorting Students in Japan 鄂督勸諭留日學生公文'. *Chinese-Foreign Daily News* 中外日報, included in *Collections of Current Events* 時事採新匯選, 4, Dec 1906, p. 7891.

[45] Meijing Jing, 'Evidence of Crime (Zuian 罪案)'. *Modern Chinese History Sourcebook Series - Xinhai Revolution* (Zhongguo Jindai Shi Ziliao Congkan Xinhai Geming 中國近代史資料叢刊·辛亥革命). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000.

The perception of national shame consolidated students in a foreign country, but strained international relations did not impact Huang's interaction with ordinary Japanese people. When Huang saw the Japanese gathered at Hibiya Park to complain about the cowardice their government showed in the face of the British and US forces, he praised their spirit of defiance in his diary on September 5, 1905: 'What they did made me ashamed of myself'.[46] He recognised the strengths of the Japanese and contrasted them with himself, but rather than internalising it as an inferiority mentality, he saw it as a motivation for improving self-cultivation. Notably, the Japanese at the time were also less discriminatory towards the Chinese compared to the situation in the 1920s. In contrast to the challenges Xie faced when attempting to rent an apartment in 1934, the landlords encountered by Huang always displayed a welcoming attitude.

In Confucianism, shame was discussed mostly as an intrinsic part of the cultivation of virtue that was indispensable for cultivating noble courage rather than one that exaggerates an overwhelming Other: 'fearing death, injuries, or other losses and hence violating duty is shameful, whereas fighting to the death against injustice is honourable'.[47] This emotional refuge that provided Huang with a temporary release. In his diaries, Huang used the classical Chinese singular words '*ru* 辱' or '*chi* 耻' more frequently than the contemporary Chinese compound words '*xiuru* 羞辱' (humiliation), '*xiuchi* 羞耻' (shame), '*wuru* 侮辱' (insult) and '*chiru* 耻辱' (disgrace). Under the pressure of neurasthenia, academic failure in Japan, and nationalist revolutions, he started to transcribe Confucian analects about shame: 'What is the use of slogging through my day without specialising in anything? The ancients would be ashamed of being sentimental and making no progress. If I want to save my country, I must first save myself'.[48] To pursue the self-discipline of the morally noble person, Huang encouraged himself that ''it is not appropriate to be ashamed of being poor. What is shameful is to be poor and have no ambition'.[49] He also quoted the aphorisms of Laozi – 'he who knows satisfaction will not be humiliated; he who knows moderation will not be in danger' – as a source of motivation amid struggles.[50] Aphorisms about shame summoned this frustrated

[46] Huang Zunsan, *Diaries of Huang Zunsan*, 19. After the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the British and Americans deprived Japan of some rights despite its victory.
[47] Yinghua Lu, 'The Phenomenology of Shame: A Clarification in Light of Max Scheler and Confucianism'. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 51, 2018, 507–525, 519.
[48] Ibid, 158.
[49] Huang Zunsan, *Diaries of Huang Zunsan*, 289.
[50] Ibid, 159.

student's spiritual stability from a distant cultural matrix, helping him refrain from personal sentiments and avoid breaking emotional norms that prioritised national responsibility. With shame, individuals managed themselves in a way that aligned with social expectations, thereby reinforcing the emotional regime of nationalism.

In the Republican era, shame also reinforced the emotional regime of nationalism, but intellectuals raised it more in a mentality of inferiority and the emotives of anguish. As Jing Tsu observes from well-known and relatively widely discussed literary works in the 1920s, a self-perception as humiliated and deficient in the wake of international military forces and orientalist discourse fueled the formation of China's national identity.[51] For instance, Yu Dafu describes the sexual frustrations facing male Chinese students in Japan, including their sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, physical reactions triggered by gazes, and overwhelming feelings of shame. Even when they are not in the presence of the Japanese Other, they imagine their contemptuous gaze, internalise it, and, by doing so, highlight the self-other dichotomy between the Chinese and the Japanese. It cannot be denied that national shame emerged from heightened national awareness and self-awareness that constructed a modern subject, within which what Haiyan Lee refers to as the 'autobiographical self' revealed. That is, one may be of interest to others not because they have achieved extraordinary distinctions or been involved in significant events, but because of their intrinsic importance as an individual.[52] However, underlying the rapidly proliferation of discussions surrounding national shame was not necessarily a love for the nation but rather a sense of shame regarding its historical past, a sentiment resulting in individuals' failure to establish connections with the heterogeneous other.

At the time, the internal impetus behind nationalism was fueled by criticisms of traditional Chinese cultures, accompanied by feelings of contempt, anger, and even hatred towards them. Existing scholarship has widely discussed that May-Fourth revolutionaries perceived traditional discourses as impediments to the genuine expression of emotions. Faced with a corrupt government and an impoverished country, they broke away from Chinese tradition and sought inspiration from European Romantic literature as a means of achieving personal

[51] Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895–1937*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
[52] Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 48.

liberation.[53] Hayashi Fumiko, a Japanese writer who frequently traveled to China during the 1930s and was also a friend of Xie, reflected on the differences in the reception of Euro-American culture among the younger generations in China and Japan in her travelogue. Hayashi expressed surprise that, while Japan's youth, despite their exposure to Western culture, remained predominantly 'Japanese', in China, just across the sea, the young intellectuals had become thoroughly 'Westernised'. She lamented that the vigor she once found in the Tang poetry and the works of Tao Yuanming, which she had read as a child, seemed no longer discernible.[54]

Hayashi's support for the Japanese militarism and her active involvement in the literary sphere of Manchukuo imbued her statement with the unmistakable arrogance characteristic of a colonial state. However, when considering the developmental trajectory of Xie's generation, their early decisive break from traditional Chinese cultural symbols – Confucian texts, classical poetry, and the practice of filial piety – was pronounced. For these Chinese intellectuals, national shame remained an emotional refuge, but it operated by disparaging the country's past to alleviate present failures. After deconstructing Confucian kinship and subverting the 'arborescent structures of orthodoxy' in patriarchal families, the May-Fourth generation engaged with 'a web of rhizomatic linkages' that consisted of homosocial bonding and heterosexual romance. However, what they encountered was not an uninhibited Self that individualism promised them but a loose and versatile network of sociality centred on nationalism.[55] The communal affinity demanded by the burgeoning nationalist agenda paralleled the rebellion against Confucian rituals, as both premised 'a code of intimacy as the only authentic and morally legitimate mode of constructing social relationships'.[56] The mission of national salvation directed Chinese people to identify not with lineage but with those within the same geographical and cultural boundaries. They spoke of national shame when self-awareness and national consciousness grew in tandem, maintaining a sense of certainty by making a clear choice between backward China and the advanced West. However, a radical disconnection from the past deprived them of a proud land to reconcile cultural nostalgia. For

[53] Denton, 'The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's "Sinking"', 115.
[54] Hayashi Fumiko, 'A Journey to China: A Japanese Woman Writer's Impressions' (Zhongguo zhilv: yige riben nvzuojia dui zhongguo de yinxiang 中國之旅: 一個日本女作家對中國的印象). *Qingnian Liangyou* 青年良友, 7, 1940, 27.
[55] Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 32.
[56] Ibid, 249.

women, specifically, their bodies became a symbol of China's backwardness that required total transformation, as will be elaborated on in Xie's case.

While intellectuals attributed positive connotations to national shame within the context of Chinese modernity, it cannot be denied that their national identity was primarily defended by narratives with a 'negative logic' rather than notions of glory, reputation, and honour.[57] To mediate the tension, some writers, particularly those deeply engaged with both Chinese and Western cultures, had tried to uncover and deal with the shame mentality permeating the emotional regime of nationalism. They hoped to achieve this not by welcoming total Westernisation but by taking a balanced perspective that considered the strengths and shortcomings of both cultures. *West Wind* (*Xifeng* 西风) (1936–1949) was a widely circulated magazine with a specific goal of publishing translated works. It was characterised by a hybrid aesthetic and represented Western values in a 'two-way cross-cultural' initiative.[58] Based on their personal observations and experiences abroad, contributors such as psychologist Shen Youqian and writer Xu Xu presented the differences between nations and their self-retrospections, stressing the importance of maintaining an open mind while raising self-esteem.[59] Lin Yutang, another active contributor, played a significant role in introducing the Western idea of humour, which he believed Chinese people lacked in a revolution-oriented climate. Lin criticised the use of literature for political purposes and promoted a tolerant, cosmopolitan, and understanding philosophy of life.[60] In addition to Chinese writers, Pearl S. Buck, an American novelist who grew up in China, identified a common chauvinist mindset among the young Chinese of shame towards their own country:

> They come back feeling that China is in a shameful state. Some of them are in an agony of impatience to change everything. They cannot. Their impatience turns into a hostility, a sense of inferiority, and they satisfy themselves by trying to hide what they cannot change.[61]

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[57] As Mona Ozouf (1988: 269-270) concludes from her analysis of the festivals of the French Revolution, modern nations are created according to a 'negative logic … in a whole enterprise of subtraction and purification'.
[58] Suoqiao Qian, *Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity*. Leiden. Boston: Brill, 2011, 116.
[59] See Lu Wang, *West Wind: Being 'Modern' and 'Chinese' through Translation*. Doctoral thesis submitted to Newcastle University in 2017.
[60] Lin Yutang, 'About this Journal' (Qieshuo benkan 且說本刊). *Cosmic Wind*, 1, 1935, 53–54, 53.
[61] Pearl S. Buck, 'On New Patriotism'. *The China Critic*, 4 (25), 1931, 579–580, 563.

Buck added that individuals who decorated their sense of shame with the guise of patriotism did not love their country. She questioned May-Fourth intellectuals' idea of radically transforming China into a 'modern' state by saying that true patriots comprehend, respect, and protect various cultures while never considering their own culture to be inferior. Eliminating national diversity in the name of modernity is non-constructive. The valuable parts of old China should necessarily survive in modern China and achieve mutual respect with other nations. It was only in that context that nationalism would not be a problem.[62]

As a writer and warrior woman who grew up in the aura of new culture, individualism and nationalism were two intertwined sides of Xie. In 1920, Xie was expelled from a missionary-run school at the age of fourteen, because she organised a parade on National Humiliation Day to remind the Twenty-One Demands imposed by Japan in 1915: 'At twilight that day, I departed God's school, rewarded with expulsion only because I loved my country'.[63] She joined other Changsha students in a citywide parade in 1925, protesting the shooting of workers who protested the mistreatment by Japanese cotton factories on May 30 in Shanghai. Xie continued to participate in anti-imperialist activities when she studied in Japan. She visited Japanese left-wing activists and journalists, recording her interactions with ordinary Japanese people she respected.[64] Most of these articles were published in *West Wind* or Lin Yutang's *Cosmic Wind*, suggesting a cosmopolitan position to communicate with foreigners.[65] It appears that Xie moderated the overwhelming nationalism with her self-agency. Literature on her perception of national shame also presents a positive view, showing that her starting point was to defend her country against imperialism and international injustice, while she was also able to refuse the inferior mentality in her overseas encounters. But what imprints did her era's joint emotional suffering leave on her? What was the unique experience of women regarding national shame in a foreign country? The following section will answer these questions by comparing Xie's articulation of shame in Japan with that of Yu Dafu's, as well as how national shame served as an emotional refuge in the 1920s and 30s.

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[62] Pearl S. Buck, 'On New Patriotism (II)'. *The China Critic*, 6 (41), 1933, 1002–1005, 1005.
[63] See Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, 175.
[64] For Xie's interactions with leftist activists in Japan, see Lin Zhu's doctoral thesis, *Modern Japanese scholars' perceptions of China – with a focus on the Chinese Literature Study Group* (近代日本における知識人の中国認識: 中国文学研究会を中心に), submitted to Tohoku University, 2017.
[65] In 1940, Lin Yutang's daughters, Lin Taiyi and Lin Rusi, translated Xie's autobiography into English, titled *Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying*. It was published by Pearl S. Buck, Lin's friend, and her husband's John Day Publishing house in the US.

Unbearable Gaze: Gendered National Shame

Because Confucianism could no longer provide modern Chinese students with emotional stability in the context of a total rejection of traditional culture, the way this refuge worked utterly differed from that of the late Qing period. Both Yu's and Xie's works show that the gaze of the Other was a major source of shame for Chinese students in Japan. These individuals often amplified their personal shame to represent China's humiliation vis-à-vis Japan. In Yu's 'Sinking' (chenlun 沉淪) (1921), the male protagonist feels that all the Japanese are staring at him. Shyness and shame are revealed through the change in his physical appearance in response to the remarks and behaviours of Japanese students. Like 'an immediate shudder' of bioelectricity, a feeling of shame runs through him 'from head to foot without any discursive preparation'.[66] When Japanese students laugh, 'he always suspects that they are laughing at him, and he blushes. When they are talking, if anyone happens to glance in his direction, he abruptly reddens again, thinking that they are talking about him'. Blushing is one prominent visual indicator associated with hiding behaviour, because the burning on the surface of bodies, or 'colouring' in Sara Ahmed's term, exposes the identity the subject tries to keep hidden.[67] The student in 'Sinking' wanders aimlessly, trying to avoid his classmates. However, no matter where he goes, he senses those people's malicious gaze tracking him like a tangible substance. His suspicion that the Japanese disdain him for being a *Shinajin* soon turns into national hatred. 'They are all Japanese. They are all my enemies. I will come to take revenge one day. I will take revenge on them'.[68] The psychology of 'revenge' is a typical emotive in the discourse of national shame. As Callahan points out, a causal relationship between failure, shame, and

[66] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. London: Routledge, 2003, 246.

[67] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 104. Suzanne M. Retzinger. 'Identifying Shame and Anger in Discourse'. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 38 (8), 1995, 1104–1113.

[68] Yu Dafu, *The Complete Works of Yu Dafu vol4* (Yu Dafu Quanji 郁達夫全集). Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2002, 21-22. Until the early nineteenth century, 'Shina' was a Buddhist term introduced to China and Japan from India. It was a synonym for 'China' (*chugoku* in Japanese and *zhongguo* in Chinese) without a connotation of discrimination. Among the 37 Qing students who registered their nationality on the graduation book of Waseda University, 18 chose to use 'Shina' (Sanetou, 1983:185). Yet after the revolutionaries overthrew the Qing dynasty and established a republican government, Japan still used 'Shina' instead of the 'Republic of China' in official documents despite repeated protests from the Republican government. By doing this, the Japanese government claimed its superiority over China through the manipulation of lexicography and furthered Fukuzawa Yukichi's conception of 'parting with Asia and entering into Europe', see Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of Modern*, 19.

revenge can be found in a culture manipulated by political elites of power, which constructs a definitive relationship between the victimised self and the perpetrating other.[69]

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), Sara Ahmed indicates how individuals' declarations of shame can bring a nation into existence as a felt community, in which the individuals shoulder the failure of the nation 'to an ideal as a mode of identification with the nation', by which they claim their love for the nation.[70] In Yu's work, the emotion of shame not only exposes the male student's blushing body to the gaze of the Japanese Other but also admits him to an imagined community that encompasses the patriotic modern Chinese as a form of nation-building. However, when the male student demonstrates defence of his country by distinguishing himself from 'enemies', he has no substantial community on which to rely and take action. As he struggles between strong national awareness and feelings of inferiority, self-loathing, and helplessness, the emotional effort collapses, and he starts masturbating, existing as an object subjected solely to the gaze of others rather than an agent to envision his own perspective. His ego grows in response to his increasing sensitivity to the attention of an omnipresent Other, eventually monopolising his interactions with society and leading him to commit suicide. Some Japanese, particularly Japanese women whom he places in a position of dominance, might not even have realised the power endowed by the Chinese man.

Like the sensitive male Chinese student portrayed by Yu, Xie presented her readers the implicit meaning of the Other's gaze while she was imprisoned in the Meguro police station, a more isolated and hierarchical place of power. Her perception of shame was also about being gazed at and how the appearance of the subjects – both herself and the nation – appeared to the Japanese Other. When Xie had to show herself in her worn-out socks, she felt that Japanese people's gaze indicated not just her shame but also the shame imposed upon the entirety of China:

> As if he had discovered a bizarre thing, the other detective looked at my torn socks and gave a contemptuous sneer. The chief constable then hastened to look straight from my head to my heels, squinted his eyes, and shook his head slowly from side to side. I knew

[69] Callahan, 'National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism', 201.
[70] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 108.

> that within these movements must have been contained these lines: 'look at you, you unclean, untidy *Shinajin*, with such dirty and torn socks ...'[71]

The internalisation of Japanese people's gaze and cynical mutterings about racism are common topics in literary works about Chinese students in Japan, implying a similar ideation of associating the differential treatment they experienced, whether factual or perceived, with one's national identity.

From Yu's writings to those of Xie's, the perception of shame was not an isolated act but implied increasing recognition of self-other relationships, which enabled people to develop a sense of themselves and others and depart from the Confucian narrative. On the other hand, as the national shame discourse overwhelmed personal expressions and directed their value, individuals appropriated it as an emotional refuge that exempted their emotional sufferings. In other words, national shame justified personal shame. Both Yu and Xie depicted the individuals' sensitivity to appearance and the Other's gaze, concluding that their inner sufferings were primarily due to the humiliation of the Japanese against the Chinese and Japan against China. Yu's characters blame their sexual frustrations on the weakness of China and the Japanese's contempt for the Chinese. Xie did not share the feeling of hatred, but she also emphasised that her shame stemmed not only from the humiliation she endured but also from her concern that her ragged and dirty socks would bring shame to her country. Individuals made emotional efforts to serve the emotional regime of nationalism within the emotional refuge, making suffering a heroic gesture that acknowledged the priority of patriotism and public duties. What they endured was not merely psychological or physical torture, but a martyrdom sacrifice.

Nonetheless, the sense of shame conveyed by Xie was more underlined at the gender level. Physical nudity underscored the social vulnerability and defenselessness that she, unable to take control of her own appearance, felt when forced to expose her feminine body to Japanese men. After a tedious interrogation by a Japanese detective, Xie was held without any formal sentence. A male guard asked her to take off her clothes:

> I only took off my coat and opened my hands for his inspection. He showed an iron-like face and insisted that I should be naked!

[71] Xie Bingying, *When I Was in Japan*, 110.

> ‘Stupid! Are you waiting for me to do it?’
> That was almost a beast. As he spoke, a demonic hand did reach up to my collar.
> I hastily unbuttoned my dress, stripped down to my last layer of underwear, and took the socks off. He confiscated my trouser belt and garters on the spot and heavily touched my armpits a few times, as if there were some secret documents hidden there.
> I wanted to slap him. But it was better to be patient when there was no way to avoid the insult.[72]

In contrast, Ba Jin 巴金 (1904 – 2005), a male Chinese writer who was held for the same reason at Kanda Police Station, did not face the same level of scrutiny regarding his clothing and was released within a day.[73] In 1937, communist Hu Lanqi also underwent a strip search during her detention in a Nazi German prison. However, the jailer conducting the search, a courteous woman, permitted Hu to turn her back while she inspected Hu’s clothing.[74]

Shame, which etymologically means ‘to cover’, has frequently been linked with nakedness.[75] In addition to being a symbol of animality, mortality, and neediness, the latter also implies a loss of control over one’s own body. As Anne Hollander points out, clothes are ‘inseparable from the self’ as they suggest an individual’s ‘respect for the order of things’.[76] Sartre also states that putting on clothes signifies the person’s effort to conceal the object-state and their assertion of the right of a seeing subject without being seen.[77] When neurotic male students in Yu’s work feel shy about being gazed at by the Japanese, we can only see the change on their faces and no other body parts. Those gazes happen in a safe environment or even only in their minds. They even show an active nakedness of spirit: When overwhelmed by the ever-expanding nationalist sentiment, they restlessly confess their ethnic identity and personal details to the Japanese women they infatuate.

During the initial body inspection by male guards, Xie felt humiliation primarily as a woman rather than a Chinese student. In China’s traditional culture, the covering of female

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[72] Ibid, 86-87.
[73] For Ba Jin’s imprisonment in Japan, see his essay, *Fifty Years of Literary Life* (wenxue Shenghuo wushinian 文學生活五十年) (1931), and autobiographical fiction, ‘God, Ghost, Human’ (shen gui ren 神鬼人) (1934).
[74] Hu Lanqi, *In A German Women’s Prison*. Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1937, 5–6.
[75] Zahavi, *Self and Other*, 216.
[76] Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*. New York: Avon, 1980, 362, 451.
[77] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 312.

bodies is important as 'social skin – a boundary between self and others as well as between social classes' that emphasises a socialised self.[78] For Xie, the degrading strip search and ensuing ridicule deprived her not only of bodily privacy but also of her citizenship and social standing, evoking what Agamben describes as 'bare life' in spaces of confinement.[79]

Notably, although it was the Japanese police who directly humiliated Xie, her sense of shame was perceived in the emotional regime of nationalism, in which the female body was constructed as a site of practice for modern civic education. An instance of this was Xie's sensitivity to the gaze of Ryoko, one of her cellmates. Despite realising that Ryoko simply had an interest in judging others' clothes, her gaze seemed to Xie as if it were targeting her Chinese identity. As Ahmed observes, the subject's feeling of apartness intensifies in the moment of unwilling exposure, especially if it comes from a friend:[80]

> She [Ryoko] always liked to observe people's clothes, and whenever she looked at my feet, I felt a nameless annoyance. I felt her glances were a sign of contempt and ridicule for Chinese people's filth. Several times when she looked at my rag-like socks, I wanted to tell her, 'If I had brought clothes to change as you did, my socks may have been whiter than yours!'[81]

Why did the condition of the socks lead to Xie's suspicion of a newly formed friendship with a Japanese woman? What link existed between the state of the socks and the perception of shame for a Chinese woman? As Xie explained, her primary concern was not the worn-out socks themselves, but rather the exposure of her 'reformist' feet to the Japanese without any covering:[82]

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[78] Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2005, 182.

[79] According to Giorgio Agamben, 'bare life' refers to a conception of life in which the biological dimension of life (zoē) is given priority over the quality, possibility, and potentiality a life is lived (bios). See Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

[80] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

[81] Xie, *When I Was in Japan*, 109.

[82] 'Reformist small feet' (gaizu pai xiaojiao 改組派小腳): a type of feet that had been bound and then released due to policy changes and Western influences in twentieth-century China. The reformist feet are also called 'semi-released feet'.

> How could I show my pointy, crooked 'reformist' feet that had been wrapped by my mother in a three-foot-long band? They [Japanese women] were already surprised when they saw my tiny feet in socks, and what a shame it would be for all the Chinese if I directly showed them a pair of small, pointy, and plump feet![83]

Xie's mother bound her feet when she was eight, believing that this could guarantee a favourable marriage for her daughter, but Xie released them in middle school, where she met peers with natural feet: 'It was too shameful to see everyone with big feet while I had a pair of "three-inch golden lotuses". I bravely untied the cloth and burned all of them'.[84]

During the imperial era, women's feet were open for discussion and admiration. The shape, size, and flexibility of the bound feet, and even the style of the embroidered shoe, can be used as standards to distinguish women's statuses and identities. For women at the time, the careful wrapping of feet was as much a part of private dressing as it was social negotiation.[85] Yet by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women were figures through whom male intellectuals imagined national modernity, and their bodies emerged as the key symptom of a weak nation and a key sign of a strong one, as well as a place where the modern and the traditional and the domestic and the exotic collided. Specifically, the bound feet illustrate traditional China's reshaping of women's natural bodies and carry a clear social dimension into the modern era. They were associated with a disturbing period of national history, which would bring unbearable shame to those who had experienced it but refused to revisit it. Male scholars claimed the causal connection between Chinese women's feet and the backwardness of the country, arguing that foot-binding had turned Chinese women into the 'trash of trash', made China a 'barbaric laughingstock of outsiders', and would have brought the nation to its doom.[86] Therefore, the country's prosperity must start with the repudiation of women's past cultural identities, and women's liberation should begin with the abolition of foot-binding. Foot-binding became a disability, symbolising a disabling ideology that was in complete conflict

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[83] Xie, *When I Was in Japan*, 112.
[84] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Soldier*, 1980 [1956], 28.
[85] Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 182.
[86] Hu Shi, 'To Chinese Women (Jinggao Zhongguo Nüzi 敬告中國女子)'. *Collection of Hu Shi* (Hu Shi Wenji 胡適文集). Vol. 9. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998 [1906]. Kang Youwei. Request a Ban on Foot-Binding for Women (Qing Jin Funu Chanzu Zhe 請禁婦女裹足折), 1898. Male scholars strategically overlooked the massive amounts of labour performed by both peasant and elite women in the household and markets, but their statements prevailed. For a discussion on women, nation and class, see Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, 2007, 79–106.

with the imagination of the independent modern women constructed first by Western missionaries and then fully developed during the Enlightenment and its political offshoots.[87]

Xie attacked traditional Chinese practises that forced women into specific gender roles. Changes in appearance were an important factor in defining her identity as a modern woman warrior. In wartime, female cadets received a gender-neutral education at the Central Military Academy. Their military uniforms concealed gendered identities, symbolising a further rebellion against traditional values that confined women to their roles in a patriarchal family.[88] The gun, the shapeless jacket, the belt, and a pair of rubber shoes, all of the equipment 'gave her a set of new vocabulary to describe the Chinese brand of feminism of the early twentieth century'.[89] Xie did not insist on the gender-neutral dress after leaving the army, but the feet were still a shameful symbol of both female and national disgrace that she wished to cover.

Scholars have suggested that by refusing the foot-binding imposed by her mother, Xie demonstrated control over her body and challenged parental authority.[90] However, celebrating the symbolic act of releasing feet while disregarding the physical existence of the scars it bore carried the risk of women's private self-abasement and implicit submission to the historical imprint ingrained in their bodies. In what way did Xie justify her 'reformist feet' after she removed foot bindings? Why did she still lack confidence in her body or even feel ashamed of it? Did her released feet answer the call of the May Fourth era on the day she threw the bindings, only to be encapsulated in official statistics as a vague example of social progress and female emancipation devoid of personal emotions? These questions remained ambiguous in what Dorothy Ko calls 'gigantic history' and no clue was given until Xie recorded her shame in the Japanese prison.[91] Her act of throwing away the foot-binding cloth marked a progressive step influenced by her observations of social injustice, but a gap existed between her actual feelings and the idealised image of modern women who could immediately immerse themselves in the celebration of modernity without pain.

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[87] For Chinese intellectuals' reception of foreign norms promoted by missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century, see, for example, Bryony Lau, 'The Limits of the Civilizing Mission: A Comparative Analysis of British Protestant Missionary Campaigns to End Footbinding and Female Circumcision'. *Social Sciences and Missions*, 21 (2), 2008, 193–227.

[88] As Xie recorded in her autobiography, the only difference between the men's and women's clothes at the military academy was the name tags sewn on the women's jackets.

[89] Wang, *When 'I' Was Born*, 180.

[90] See ibid, 179; Li Guo, 'Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-Century China'.

[91] 'Gigantic history' is a type of widely analysed history that is traceable through public documents and amenable to the methods of political and social history, see Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 12.

Because women were subordinated to the fate of the nation and its prospect for revolutionary transformation, Xie's shame about her feet deepened as nationalist education made her a patriotic warrior. For Xie, the exposure of feet threatened her identities as a rebel, a soldier, and a modern Chinese citizen because she had adopted nationalism as the only authorising discourse for her actions. She felt uneasier about her scarred feet than when the Japanese police forced her to undress, believing that the latter only proved the beastliness of the Japanese, but the former would disgrace her nation and render her an unproductive citizen. Showing the 'reformist' feet in front of the Japanese expelled her from the rosy image of being a modern woman. The Other who gazed at her now possessed three dimensions: the Japanese, the intellectuals driving China's nationalist agenda, and the ideal modern woman she perceived herself as. They led to a sense of alienation from the subject's own identity, othering her sense of the self and disconnecting it from her place in society. Under these circumstances, she invoked national shame as an emotional refuge to allay the fear that her inadequacies would result in rejection by or expulsion from the imagined community of modern women. Xie experiences a mixture of shame caused by national identity and gender. Unwinding foot-binding ceased to be merely a personal choice but took on national significance. Unfortunately, it did not appear to have immediately liberated women and the nation from international humiliation, as male intellectuals had proclaimed, but instead instilled in them a profound sense of shame on the feminine body.

Overall, in both Yu Dafu's and Xie Bingying's writings, the emotional regime of nationalism dominated individuals' perception and evaluation of the outside world, within which national shame served as an emotional refuge to assuage personal suffering. However, the mechanisms and foci of emotional refuge operate differently in their manifestations. For the male Chinese students in Yu's work, national shame justifies their struggles in interpersonal relations and covers the failure of manhood under the seemingly severer failure of nationhood. By invoking China as a scapegoat and the personification of a docile lover, their deaths seem to take on heroic overtones. Yet they never make a serious attempt to call for help from the outside world. What the nationalist discourse brought to them was self-enclosure, sealing their voices in repetitive, monotonous echoes. The sense of shame that ensues leads to the destruction of the individual, even if the humiliation may exist only in the characters' imaginations.

Xie would not internalise the gaze of the Japanese Other as self-destructing shame when it did not involve the female body. The helpless self-exposure that demoralises Yu Dafu's male characters is replaced by an oppositional gaze and an intention to take action. As the Japanese police swept the prisoners and made them bow their heads one by one, she looked straight back into his eyes until he got bored and turned away, seeing this as her small victory as a Chinese.[92] Xie neither internalised the defeat of the Chinese nation nor subscribed to the values or expectations imposed by the 'shamers'; rather, she stated that the humiliation she suffered only revealed the hypocrisy of the so-called Japanese civilisation.[93] To borrow bell hooks's words, Xie's counter gaze suggests a change of identity, and 'even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency'.[94] At the same time, writing down the experience shortly after her release, she challenged the unequal power relations between the 'active' Japanese police and the 'passive' Chinese prisoner. Despite being gazed at by inescapable spectators, Xie, as the author, together with her readers, gazed back at those gazes through the textual scene she constructed.

On the other hand, although Xie did not struggle with romantic relationships as Yu's characters did, she bore the heavy, but often unnoticed, emotional suffering of women in the nationalist agenda's reshaping of the female body. As an emotional refuge, national shame obscured her anxiety about her disqualification as a modern woman, putting the focus on the destruction of national pride. Xie's strategy to restore national and personal pride was to mend the socks and cover her feet. After the Japanese police refused her request to deliver her clothes to the prison or to get a darning needle, Xie had an idea to make a needle from a bamboo piece of a chopstick and finally managed to complete the craft. Finally, by challenging the situation to the best of her ability rather than destroying the 'shameful' self, she presented a sense of duty to her identity as a modern woman and her country, despite enduring physical distress and mental desperation.

[92] Xie, *When I Was in Japan*, 96.
[93] Ibid, 96.
[94] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992, 116.

Towards the Cosmopolitan Friendship of Emotional Liberty

Through the pious mending, Xie hid her feet, as well as the country's shameful past, in her socks. However, this behaviour can be related to two potential problems. From the standpoint of the victim country, i.e., China, if the achievement was celebrated solely to serve as a symbol of the end of past humiliation, growing confidence may serve to activate rather than assuage people's historical memories of national shame, similar to the commemorations of many events that the government claimed had appeased China's traumas.[95] Second, drawing dignity from physical actions through which one feels superior to others would seem to be a form of spiritual victory, a term coined by Lu Xun in his famous novella *The True Story of Ah Q* (Ah Q zhengzhuan 阿 Q 正傳) (1921). It refers to self-deception that helps people cushion themselves from extreme defeat or humiliation.[96] The male student created by Yu Dafu, who claims revenge against the Japanese to justify national pride but ultimately destroys himself, serves as an example. In the end, his momentary sense of resilience fades, and the imagined superiority does not endure, leading to his eventual destruction in a profound sense of powerlessness. Breaking the oppression was difficult not only because of Japanese imperialism but also because China's nationalist sentiment was based on a hostile self-other relationship, which the spiritual victory further intensified. Members of this system would require more emotional effort to survive mental pressure.

Sock mending was a way to return to self-respect, but Xie accomplished it not only through her craft but also by interacting with Japanese women. As she mended the socks, Ryoko and her other two cellmates, Yoshiko and an older woman, gathered around her with great interest. Ryoko was the first to compliment her intelligence. Then, all three women laughed and congratulated her. When Xie finally finished the work, 'they all celebrated my success with pleasant smiles'.[97] Their laughter attracted a male guard, who came and disdainfully mocked Xie for her 'awesomeness', but the female prisoners ignored him. Even in the grim prison, this female cell constituted an emotional refuge where both Chinese and Japanese women had emotional liberty against the masculine gaze and Xie against the shame of the nationalist self-other relationship.

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[95] Wang, 'National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory', 804.
[96] Ming Yan, 'Poverty and Shame in Chinese Literature'. *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*, edited by Elaine Chase and Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo. Oxford: University of Oxford, 2014, 68.
[97] Xie, *When I Was in Japan*, 114.

The intimate community was not a natural occurrence but was achieved through gradual communication between Xie and Japanese women. First, Xie managed to avoid internalising the discriminatory terms used by the Japanese as an evaluation of herself or Chinese national identity as a whole. As a result, unlike other male students in the early Republican era, she was not constrained by an ever-expanding ego that would limit her connection with the external world. The former, by contrast, showed a traumatic reaction to the terms *Shina* and *Shina-jin*. In addition to the characters in Yu Dafu's work, Guo Moruo describes a conversation between a Japanese landlady and a male Chinese student who wanted to rent her house in his autobiographical story 'A Tough Journey' (Xinglunan 行路難):

'Which country do you come from? Shanghai? Korea?'
'I am a Chinese international student.'
'[So you are a] *Shinajin*?'

The landlady had limited geographical knowledge to discern that Shanghai is not a country like Korea, while the protagonist did not offer further clarification regarding whether *Shinajin* was a discriminatory term or a customary usage for her. He restlessly ended the conversation and 'fled' to the shoreside, as he immediately imagined the *Shinajin*'s potential insult, believing it to be an attack by the Japanese. With a sense of losing dignity, he mutters as he stares blankly at the sea that connects Japan and his motherland: 'International students in those days [the Tang dynasty] wouldn't have been unable to find any shelter like us, would they?' 'You [Japanese] really say the word "Shina" with the utmost malice'. In the national shame discourse, a self-defense mentality of refusing communication for fear of harm was common. Similarly, after being brutally arrested and searched by the police, Xie assumed that Japanese women would be unkind to her the first night she was in prison. Xie felt humiliated when Yoshiko said that 'Nanjing bugs' (the Japanese term for bedbugs) only existed in *Shina* rather than Japan.[98] She pretended that her Japanese was not good and refused to talk.

As Xie remembered, her change began when she realised that shame might merely be misunderstandings in some cases. For the Japanese women prisoners she met, 'China' and 'Shina' were not political concepts with complex historical debates but merely interchangeable

[98] Ibid, 118.

titles for a country. Therefore, taking their statements as a humiliating attack was a misunderstanding. Seeing Yoshiko cry for imprisoned Korean and Chinese revolutionaries who had been abused into bleeding, Xie lamented that it was 'such precious sympathy'.[99] These female prisoners also showed great concern for Xie. They defended her in front of the guards and cried over the torture she suffered in interrogations. Seeing Xie wail after being hit on the head, Ryoko sighed and pleaded with the guards not to let Xie attend the subsequent interrogation. When Yoshiko, a seventeen-year-old Japanese girl with a mental disorder, saw Xie lying on the floor in pain, she 'suddenly cried out and burst into tears'.[100] The older woman, whom Xie treated like her mother, also wept over Xie's wounds. Xie also found admirable qualities in the female prisoners' daily lives: Ryoko remained well-kept even in prison, appearing as lively as a free woman. Besides grooming her hair every day, she always brushed off any dust before entering their cell. Her self-respect was discovered, admired, and recorded by a Chinese woman, rather than by the men of her own country.

Xie recognised that Japanese women were also victims of masculine society. Gender oppression concerning the female body existed not only between Japanese men and Chinese women but also between local men and women. In prison, the patriarchy manifested itself more strongly than in everyday life in Japan. Male prisoners had priority to go to the toilet first, while female prisoners were left with less time. Yoshiko was once dragged out of the toilet by a male guard before putting on pants because she exceeded the time limit. Yoshiko had to wipe her bottom and throw the tissues on the aisle, crying and cursing: 'What cruelhearted. They do not want to understand me even when I'm sick. Did they think I was playing in the toilet?'[101] The male guard who issued the order heightened the sexual violence of his gaze by sharing the scene with the audience – the male prisoners on either side of the aisle. By contrast, a male prisoner who also broke the rule was whipped without having to expose his body. Learning of Yoshiko's miseries, Xie questioned: 'Honestly, who has committed the crime? Who has made a young girl go from poverty to madness and from madness to prison?'[102]

Interactions with Japanese women outside of prison also challenged the self-other relationship in the emotional regime of nationalism and reconciled its suffering. Xie lived in

[99] Ibid, 127.
[100] Ibid, 148.
[101] Ibid, 94–95.
[102] Ibid, 99.

the Nakano Female-only Student Accommodation the first time she studied in Japan, before which she heard from some Chinese students that the resident manager did not like Chinese people. However, Xie discovered that the manager had never rejected an application because of nationality, and there was a time when all residents were Chinese. The manager looked stern because she was concerned about the students' safety and hygiene issues. Yonako, the dormitory cleaner, showed affection for Xie because she read the Japanese translation of Xie's *War Diary* and was impressed by the young woman soldier's adventure. Knowing that the Japanese government would soon deport Xie and other Chinese students, Yonako sobbed and left them her photos as a memento. She implored Xie to write to her once she arrived in China.[103] By showing everyday interactions with ordinary Japanese women, Xie presented mutual understanding and respect, elements often overshadowed by masculine political propaganda. Rather than deny the significance of national shame, she subverted the hegemonic hostility between the self and the Other it bred, establishing open communications with Japanese people from all walks of life, including flat managers, writers, journalists, and even a detective who monitored her. On 9 December 1934, Japan's Chinese Literature Study Group invited Xie to give a speech at its first symposium. Leftist writer Takeuchi Toshimi remembered in his diary that 'it was an unusual gathering, especially as it included Hasegawa Shigure, Wakabayashi Tsuyako, and Murata Syuko. Ms. Xie's passionate speech lasted for an hour and a half and made the whole room spellbound'.[104]

Equally noteworthy are friendships between opposing political positions. During her second time in Japan, she met Hayashi Fumiko, an autobiographical writer renowned for her focused on the underside of Japanese society. Similar to Xie, Hayashi's autobiography demonstrated a literary imagination that differed from that of most male writers rather than mirroring her actual experiences.[105] Hayashi's *Diary of a Vagabond* (1928–1930) offers a poetic portrayal of the degradation and instability faced by a woman from a small town attempting to survive in Tokyo, yet it also depicts women who, despite harships, remained undaunted. In terms of the theme of an irrecoverable hometown, Hayashi's experiences resonate with Xie's own, as discussed in Chapter One, when Xie wandered in Shanghai after fleeing an arranged marriage. However, the two women represent different iterations of the

[103] Ibid, 15.
[104] For the Japanese version and other information of the Chinese Literature Study Group, see Lin Zhu, *Modern Japanese scholars' perceptions of China.*
[105] Joan E. Ericson, *Be a Woman: Hayashi Fumiko and Modern Japanese Women's Literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.

Nora archetype: Hayashi, hailing from the invading country, embodied a curious 'Gypsy' who, in her twentieths, spent her monthly salary on travelling to an unfamiliar place simple out of 'boredom'.[106] While Xie, on the other hand, bore the weight of national salvation as a woman warrior. They both used literary royalties to travel abroad in 1931, yet the paths diverged: from 1931 to 1932, Hayashi resided in Paris and London, investigating stories of foreign female vagabonds, whereas Xie went to Japan for academic purposes, twice compelled to leave under duress.[107]

Their approaches to articulating friendship were also different. Hayashi, during an interview with a reporter, spoke about her travels in China, her curiosity about the lives of Chinese girls, and her belief that there should be no war between the two countries. She expressed this in a light, almost casual tone:

> Do you know Ms Xie Bingying? She stayed in my home in Japan for a long time, and we were very close. At that time, my house was often searched [by the police], and she suffered a lot of scares. I feel deeply sorry for discomposing her.[108]

Xie praised Hayashi's indomitable spirit and zest for life in her reminiscent essay but referred to her only as 'the author of Diary of a Vagabond', offering little personal insight into their relationship. Xie recorded just two conversations between them, primarily focused on her inquiry into Hayashi's reflections on her writing journey. Xie also noted that Hayashi would not have initiated contact herself, and if they had met as adversaries on the battlefield, it would have been 'extremely awkward'.[109] Their friendship, while rooted in shared experiences as Noras and developed through literature, was woven into a precarious social fabric, necessitating caution in expression and a multiplicity of roles, both chosen and imposed. Xie had to navigate a more unstable network, embodying various social identities: as an elder sister to younger women, a single mother raising her daughter, and a leader of social initiatives in a war-torn country. These roles imposed the dual burdens of familial nationalism and colonial

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[106] Hayashi Fumiko, 'Random Thoughts on My Twenties'(Suibi suixiang wode ershisui shidai 隨筆隨想我的二十歲時代), translated by Bai Lai. *Dongliu wenyi zazhi* 東流文藝雜志, 2 (4), 1936, 37.
[107] Cui Wanqiu, 'Interview with Fumiko Hayashi, a new female writer in Japan' (Riben xinjin nvzuojia Hayashi Fumiko fangwenji 日本新進女作家 林芙美子訪問記), *Xingqi wenyi* 星期文藝, 10, 1931, 3.
[108] Xu Fang, 'About Hayashi Fumiko' (Ji Hayashi Fumiko 記林芙美子), *Wenzhai* 文摘, 1 (1), 1937, 38. Hayashi's home was investigated under suspicion of her involvement in donating to communist activities.
[109] Xie Bingying, *When I Was in Japan*, 32.

violence. The traditional Western paradigm of autobiographical writing often overlooks the profound impact of colonialism on the moral framework of colonised societies. These layers of responsibility necessitated a more intricate transformation of her body, thoughts, and ways of being through their own means or with the help of others in order to attain a higher state of existence.

Nonetheless, instead of channeling her dissatisfaction with Hayashi's role as a war correspondent extolling militarism during the Sino-Japanese War into nationalist resentment, Xie acknowledged and praised Hayashi for her sincere depiction of a wandering life and her remarkable perseverance in adversity. After relocating to Taiwan and assuming a teaching position, Xie inspired her students by presenting a feminist interpretation of Hayashi's life story.[110] These efforts at searching for resonance led to emotional liberty beyond the existing emotional regime.

Conclusion

This chapter analyses how national shame served as an emotional refuge for the emotional regime of nationalism for Chinese students in Japan. National shame projects a history that is critical and self-critical of Chineseness, yet far from presenting historical facts, it is 'a floating signifier that has been used in multiple and contradictory ways' for a newborn modern nation that foreshadows individuals' lived experiences.[111] The discussion of nationalism and national shame involved understanding one's self in relation to the Other and China in relation to the world, and individualism was always situated within the urgent mission of nationalism. At the national level, national shame became an official discourse for controlling collective action when China suffered continuous humiliation from foreign powers but also sought international recognition. At the individual level, intellectuals appealed to national consciousness in their writing, integrating their experiences of shame with the evaluations of others to develop a social self.

In the emotional regime of nationalism, where emotional effort and emotional suffering coexisted, national shame persisted as a polymorphic emotional refuge among Chinese students

[110] Ibid, 33–34.
[111] Callahan, 'National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism', 215.

in Japan. For late Qing student Huang Zunsan, the Confucian concept of shame temporarily released him from the pressures of academia and revolution, allowing him to focus on self-cultivation and, in the long run, be better equipped to follow the emotional norms of nationalism. The Republican students moved away from emphasising high moral standards as advocated by Confucianism. Instead, they accepted a systematic and official set of rules for commemorating national shame. Their understanding of shame was also shaped by direct encounters with discrimination while in Japan. The national shame served as an emotional refuge to alleviate their suffering by invoking the state as a victim and adding a heroic dimension to their traumas. For the male students in Yu Dafu's work, national shame both amplified and justified their shame resulting from social and gender anxiety. However, despite the temporal resilience, they internalised the dichotomy between the perpetrator, the Japanese, and the victim, the Chinese, rendering a denial of self-worth.

For Xie, shame was more related to gender and the feminine body. Women had to bear more physical harm than their male counterparts. Her writing reveals that harsher gender-induced shame lurked within the national shame women faced, not only from Japanese imperialism and Japanese men's oppression, but also from the denial of traditional femininity and the construction of a modern woman's body by China's nationalist discourse. Rather than pitying herself in nationalist sentiment and retreating to self-aggrandising shame, Xie made both physical and emotional efforts to improve her situation. She mended her socks to cover her feet, which represented the shameful remnants of Chinese tradition, and to sustain her identity as a qualified modern woman. More importantly, she forged an empathetic female community with Japanese women who also faced oppression within a patriarchal society. This new emotional refuge was founded on transnational interactions and aimed at achieving more promising emotional liberty.

Rather than a lonely pursuit of inner spirituality, women's intimate community provided a fresh perspective on the idea of self and an encompassing circle of human-relatedness. It implied a communal act that reconciled Xie's emotional suffering between individualism and nationalism. Although she was a representative of anti-Confucian revolutionaries at the time, her experience in Japan foreshadowed her later change of mentality from one of rejection of Confucian culture to one of understanding, as will be further discussed in Chapter Five: A familial bond was recollected with broader emotional liberty when Xie relocated to Taiwan in 1948. Journeys to the US in the 1970s endowed her with a more cosmopolitan perspective to

negotiate with the nationalist self-other dichotomy. By reviewing Chinese traditional cultures in the US, Xie suggested that the value of humanism in Confucian morality could be a strength for forging social solidarity. It echoed Tu Wei-ming's discussion on Confucian humanity that the self is an open system; self-realisation involves the establishment of a circle that develops 'through the structures of the self, the family, the country, and the world; it must also transcend selfishness, nepotism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism to maintain its dynamism and authenticity'.[112]

[112] Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformatio*n. New York: State University of New York Press, 1985, 137.

Chapter Four: Organising Women at the Front, 1927 and 1937

Introduction

In August 1937, a telegram sent by Song Meiling 宋美齡, President Chiang Kai-shek's wife who was widely acknowledged as the National Mother, highlighted the duties of Chinese women during the War of Resistance. Song stated that 'women constitute half of our citizens. As such, we [women] bear the inherent obligation to undertake fundraising, tending to the injured, and consoling the distressed. None of these responsibilities can be shunned'.[1] The following year, the KMT government established the Women's Advisory Council of the New Life Movement (Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui funü zhidao weiyuanhui 新生活運動促進總會婦女指導委員會, hereafter WAC) in the first provisional capital of Wuhan, with Song serving as its honorary chairwoman.[2] Taking on the role of political guidance, her frequent presence in the press encouraged patriotic engagement among the influential women of society, modelling for them the concept of national motherhood as well as how to actively contribute to the war effort.[3] Song's gendered assumption scripted women's military involvement; that is, not only medical skills but women's 'innate' tenderness rendered them suitable for assuming the role of supportive caregivers for their male compatriots. Li Dequan 李德全, wife of General Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥, was another prominent leader who promoted women to prepare for the war. In her New Year's speech, Li issued a heartfelt appeal to Chinese women, calling upon them to embrace the crucial responsibility of upholding the home front while men departed for war.[4] As spokeswomen supporting their husbands' political careers, they designated women's wartime roles as self-sacrificial and nurturing within a heteronormative framework, while reserving militarism exclusively associated with

[1] The Second Sino-Japanese War was also known as the War of Resistance to commemorate the significant number of Chinese people who sacrificed their lives during the eight-year (or otherwise known as thirteen-year) struggle with invaders. Song Meiling. A telegram of August 2, 1937, quoted in Chou Chun-yen, 'Funü yu kangzhan', 173.

[2] The predecessor of WAC was the Women's Guidance Committee of the New Life Movement (xinshenghuo yundong funü zhidao weiyuanhui 新生活運動婦女指導委員會, hereafter WGC), which was established in February 1936. In May 1938, Song Meiling proposed the expansion of WGC during a national women's forum in the Lushan Mountain. In July of the same year, the WAC was officially established, with members from the KMT, the CCP, YWCA, etc. For the Council, see Qinghong Song, *Research on the Women's Advisory Council of the New Life Movement (1938–1946)* (Xin shenghuo yundong cujin zonghui funü zhidao weiyuanhui yanjiu 新生活運動促進總會婦女指導委員會研究). Doctoral thesis submitted to Fudan University in 2012.

[3] Barnes, *Intimate Communities*, 65.

[4] Li Dequan, 'National Crisis and Women' (guonan yu funü 國難與婦女), Capital Women's New Movement Annual (Shoudu funü xinyun niankan 首都婦女新運年刊), 1, 1937, 48–51.

masculinity. This aligns with the prevailing view in many societies that nursing is a predominantly female profession in which female nurses provide emotional labour to patients beyond professional treatment.[5]

Deeply upset by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Xie Bingying started to conceive of organising women to serve on the front lines. On 13 August 1937, the Japanese navy dispatched warships and marines to Shanghai, initiating the first major confrontation between the NRA of the ROC and the Imperial Japanese Army of the Empire of Japan. This event served as a catalyst compelling Xie to return to the battlefield a decade after the Northern Expedition.[6] In September, Wu Qiwei 吳奇偉, commander of the Nationalist Fourth Army, consented to Xie's request, allowing her team to accompany the troops to the frontlines. Following this approval, Xie established the all-female HWBSC at her home, assuming the role of group leader.[7] At the age of 31, Xie held the distinction of being the eldest member within the Service Corps, juxtaposed against the youngest member – a seventeen-year-old student hailing from BWNU. Xie's Service Corps mainly comprised nurses, complemented by teachers, school staff, and Xie's classmates from the Central Military Academy.[8] In contrast to other service groups, which were led by well-known writers and primarily consisted of individuals from literary, journalistic, photographic, and artistic backgrounds engaging in propagandistic activities or the staging of anti-Japanese plays, Xie structured her corps with a more pragmatic approach.[9] On September 19, the Service Corps arrived at the Jiading frontline and promptly dedicated their efforts to providing medical assistance and various forms of support to the soldiers in need.

Nicole Barnes's analysis of NRA nurses' emotional labour in the construction of modern China informs a basic premise for this chapter: that women established the requisite intimate connections with their patients and therefore escorted the disciplinary agenda of the masculinist state into spaces previously under the control of the family patriarch. Meanwhile, with their hard work on the front lines, women's service groups challenged the gender norm that defined

[5] See Arlie Russell Hochschild, 'Introduction: An Emotions Lens on the World', *Theorising Emotions: Sociological Exploration and Applications*, edited by Debra Hopkins, Jochen Kleres, Helena Flam, and Helmut Kizmics. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009, 32.
[6] Xie Bingying, 'The Service Corps's Past and Future' (bentuan de guoqu yu jianglai 本團的過去與將來). *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 196–202.
[7] One man carried the luggage for them, but he was not the core of the organisation.
[8] Ibid. Also see *Ta Kung Pao Temporary Evening Bulletin*, 17 September 1937, 1.
[9] For example, the North Battlefield Service Corps organised by Ding Ling and the Writers' Association of China's Writers' Battlefield Visiting Group organised by the Chinese Literary and Artistic Resistance Association.

the battlefield as a male space and the prevailing view of 'women returning home'.[10] The medical care and emotional relief they provided for soldiers helped to mend broken bodies and souls in the war-torn nation and served as fuel to keep the fight going. Furthermore, the presence of women, traditionally perceived as needing protection by soldiers, on the battlefield implied that men were derelict in their 'nature' duty to defend their families, which urged them to intensify their efforts in combat and kill more enemies. Nonetheless, this chapter departs from Barnes's focus on how 'illiterate Chinese learnt to love their brethren as modern subjects' and the way female nurses encompassed Chinese citizens in an intimate community.[11] Rather, it examines how a women's organisation actively integrated themselves into national salvation and negotiated with its complexities in the immediate month of the war before the state apparatus officially encouraged women to serve at the front.[12]

Previous studies on Chinese women's movements in the years prior to 1949 tend to marginalise elite women's contributions, contrasting 'bourgeois housewives' with 'New Women' and highlighting women workers or those who were involved in the communist movement.[13] Recently, research on elite women's activism has emerged, shifting away from a party-political perspective to focus on how the so-called 'upper-class' women's forces cooperated for their own social and political empowerment.[14] Current scholarship has extensively examined women's collective activities during the War of Resistance, focusing on their involvement in various political parties, institutions, and organisations. Notable studies include Nicole Barnes' discussion on frontline rescue teams, Louise Edwards' research on women's suffrage, Vivienne Xiangwei Guo's exploration of elite women's pre-war networking, Rong Xia's and Qinghong Song's work on the WAC, and Danke Li's investigation of women's

[10] Chou Chun-yen, 'Women and battlefield first aid during the Second Sino-Japanese War' (Funü yu kangzhan shiqi de zhandi jiuhu 婦女與抗戰時期的戰地救護). *Research on Women in Modern Chinese History* (Jindai Zhongguo funüshi yanjiu 近代中國婦女史研究), 24, 2014, 133–220, 173.
[11] Barnes, I*ntimate Communities*, 7, 12.
[12] By 'ordinary urban women', I refer to women who lived in urban sites and had professional skills, occupations, or a certain level of education to distinguish them from elite women and rural women, who are usually also known as 'upper-class women' and 'lower-class women'. See Guo, 'Forging a Women's United Front', 489.
[13] Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's suffrage in China*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008, 16.
[14] Kate Merkel-Hess, 'A New Woman and Her Warlord: Li Dequan, Feng Yuxiang, and the Politics of Intimacy in Twentieth-Century China'. *Frontiers of History in China*, 11(3), 2016, 431–457.

political activism within the underground CCP.[15] Professional women, such as journalists, educators, and writers, usually receive more attention.[16]

Less emphasis has been placed on the activism of more ordinary women during the early stages of the war. These women, who had received modern education or professional training but merely to a limited extent, were often overshadowed by more prominent figures. While the passionate guidance provided by women leaders was conveyed to them through print media and broadcast, the driving force behind their actions might come from other sources. They ignited sparkles within the currents of their time, but their names remain unetched in the annals of history. Specifically, Xie led her corps to the frontlines shortly after the outbreak of the War of Resistance, several months ahead of Song Meiling's official announcement of the women's united front in 1938. This prompts exploration into how public spaces were opened up for these women's involvement in national affairs. Was it another manifestation of crisis femininity following the Northern Expedition? To what extent did elite politicians, who set guidelines for women's actions on the battlefield, encourage their actions? How did the actual organiser of a women's service corps manage her members? Beyond posing these inquiries, the chapter delves into the operation of women's battlefield service corps, whether corps members altered the vocabulary of female heroism, and what their actual wartime everydayness was like when their emotional labour was recognised at the nationalist propaganda level.

In addition to Xie's writings about women on the battlefield and press reports, the diaries of corps members are the primary reference for this chapter. The latter enables us to get direct insight into the inner struggles of ordinary women warriors when they begin to break the silence. Equipped with personal narrating voices, they had the opportunity to act as subjects in their own worlds and tell their own stories about the war. The diaries of her corps members for a single week may not necessarily be representative of all the women's service corps during the War of Resistance, but they show us worlds of thinking and feeling about which documents drawn from archives might be silent – a silence to which we otherwise have limited access. They also help us understand how, during times of war, female citizens responded to the authorities' mobilisation and the way they supported each other and their country through the

[15] See, for example, Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing*; Li Xia, *The 'New Life Movement' Women's Advisory Council and the War of Resistance*; Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*.
[16] For the oral history of professional women, see Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*. For female journalists, see Ma, *Women Journalists and Feminism in China*, 7–8.

most brutal conflict in Chinese history. This support was not a smooth, linear evolution guided by the masculine discipline of a state, but rather the cumulative effect of different decisions made by individuals within the community. Women's wartime writing serves as a window into revealing this process.

First, I introduce the challenges faced by Xie and fellow women when establishing a women's service corps during the War of Resistance. Then, I compared the concept of 'crisis femininity' experienced by women's military organisations over periods, as well as how female leaders struggled to secure social space for women. Next, I explore the kinship terms used by corps members on the frontlines to knit together a nation-family. In addition to emotional labour in the general sense, such as tenderness and patience when treating the wounded soldiers, the corps members negotiated conflicts between soldiers and locals, using diaries as a means of self-discipline and stress relief. The final section examines an intimate community encompassing model female soldiers, ordinary corps members, and local women, demonstrating silence as a communicative element in and of itself for women. The members' diaries not only reflect the overall historical context, but also showcase individual particularities, interpersonal relations, and the formation of a diverse female community.

From the Women's United Front to Women on the Front

The KMT government's relocation to Nanjing in 1927 initiated a decade of relative peace in modern Chinese history, during which the gendered division of labour were re-emphasised. In 1934, Chiang Kai-shek and Song Meiling promoted the New Life Movement to advocate for a life guided by modern hygiene and Confucian virtues, aiming to mobilise a positive nationalism and instil it into individual citizens by intervening in their private lives.[17] The appropriation of Confucian traditions served the needs of the modern nation-state in terms of creating subject of governance, reaffirming the connection between women and their familial roles.[18] A 1935 official report categorised women's work into two aspects: family and society. Family tasks included household chores, lifestyle habits, cooking, maternity and infant care, childrearing, and education. Although the New Life Movement integrated women into a

[17] Chiang Kai-shek, 'On the Need for a New Life Movement' (Speech 1934), reprinted Columbia University, East Asian Curriculum Project.
[18] Arif Dirlik, 'The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counter-revolution'. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 34 (4), 1975, 945–980, 971.

national building project in which family became a subsidiary unit of the nation, women's engagement in the public sphere continued to reflect traditional gendered characteristics, including nursing, epidemic prevention, disaster relief, women's savings, literacy, care worker training, job placement, marriage, haircuts, and anti-footbinding.[19] The view of 'Good Wife and Wise Mother' (xianqi liangmu 賢妻良母), which had been condemned in the May Fourth Movement, began to revive.[20] First adopted by the ROC government to suppress women's anti-Japanese activities before 1937, this gender-specific slogan soon paved the way for women's 'natural' duties stated by elite women during the national exigencies. In her speech at an International Women's Day conference in 1936, Zhang Mojun 張默君, a feminist activist and politician in the ROC government, quoted Confucian classics to advocate for the revival of the concept of 'Good Wife and Wise Mother' in times of national crisis. Zhang emphasised the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of a harmonious modern state, placing the dual responsibility on women to fulfil their roles in the family while also engaging in social service on the home front to alleviate the concerns of soldiers.[21]

Despite the advocacy by elite women for active female engagement in war preparation and the emergence of a more eclectic concept of the 'New Doctrine of Virtue' (xin xianliang zhuyi 新賢良主義), which promoted the idea of men and women fulfilling their respective roles as responsible parents and good spouses, a conservative shift in society was evident in the obstacles faced by women.[22] In 1935, Shen Zijiu 沈茲九, a feminist journalist and a friend of Xie, founded *Women's Life* (funü shenghuo 婦女生活) (1935–1941), urging the formation of the Women's United Front in Shanghai. Shen pointedly stated that government agencies deprived women of work in favour of male workers, while the latter were still not satisfied and even labelled women competing with them in the job market as counter-revolutionary.[23] In the inaugural editorial, Shen noted that although women as social beings should bear equal social responsibilities and rights as their male counterparts, 'some "gentlemen" advocated "women

[19] Zaojin Xie, 'The Implementation of the New Life Movement' (xin Shenghuo yundong de tuixing 新生活運動的推行). *Modern Chinese History: A Collection of Essays. No. 8 A Decade of Nation Building* (zhongguo xiandaishi lunji no. 8 shinian jianguo 中國現代史論集第八輯: 十年建國). Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1982, 283-285.
[20] Yi Ding, 'A Revival of The Doctrine of Being Wise Wife and Good Mother', *Beiping xinbao*, 1936, 9–10.
[21] Xian, 'Impression on Li Dequan' (li dequan yinxiang ji 李德全印象记), *Women's Life* (Shanghai), 2 (5), 1936, 35–38, 37.
[22] Shu Long, 'The Essential Conception of New Wisdom and Goodness', *Funü gongming*, 4 (11), 1935, 9–14.
[23] Shen Zijiu, 'The Gender Career Debate' (nannv zhiye zhizheng 男女職業之爭), *Women's Life* (Shanghai), 1, 1935, 9.

returning home", while others stood for the restoration of "Three Obediences and Four Virtues"'.[24] The press media was an important platform for Shen to develop a women's salvation network against the resurging patriarchal trend endorsed by the New Life Movement. Based on channels like *Women's Life*, women fostered social connections and vocalised their concerns and apprehensions prior to the war.[25] In a parallel effort, Cao Mengjun 曹孟君 united elite women in Nanjing through local reading and publishing societies to share and discuss national affairs, demonstrating women's initiatives in protesting against the 'women returning home' agenda.[26]

Undoubtedly, elite women assumed leadership roles during the national salvation movement, establishing pre-war women's united fronts in cities like Shanghai and Nanjing. Through these platforms, they found empowerment and recognition at both local and national levels. However, this social network had limited influence on women outside of intellectual circles.[27] The classics cited by Li Dequan in her speech to mobilise women, ranging from *The Annals of the Warring States* (Zhan Guo Ce 戰國策) to *The Commentary of Zuo* (Zuo Zhuan 左傳), in which courtiers advise the monarch on defending the country against the enemy, held little attraction to less educated women.[28] A reporter, though inspired by the spirit of her elite counterparts, admitted that she did not understand such literature very well.[29] While the speeches and publications of elite women became guiding principles for Chinese women's pre-war and wartime service, it is important to note that, apart from defending the country, the primary motivation for ordinary women who followed Xie to the frontlines, was to leave families and marriages and strive for autonomy. Despite engaging in physical and mental care services, Xie's Service Corps did not neatly fit into the salvation networks of elite women because it deviated from their vision of a heteronormative family-like nation in the issue of women's emancipation.

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[24] Ibid, 2.
[25] Vivienne Guo, 'Forging a Women's United Front', 493.
[26] Cao Mengjun, 'The Summary of the Year 1935' (1935 nian de huigu 1935 年的回顧), *Xinmin Bao*, 1 January, 1936.
[27] Guo, 'Forging a Women's United Front', 511.
[28] Li Dequan, 'National Crisis and Women', 49. The two stories told by Li Dequan were 'A Qi man remonstrated with Jingguo Jun who wanted to build rampart' (qiren jian jingguojun chengxue 齊人諫靖郭君城薛) and 'if the skin will not survive, the hair will be attached to nowhere' (pizhi bucun baojiang anfu 皮之不存，毛將安附).
[29] Xian, 'Impression on Li Dequan', 37.

Predating the government's wartime initiatives for women's deployment and deviating from public expectations regarding women's duties, Xie's Service Corps faced obstacles from authorities when preparing to depart for the battlefield. Although both women and men endured hardship, sacrifice, and the threat of death in their contributions to the war, some considered women incompetent to handle the burdens of military life and detrimental to morale.[30] When Xie attempted to negotiate about her Service Corps, an official criticised that 'women could only work on the home front'.[31] Xie acutely pointed out men's lack of trust in women's abilities, saying: 'This is not a question of why we are not willing to fight with guns, but why guns are not given to us?'.[32] In the end, permission for the establishment of her corps had to be granted by a male commander, upon whom Xie must rely to lend her authority. One of Xie's corps members, Liu Mutang, voiced her disappointment to reporters when organising the third strand of the Service Corps in Changsha. Liu remembered that the Hunan government had not paid enough attention to organising women.[33] Another member expressed her frustration in an open letter:

> Men who have the ambition to save the country can easily find opportunities to sacrifice themselves for the nation, but what about us, women? If we want to make a positive contribution to the war effort, we will encounter many obstacles. It is truly heartbreaking that we are still being told to return to our homes at this time.[34]

An ironic contrast emerges between the rhetoric of female elites and that of male leaders. While the former consistently emphasised the importance of women's mobilization for the war effort – particularly on the home front – the latter notably exclude this perspective from their discourse. Instead, male leaders invoke perceived feminine deficiencies as justification for women's exclusion from active participation in the war's operations.

Undermining military morale was another question regarding women's frontline service corps. Despite women's significant role in mobilisation, discussion on women's negative

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[30] Xie, 'The Service Corps's Past and Future', 199.
[31] 'Xie Bingying Led The Corps to Leave for Frontline Work Today' (Xie Bingying benri shuailing tuanyuan chufa qianxian gongzuo 謝冰瑩本日率領團員出發前線工作), *Ta Kung Pao (Hunan)*, 1937, 627.
[32] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 309.
[33] 'Liu Mutang Talked About The Work of Xiang Women Yesterday' (Liu Mutang zuotan xiang funü gongzuo 劉慕棠昨談湘婦女工作), *Ta Kung Pao (Hankou)*, 3, 1937, 2643.
[34] Ouyang Cheng. 'Four Soldiers' Aspirations of Our School' (benxiao sizhanshi de houyuan 本校四戰士的後願), *Chou Nan jiaodao youbian* (school magazine). Chou Nan Private Girls' High School, 15 December 1937.

impact on the ethos of the army persisted, particularly in regard to heterosexual relationships. As one male military commander remarked, 'due to the possibility of female colleagues undermining military discipline, many commanding officers were reluctant to have women in the army'.[35] In 1939, an anonymous reader wrote a letter to *Wartime Youth* (zhanshi qingnian 戰爭青年), complaining that the lead actress of a play performed by her service corps prioritised romantic relationships over enthusiasm for work. The reader was afraid that this incident would harm the reputation of the whole service corps. As a result, three members, including the actress, were expelled.[36]

However, there was minimal criticism of the harassment facing women's service corps by male officers and rank-and-file soldiers. In 1939, a woman serving on the front line wrote to *Total Resistance* (quanmin kangzhan 全民抗戰) about how the army director blamed her for refusing the proposal of a lieutenant colonel. The director told her that 'men have careers, women have marriage', so it would be ungrateful to turn down a talented man.[37] She asked the editor whether marriage was a problem for women and whether the dedication of women's service corps was worthwhile if it invariably resulted in being chosen by male soldiers. In the response, the editor advised the woman not to let romance interfere with her work but craftily avoided the issue of male officers harassing women, claiming that the officer's problem was just 'being too hasty in character'. If the two people could 'help each other, urge each other, discuss and study together, and assist each other', then being in love 'not only does not hinder work, but also benefits work'.[38] The editor seemed to offer a solution that satisfied all ends, but replacing sexual harassment concerns with romance issues indicated a bias favouring male soldiers. The imagination of a harmonious gender relationship also implied that the dominance of heteronormativity was still over women's personal autonomy, even during a state of national emergency.

[35] Ju Haoran. 'Women Workers in Military' (jundui gongzuo zhong de funü gongzuozhe 軍隊中的婦女工作者), *Central Daily News*, 4, 1942, 4.
[36] H. F. 'Incorrect attitudes to love hinder war work' (bu zhengque de lianai taidu fanghai le kangzhan gongzuo 不正確的戀愛態度妨害了抗戰工作), *Wartime Youth* (zhanshi qingnian 戰時青年), 2 (4), 1939, 41.
[37] Tao, 'Love issues in resistance work' (kangzhan gongzuo zhong de lianai wenti 抗戰工作中的戀愛問題), *Total Resistance* (quanmin kangzhan 全民抗戰), 57, 1939, 1084.
[38] Ibid, 1085.

Subpar conduct among male soldiers was also a common problem.[39] However, female corps members were often counselled to tolerate the inappropriate behaviour of these soldiers to avoid troubles and conflicts. In an open letter, a man consoled his younger sister, who worked in one service corps:

> During the War of Resistance, China's new society is still in its embryonic stage, and the relationship between men and women has not yet reached a satisfactory state. In this regard, a woman working in today's service corps inevitably encounters some unpleasant things regarding gender issues. Many men still cling to old-fashioned ideas in their concept of women, and sometimes their behaviour can be frivolous, and their words can be a bit coarse. These cannot be avoided.[40]

The emotional labour undertaken by women on the front was multifaceted. It was not only part of their professional work, such as constantly displaying confidence, tenderness, and compassion towards their patients, but also demanded that they endure sexual harassment from male soldiers, which was justified by others' persuasion that such discomfort should not impede their work. Despite their dedication to national salvation, these women were still ingrained with traditional female responsibilities.

The script on women's 'natural duties' provided by female politicians like Song Meiling, Li Dequan, and Zhang Mojun failed to address such issues. In her wartime national speeches, Song Meiling repeatedly emphasised: 'Men should all go to the front to kill the enemy. The work on the home front is women's responsibility, and we [women] should make them [men] worry-free'.[41] Her messages were primarily directed towards military spouses, a demographic akin to herself, who were not engaged in hazardous frontline endeavors. Rather than giving practical solutions to alleviate the plight faced by women in service corps, some elite women might pay more attention to the superiority of their class, using activism to increase their

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[39] For the low level of education of wounded soldiers and the issue of civil-military conflict, see Cao Juren, 'Wounded Warrior Issues' (shangbing wenti 傷兵問題), *War of Resistance (Shanghai)* (kangzhan 抗戰), 49, 1938, 9-10; Yin Jianyuan, 'Wounded Warrior Education' (shangbing Jiaoyu 傷兵教育), *Youth Monthly (Nanking)* (qingnian yuekan 青年月刊), 6 (4), 1938, 19–20.

[40] Shi Jia, 'Don' Let False Love Destroy the Heart of the Struggle - To Zhen Mei Who Is Working on the Front Line in Southern Yunnan' (morang xuwei de aiqing cuihui le douzhi 莫讓虛偽的愛情摧毀了鬥爭的心志 寄給工作在滇南前線的珍妹), *Central Daily News*, 28 April 1941, 4.

[41] 'Madame Chiang instructed the resistance line' (Jiang furen Zhishi kangzhan luxian 蔣夫人指示抗戰路線). *Li Bao*, 2 August 1937, 1.

political capital and working to improve people's loyalty to the ROC government through civilian relief projects.[42] The similar demonstrations of the newspaper editor, the brother of a woman warrior, and elite women reinforced heteronormality as the fundamental rule of social functioning, typifying what Barnes theorised as 'the romance of the nation'; that is, 'individual men and women embodying heteronormative gender roles so as to support one another in supporting the nation's ability to kill its enemies'.[43] In this context, a woman warrior whose desire had been suppressed, distorted, and whose mental and physical strength had been exhausted could believe that her obedience acquired significance through the rosy vision of a new state.

Despite these disadvantages, after Xie led her corps to the front, women serving in the army emerged as fresh role models for Chinese women at large. Compared to figures in distant tales and high-ranking female commanders, they became more tangible examples of women warriors from whom people drew inspiration. In *Women's Life*, Shen Zijiu juxtaposed three service corps organised by female leaders:

> Since the news that Ms. Ding Ling organised a Battlefield Service Corps in northern Shaanxi and departed for the Jin-Sui front line, Ms. Xie Bingying later mobilised women from the Xiangjiang region to serve at the front line in Shanghai. Recently, Ms. Hu Lanqi organised the Labour Women's Battlefield Service Corps, and they have already gone to the front to work.[44]

Shen implied that Ding Ling's service corps might have served as a reference point for Xie, despite the differences in the composition of the two corps and the nature of their work. In her memoir, Hu Lanqi recalled the impact that Xie's Service Corps had on the formation of her Shanghai Labour Women's War Service Corps. Because frontline soldiers in Shanghai hailed from diverse regions across the country, some of them had different dialects and customs from the local population, hindering military operations and communicative efficiency. Recognising the achievement of Xie's Service Corps in civilian-military work, Luo Zhuoying 羅卓英,

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[42] Barnes, *Intimate Communities*, 64

[43] Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 22.

[44] Shen Zijiu, 'Women's Battlefield Service Campaign' (funü zhandi fuwu yundong 婦女戰地服務運動), *Women's Life (Shanghai)*, 5 (3), 1937, 3–4.

Commander of the Fifteenth Army Group, invited Hu to organise a similar women's team for his troop.[45]

Following in the role model's footsteps, various women's service corps mushroomed around China and laid the foundation for many women to increase social engagement and influence.[46] In a conversation with Xie, He Xiangning 何香凝, the president of the Chinese Women's Anti-Enemy Support Association (zhongguo funü kangdi houyuanhui 中國婦女抗敵後援會), urged her: 'Your corps was the first to go to the fire line, so you must set a good example for your sisters who come after you'. This way, those who criticised women's work would not have a chance to do so.[47] After Xie's success on the East Front, the HWBSC organised other two branches in 1937, bringing the total number of members to 60. The second team, led by Li Fenlan 李鳳蘭, focused on ambulance services in the Pinghan Line area. The third team, led by Liu Mutang, had a dual mission of political propaganda and medical aid.[48] Recruitment and selection for the third team were made in a highly participatory manner:

> Just in one place in Changsha, there are already 3,000 women who have signed up to participate in frontline work. The number of trained female ambulance members is 20,000. There are already 1,200 women who have gone to the front as part of the women's Super-Brave Squad, and there are also hundreds of women in the women's Big Knife Squad and undercover teams who have recently gone to the front line to kill the enemy.[49]

Although the HWBSC disbanded after the NRA retreated from the East Front in December 1937, women continued to deploy their organisations to the front lines, which extended beyond the political structures provided by either the KMT or the CCP for women's wartime engagement.[50] In March 1939, Xie planned to establish a new women's service team in Chongqing to aid the Xiangyang and Fancheng areas. Many women applied to participate, most

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[45] Hu Lanqi, 'Remembering the Shanghai Working Women's War Service Corps' (ji Shanghai laodong funü zhandi fuwutuan 記上海勞動婦女戰地服務團), *The Battle of Shanghai in Memory* (jiyi zhong de songhu kangzhan 記憶中的淞滬抗戰). Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2017, 1356.
[46] Shen Zijiu, 'Women's Battlefield Service Campaign', 3–4.
[47] Xie Bingying, *New War Dairy* (Xin congjun riji 新從軍日記). Taipei: Tianma shuju, 1938, 87.
[48] 'The Mobilisation of Hunan Women' (Hunan niangzi jun de dongyuan 湖南娘子軍的動員), *Social Daily* (shehui ribao 社會日報), 4 December 1937, 4.
[49] Ibid, 4.
[50] Liao Zi, 'Xie Bingying Goes to the Front Again' (Xie Bingying zaishang qianxian 謝冰瑩再上前線), *Zheng Bao*, 21 April 1939, 5.

of whom were nurses with first-aid skills, university graduates, and high school teachers. Some women who lived far away wrote letters requesting to join.[51] Following role models, ordinary women actively sought opportunities to participate in national salvation, change the status quo, and demonstrate their subjective agency.

A Tale of Two Wars: The Northern Expedition and the War of Resistance

Louise Edwards insightfully uses the term 'crisis femininity' to define Chinese women's wartime engagement; that is, the war allowed women to temporarily challenge gender conventions by offering them the justification of national salvation. However, this challenge was contained by a resilient patriarchy that merely replaced women's loyalty to fathers and husbands with their loyalty to the nation in crisis. The provisional positions women secured during wartime did not necessarily guarantee the realisation of gender equality; rather, it could be a false promise that propelled them to merge the images of subservient domestic women and the state apparatus.[52] The experience of the women's service corps seemed to exemplify this discourse during the War of Resistance. Yet notably, Chinese women had already encountered crisis femininity since the era of the Northern Expedition. While the first women's military unit in modern China saw the war as an opportunity to change the landscape for Chinese women, their contributions were either revoked or appropriated by its offspring. This section investigates Xie's perspectives on women's military engagement during the two wars. It asks whether her perception of women's precarious situation shifted upon her return to the front lines in 1937, and if so, what her solution was in her second attempt.

During its enrollment period in 1926, the Central Military Academy reduced the number of female students by half, yet it still managed to attract several times more applicants, with many seeking refuges from arranged marriages.[53] In a 1927 speech to female schoolmates at the Central Military Academy, Xie cheerfully announced that they, the all-female class, were outstanding and lucky enough to create another pathway for the majority of women through joining the army. Being aware of the hypocrisy of the 'ladies first' discourse, Xie urged women to reject preferential treatment by school tutors in order to achieve further equality with men in areas such as education, salary, and job opportunities in the future. She also encouraged young

[51] Ibid, 5.
[52] Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China*, 10.
[53] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 45.

women that while some male students fled due to the harshness of the military training, none of the female students did so because the deep oppression women suffered had strengthened their determination beyond that of their male counterparts.[54]

Nonetheless, these young women were disarmed by male commanders after being sent to the front lines and asked to serve only as propagandists and medical personnel.[55] Even if they received military training in school like men, gender division of labour forced women to perform as mental and physical caregivers, an extension of their familial roles at the societal level. Their autonomy was subject to what Haiyan Lee termed 'revolutionary structure of feeling', a hegemonic mode promoted by KMT and CCP elites that restored the Confucian framework while negating the radical implications of the enlightened structure.[56] Women's organisations were also the first to be abandoned in factional struggles or when the war approached its end. Due to the escalating conflict between the KMT and the CCP in the latter phase of the Northern Expedition, the women's team met a swift dissolution within three months. Xie expressed a sense of betrayal in the epilogue of *War Diary*:

> Poor girls who fought their way out of the feudal families, making the Party their life and the school their home – what do they live on now?
> You [the women's team] were disbanded! I cannot bear to speak of it! I have only heard that some of you sacrificed your lives; some of you were forced into exile; some were captured by bandits; some were locked up in feudal prisons when you returned home; and some are still behind bars …[57]

The mere existence of women's wartime organisations presupposed that they were willing to work without any official pension or livelihood security. After the restoration of postwar social order, public expectations would immediately exclude them from the army, demanding their compliance with patriarchal norms and past roles as daughters, wives, and mothers.[58] This was similar to their British counterparts during the Second World War: the wartime exigencies formed precarious conditions where questions regarding the limits and boundaries of nursing

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[54] Xie Bingying, 'To Female Classmates' (gei nv tongxue 給女同學). *War Diary* (congjunriji 從軍日記). Shanghai: Chunchao chubanshe, 1933 [1929], 109–122.
[55] Xie Bingying, 'Epilogue' (xiezai hou mian 寫在後面). *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 53–76.
[56] Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 16.
[57] Xie Bingying, *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 75.
[58] Edwards, 'The Impact of War on the Women's Political Participation Movement in Modern China', 222–224.

practise could be suspended. Yet patriarchal work patterns resumed as the war ended, and female nurses returned to 'what the ideology of the early twentieth century deemed a suitable domestic life, that is, marriage'.[59]

Those who continued to 'transgress' the gender borderline could face condemnation or even retaliation from men. In the early 1920s, having short hair was a sign of women's rejection of traditional views and symbolised independence.[60] Yet after the collapse of the KMT-CCP United Front in 1927, short hair evolved into a tacit political symbol signifying women's affiliation with the communist cause. Although not all women had short hair for this reason, it became a criterion used by the KMT to identify adversaries without the need for explicit political declarations. In the late Qing and early Republic, female revolutionaries and activists similarly had short hair as a mark of their defiance against the government.[61] The difference, however, lies in the fact that Xie and her female comrades, many of whom were from average families, lacked the same level of prestige, family wealth, and political influence that could have shielded them from repercussions. While female soldiers' presence and work in rural areas helped to promote a new womanhood, their vulnerability became apparent once they lost the military as a temporary refuge. In addition to being imprisoned by parents or forced into marriage, bobbed-haired female soldiers faced harsh reprisals from the local landlords and gentries, who were once the subjects of criticism during the Northern Expedition. This sentiment was reflected in a popular slogan in the southern countryside: 'Hooray for the bob! Gun down bob-haired women!'.[62] The ROC government's connivance in such incidents implied that men who supported the local force would not lose their privilege in gender struggles.[63] On the train ride home following the disbandment of the female cadets' team, Xie and three other female comrades had to pretend to be a male student's family to evade police interrogation.[64]

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[59] Jane Brooks, *Negotiating Nursing: British Army Sisters and Soldiers in the Second World War*. Manchester: University of Manchester, 2018, 2.
[60] Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China*, 87.
[61] David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China.* Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2011, 93.
[62] He Meng, 'The Whampoa Girls During the War' (kangzhan shiqi de Huangpu nvsheng dui 抗戰時期的黃埔女生隊), *Kangzhan (Hankou),* 1 (10), 1937, 157.
[63] Chih-yu Shih, *Song Mei-Ling and China*. Taipei: Shangzhi wenhua, 1998, 11–12.
[64] Xie Bingying, *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography*, 1980 [1956], 95.

Xie's speeches at the military academy and her involvement in propaganda efforts during the Northern Expedition reveal her awareness of the constant challenges facing women in the late 1920s. She argued that women's right to participate in military affairs was not firmly established and that women had to hold themselves to higher standards than men, which included not only active physical involvement but also ideological consistency, to demonstrate their exceptional abilities and secure their rightful place in society. One way Xie conceived for female recruits to justify their presence was by rejecting romance. Her understanding of romantic relationships at the time followed a class-struggle script prevalent among political ideologues, which 'called for the postponement of love and the subordination of sexual relationships to the revolutionary agenda'.[65] In a public speech, 'For Female Students' (gei nü tongxue 給女同學), Xie stated that as most women enlisted in the army to eschew arranged marriages, they should temporarily forgo personal romantic pursuits and be willing to sacrifice their lives. By obeying the army's iron discipline and even surpassing male soldiers, they could safeguard themselves and all women experiencing hardship.[66]

Another student's speech rendered the rejection of romantic love as necessary for class vengeance, stating that 'our goal is to save the suffering people – and our suffering selves'.[67] Xie also announced that romantic love was a narrow concept of love, a plaything of the 'leisure classes' (youxian jieji 有閒階級) that should be replaced by love for the country and the nation.[68] The ideal of 'bourgeois' romance had its appeal, but,

> If we look at people who fall in love now, aren't they only a minority of the bourgeoisie or the petit bourgeoisie? As for the proletariat, they don't even have food to sustain themselves. How can they even afford romance? Many people say that love is unconditional, and of course, I acknowledge that, but ordinary people's love has to depend on material and economic conditions. Therefore, the success of love presupposes the success of the socioeconomic revolution.[69]

[65] Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, chapter 7.
[66] Xie Bingying, *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 109–122
[67] Xie Bingying, *A Woman Soldier's Autobiography*, 1980 [1956], 171.
[68] Ibid, 77.
[69] Xie Bingying, 'Revolutionised Romance' (geminghua de lian ai 革命化的戀愛), *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 123–138, 138.

In another short essay from this period, 'First Love' (chulian 初戀), Xie portrayed the sorrow of separating from her lover due to their divergent ideals.[70] While the 'revolution+love' mode gained popularity in literary society, female soldiers were instructed to adopt a more class-based set of values, where romantic love was seen as an egoistic indulgence that had to be sacrificed for the greater revolutionary cause. This aligned with the replacement of the private family by selfless love for the peasants, as discussed in Chapter two. The same principle was further reinforced by the common marital struggles experienced by women.

Meanwhile, Xie held an unimpressed view of the endeavours made by elite women in advocating for suffrage. Aligned with radical women's movements from the 1920s, which marginalised female suffragists as an elite minority, Xie raised questions about the role of personal ambition in the activism of these women. In her 1927 speech, she highlighted that their focus was primarily on securing political participation for a limited segment of women, while struggles faced by proletariat women who lived in a world apart from theirs were disregarded.[71] Taking a communist viewpoint, Xie embedded her women's team within a global genealogy of women warriors, which represented 'a pioneering force in the pursuit of liberation and freedom for oppressed women not only in China but also around the world'; 'within China alone, women constituted half of the population, and with our team of one hundred and eighty-three women soldiers, each individual has to shoulder the duties of over 10,900,200 women on average'.[72]

The evolution of class struggle gave rise to another oppressive system within the women's community. During the Northern Expedition, women's associations imposed restrictions on urban schoolgirls who came to the rural area for propaganda activities, prohibiting them from wearing skirts. Radical factions deployed members along roads to enforce the 'hair revolution', resorting to coercive measures such as forcefully cutting the hair of women who resisted transitioning to shorter hairstyles. As a young soldier, Xie actively supported these ideas. She also expressed resistance to the institution of marriage, as most marriages in the rural areas

[70] Xie Bingying, *Prose by Xie Bingying* (Xie Bingying sanwen 謝冰瑩散文). Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1995 [1971], 67–71.
[71] This view was unfair to elite women, though, because achieving quotas for Chinese women in representative bodies after the revolution was an accomplishment that had not occurred even in most advanced democracies, which often regarded themselves as very progressive in terms of women's rights. For the achievements of the Chinese Women's suffrage movement, see Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*.
[72] Xie Bingying, *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 110.

were, in her view, a means of consigning daughters into a state resembling 'slavery' within men's households.[73] As Edwards observes, the development of women's rights such as suffrage brought about class awareness among critics like Xie. Yet they conceived of franchise rights as merely 'equality between men and women of the educated and privileged classes', leading to the fact that while they claimed a shared experience that all women as a group suffered from a collective disadvantage relative to men, those who did not fit within the prescribed ideological framework were muted or excluded.[74]

Despite a commitment to women's sake, the female cadets' team aligned itself with the authority of the army and the Party within a hierarchical structure, operating under overarching directives rather than pursuing its own diversity. This loyalty had neither helped to build a united community of women nor alleviated tragedies later facing the female cadets' team in the Northern Expedition, for an inclusive sisterhood would also seem dubious under the supervision of class struggle. One end of this pathway was the 'combat view' (zhandou jingshen 戰斗精神) prevalent in Maoist China, in which the communist regime sublated feminist legacy into political policies.[75] In the 1930s, the renowned communist writer Ding Ling altered the focus of her writing from women's personal sentiments to class consciousness to steer clear of being labelled as a 'petit bourgeois intellectual'.[76] Her essays on the writers' mission published in the 1950s further clarify her stance as a self-assured Maoist functionary. Ding Ling claimed that love was a radical emotion that deserved open discussion in the new society, 'just as it was during the Soviet period', and it should never be confined to mere personal fantasy.[77] In a talk session with readers, Ding Ling enshrined the eponymous protagonist of her last story, 'Du Wanxiang' (杜晚香) (1978), a worker who serves as 'a fully realised, proletarianised, daughter of China', as the only model woman soldier.[78]

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[73] Ibid, 41–52.
[74] Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 28.
[75] The 'combat view of life' is a communist slogan implying that women must eliminate all such slavery traditions as compliance, cringing, bowing, and submitting in order to please a few people, and that they must be independent, self-respecting, self-confident, unyielding, highly spirited, and opposed to all injustice – national oppression, social oppression, and family oppression. See Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 2004, chapter 5.
[76] Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 199.
[77] See Ding Ling, 'From the Masses to the Masses' (cong qunzhong zhong lai, dao qunzhong zhong qu 從群眾中來，到群眾中去) (July 1949) and 'Talking about Honesty' (tan laolaoshishi 談老老實實) (1950). Ding Ling, *Selected Essays of Ding Ling* (Ding Ling sanwen xuanji 丁玲散文選集), Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2009, 310-315.
[78] Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 321.

In the War of Resistance, a decade after the Northern Expedition, Xie diverged from the communist route and led a new women's organisation to the front again. Although Xie and some members of the HWBSC had suffered from disillusionment in the late 1920s, their sense of duty to defend the nation eclipsed other concerns during one of the most urgent national crises, and they once again believed that war presented an opportunity for women to change the status quo. As Gail Hershatter observes, during wartime, feminists did not wait for rights to be granted by a clement government.[79] Xie's previous experiences demonstrated that attempts to relegate women back to traditional roles after they had fulfilled their national duties were not always successful, and she assumed the role of leader for other young women. How did she inspire members of her Service Corps, and how did this differ from a decade ago? As the government set the example of being a 'national mother' and called upon women to raise citizens capable of killing enemies, how could women's service corps meet this goal while maintaining their vigilance against the crisis femininity mode?

Much like the Northern Expedition era, in Xie's Service Corps, women felt the necessity to swiftly adjust to military life and fulfil their duties on the battlefield to evade being compelled to return home. They also needed to outperform their male counterparts for the possibility of gaining equal respect and securing positions reserved for men. Xie practised what she had held since her days at the Central Military Academy: rejecting gender-related special treatment. When asked by the commander of the Fourth Army how much living expenses her Service Corps would need, she responded that they required nothing special and 'as long as we have food like the soldiers, it is enough'.[80] Xie enforced strict discipline among her corps members, requiring everyone to work hard, stop yelling empty nationalist slogans, and sacrifice individual freedom for the sake of group work and military missions. In a similar fashion, a female nurse in Chongqing reported in a meeting that whenever a woman slackened in her duties, her colleagues would exhort her more than male soldiers. Because of the cohesive teamwork, 'women's work performance exceeded that of men in one month, thereby eliminating their disregard'.[81]

[79] Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007, 94.
[80] Xie, 'The Service Corps's Past and Future', 197.
[81] Du Si, 'A Female Nurse's Talk' (Nü hushi de hua 女護士的話), *Women's Life (Shanghai 1935)*, 8 (3), 1939, 13–14.

Instead of political opportunism, the deployment of nationalism in women's causes during the War of Resistance was more grasped in a feminist standpoint and perceived in terms of particular group interests. Although Xie promoted a theme akin to the refusing romance seen during the Northern Expedition, she eschewed the previous overzealous moralism, in which female soldiers solely committed to class struggle rather than taking a pluralistic approach that involved women working for the same overall goal via different paths. During the War of Resistance, Xie's opposition to romance served a dual purpose: it aimed to foster unity among women on the front lines while also thwarting opponents from leveraging romantic entanglements to question women's working ability. Likewise, He Xiangning reminded Xie and Hu Lanqi that reactionaries might use romance as an excuse to prevent more women from participating in military and other social activities: 'Young women are the easiest to seduce. You need to tell them about various social experiences'.[82] By prohibiting romance, these female leaders attempted to avert a recurrence of previous tragedies, thereby avoiding the corruption of external forces in women's communities that had already taken shape. Such dispersal could compel women to return to patriarchal families, rendering them isolated and obscured again.

In addition to external forces, another factor in the crisis of female communities was the internal pursuit of a singular icon. In the context of class struggle, the emphasis on ideological purity not only facilitated attacks from the outside but also generated mutual attacks among women, separating them even if liberation was the common goal. This inner division was essentially a continuation of the male chauvinism present within left-wing groups, as can be seen from Xie's harsh evaluation of some of her female friends in the 1920s.[83] Following the success of Xie's Service Corps, women serving on the battlefield became a new model for Chinese women. Yet the discourse that divided women continued, although it shifted from praising the 'Good Wife and Wise Mother' to the public condemnation of housewives. A female reviewer, for example, highlighted the contribution of women on the front lines and utilised their stories to criticise 'wives' who were still 'roaming in kitchens':

> Hu Lanqi is involved in consoling soldiers in Shanghai. Ms Yang Ruoxia, who is from Wuhan, works with the Hubei Women's War Service Corps and edits the weekly

[82] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 88.
[83] Holly Lawford-Smith, 'Trashing and Tribalism in the Gender Wars', *The Moral Psychology of Hate*, edited by Noell Birondo. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022, 220.

magazine *Women's Vanguard*. Ms Huang Zigu is preparing to organise the Volunteer Corps in her hometown. But many women still stayed at home and played the role of housewives. Xie Bingying is suffering from severe lung disease and anaemia; Liu Mutang has three or four children. Yet both of them go to the front without any complaint. What reasons do other women have to stay at home?[84]

This type of review aimed to unite and mobilise women, but it ignored the fact that if the contribution to one's nation had been the barometer, women who stayed at home were also valuable citizens. Housewives played an important role in the establishment of Xie's Service Corps. As some members had infants who required breastfeeding but could hardly arrange for childcare, Ms Chen from Changsha volunteered to take on the responsibility of caring for and raising children. She already had three children of her own and was additionally taking care of another eight children, ensuring the corps members could work without worry.[85]

The call for women's joint action to leave home disregarded the existence of women's multiple possibilities and their subjective will, becoming a way of identifying 'revolutionary women' and leading to suspicion towards others. As Sedgwick notes, it is politically motivated to obscure any possibility of differentiating between one's identification (as a woman) and one's identification (with other women)', and 'to identify as must always include multiple processes of identification with'.[86] Hence, dividing women into hierarchical groups based on their alignment with the overarching revolutionary cause resulted in 'intimate denegation' among them, in which mistrust emerged and some women were not regarded as part of the same category as their 'more qualified' compatriots until they cast aside their own values in favour of those deemed worthwhile by the majority.[87]

Rather than encouraging women to nullify all kinds of love other than national love, Xie took a more flexible approach to managing the romance issues among corps members during the War of Resistance. In a regulation, she outlined measures for dealing with such relationships within the Service Corps, which included the following steps:

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[84] He Meng, 'The Whampoa Girls During the War', 157.
[85] 'The War Service Corps of Female Writer Xie Bingying' (nv zuojia Xie Bingying zhandi fuwutuan 女作家謝冰瑩組戰地服務團), *Ta Kung Pao Temporary Evening Bulletin*, 17 September 1937, 1.
[86] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1990, 61–62.
[87] Ibid, 61–62.

1. If a member is found to be in a romantic relationship and it has been confirmed by two or more responsible persons (evidence must be presented), the team leader or deputy team leader will convene a talk with her and advise her with a sincere attitude.
2. If the member continues the romantic relationship, [team leaders] advise her again with a sincere attitude.
3. If, after several warnings, the member persists, then her 'fault' for being in a romantic relationship during the war will be declared at the meeting, and the consent of all members will be sought. Finally, the last resort – expulsion – will be taken.[88]

Stating that the Service Corps was not an administrative agency, Xie hoped to address issues in a discreet manner that would not damage the dignity of the members or generate mutual disclosure and attack among the members. Shortly after the Service Corps set out, Xiying 喜英 reported to Xie that another member, Zhang Yongfen 張詠芬, was in a romantic relationship, because she witnessed a man giving Yongfen a bunch of reed flowers. Xie first reassured Xiying that her suspicion could be an 'old' consciousness, explaining that 'if the reed flowers were gifted to Yongfen by a woman, they [corps members] would certainly not laugh. In fact, many things arose from women tying themselves up with traditional constraints'.[89] Following this, Xie had a personal conversation with Yongfen, kindly suggesting that if she prioritised marriage, returning to the rear without risking her life on the battlefield would be a better option. Ultimately, the incident was revealed to be a misunderstanding. On another occasion, Ms Liu, one of the deputy leaders, was accused by several members of hypocrisy, as she was involved in a heterosexual romance herself while still chanting slogans about dedicating all to work. Xie organised the election of a new deputy leader, but instead of using Ms Liu's actions as a counterexample to warn other members, she made efforts to help her change working attitudes.[90]

Under the same manifesto of rejecting romance, Xie's priority in leading women's communities shifted from seeking overall ideological coherence to internal unity. Women who used to be divided into different categories now ceased their attacks on each other and instead

[88] Xie Bingying, *New War Dairy*, 104–105.
[89] Xie Bingying, 'Yongfen's Death' (Yongfen de si 詠芬的死), *The Age of Literature* (wenyi shidai 文藝時代), 1 (3), 1946, 45–50.
[90] Xie Bingying, *New War Dairy*, 200.

formed an inclusive coalition against forces that sought to divide them. The Service Corps' differences pointed to the important roles women played in social causes, not only in public roles but also in their private roles as wives and mothers, from which women attempted to secure their guaranteed quotas in political institutions and assert collective interests with a more pragmatic approach.

Endorsement for the Nation-Family: Emotional Labour and Kinship Terms

Emotional labour performed by the women's service corps was an integral aspect of their work. Since 'the emotional style' of offering emotional labour was part of the labour itself, their empathy, companionship, and smiles softened the brutality of war and enhanced the aura of a family-like state.[91] As a means of doing so, the use of kinship terms by the Service Corps members served as a linguistic tool to create emotional connections among Chinese people, in particular soldiers and civilians, through quotidian encounters. In her autobiography, Xie asserted that members of her service corps 'looked upon the battlefield as if it were our own home'.[92] They further likened the camaraderie within the army to the warmth of a family and took to calling soldiers 'brothers' to comfort their homesickness. Performing as surrogate wives and mothers, these women provided medical care and emotional relief for men who suffered from homesickness and illness. At the same time, they encouraged the local people to view soldiers from the same perspective and accompanied local children.

By stressing that soldiers were also mothers' children, they extended kinship terms to the rural area, persuading the locals to assist soldiers under the encompassing concept of *guojia* (国家, literally means nation-family) and thus forging a new emotional community in national crisis. The utilisation of kinship language not only allowed the members to reframe the nationalist cause as a familial bond that could be easily related to by civilians, but it also defined Chinese people as a group adhering 'to the same norms of emotional expression and value'.[93] Additionally, the connection between family life and national salvation served to justify the active presence of women on the battlefield and their association in public spaces, traditionally

[91] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 5.
[92] Xie Bingying, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 276.
[93] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 2.

reserved for men as protectors.[94] A new presentation of womanhood was incubating and taking shape.

Facing the mutilated limbs, blood, and loss of life one after another right before their eyes gave the corps members a visceral sense of the brokenness of families. Diary entries of Yan Chao 嚴超, one member of the HWBSC, reflected the changing process of her understanding of war. On 31 October, Chao expressed a feeling of boredom before seeing actual wounded soldiers:

> I really hope to see a large number of wounded comrades return from their missions as soon as possible! My sentiment may contain a sense of cruelty! But I think that scene is something that will happen sooner or later. They [other corps members] have all seen it, and I feel empty now. This is because of my selfish desire for knowledge![95]

Chao admitted that, as an ordinary woman, self-interest was the initial motivator behind her decision to join Xie's Service Corps. She was eager to prove her own value and demonstrate her capabilities, even if it meant more risks of injury or death of soldiers. While Chao recognised that this thought might appear 'cruel', she hoped to keep pace with her fellow corps members who were already engaged in rescue work, believing it was her duty to be on the front lines and contribute to their shared mission.

However, Chao's attitude changed after witnessing a soldier's hand being amputated due to an untreatable injury: 'I stared at the ground for a long time, deeply disturbed, and almost fainted when I stood up. [The wounded comrade was] also a child raised by his mother to adulthood! I didn't know how I started to scream'.[96] The horrific images brought the stark reality of war life to Chao, instilling in her a keen awareness of how war could profoundly and devastatingly disrupt the lives of individuals and families. During the War of Resistance, many women accepted their role in supporting the ROC government's exercise of necropolitics, that is, rescuing the wounded soldiers in order to send them back to the front lines, where they once

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[94] Margaret Humphreys, *Marrow of Tragedy: The Health Crisis of the American Civil War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, 50–51.
[95] Yan Chao, 'Waiting for The Wounded to Come' (yanbaba wangzhe shangbing lai 眼巴巴望著傷兵來), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 204.
[96] Yan Chao, 'A Soldier Injured by Steel Plate', 208.

again competed with the Japanese before graves. In her autobiography, Xie also stated that 'to save one soldier is like to kill one enemy', through which female medical personnel supported national politics.[97] A similar meaning was expressed by Yao Aihua, a proficient military nurse in Baoding, Hebei, who declared that women 'must work desperately, as saving one more wounded soldier is equivalent to killing one more *guizi* (referring to Japanese soldiers, literally means 'ghost')'.[98] However, Chao's evolving mindset shows that, from the perspective of an ordinary Chinese woman newly exposed to the battlefield, there was rather more to China's will to resist the Japanese than uncomplicated nationalism.

For Xie's Service Corps, keeping diaries was also a way of linking soldiers' sacrifice to the formation of a family-like nation. Although members disagreed with soldiers seizing the peasants' property, they repeated kin terms and the dedication of 'brothers' in diaries to channel frustrations over the inability to persuade soldiers into a call for supporting military missions. In a similar fashion, they encouraged the peasants to attribute their grievances against Chinese soldiers to the invasion of Japan, identifying Japanese soldiers as the sole enemy. A member comforted a rural woman who complained about a soldier taking her belongings: 'The brothers came from a distance to kill the enemies for our country. We are all one family. Once we help each other fight off the Japanese devils, everyone will benefit'.[99] In his research on the diaries of U.S. and Japanese soldiers during World War II, Aaron Moore suggests that diarists perceive their entries as a sincere reflection of their wartime thoughts and feelings. The 'truth' written in the diary can influence soldiers in return, reshaping their self-concept based on texts as authentic objects and 'formulating the rationale behind action, and these stories and events were mobilised to be evidence for implicit claims'.[100] By repeating kinship languages, corps members could smoothly internalise the written disciplinary agenda of the masculinist state as an act of self-discipline that enabled them to adapt to and handle the inner struggles in the context of war.

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[97] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 276.
[98] Yao Aihua, 'Memoir of Yao Aihua', *The Last Concentration of Troops* (Zuihou yi ci jijie 最後一次集結), Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2012, 205.
[99] Yuan Zhiying, 'You Female First-born Are So Nice' (nimen nv xiansheng zhenhao 你們女先生真好), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 204.
[100] Aaron Moore, *Writing War: Soldiers Record the Japanese Empire*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013, 210.

Through their medical and relief work, Xie's Service Corps worked to instil the state's disciplinary power among people, foster bonds between local communities and soldiers, and align the will of citizens with the national will. Yet, in terms of civil-military relations, the use of kinship terms primarily served to encourage the locals to show respect and care towards the soldiers, rather than the other way around. As Xie noted, mobilising civilians at the beginning of the War of Resistance posed greater challenges compared to the period of the Northern Expedition. The Northern Expedition was a battle against warlords and landlords who exploited rural China with warfare and taxation but also sponsored modernisation schemes in their areas.[101] The Japanese, however, were foreign enemies who were not a direct threat to most Chinese civilians before the War of Resistance.[102] When the Japanese had not yet wreaked severe havoc and massacres at the beginning of the war, anti-Japanese sentiment was typically stronger among the more educated population, whereas local residents tended to perceive the real enemies as those who suppressed them in everyday life. Therefore, during the 1930s, a time of mass displacement and poverty, mobilising rural people to work for bullying soldiers could be difficult, even with the blueprint of a family-like nation. In this context, the Service Corps made it clear that they only sought assistance from the locals for the benefit of the army and never burdened them for the corps. As they had promised to the commander, these women took care of all their own needs, including cooking, laundry (Figure 4.1), and haircuts (Figure 4.2).

[101] Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911–1937*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
[102] Parks M. Coble, *China's War Reporters: The Legacy of Resistance against Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015, 36–37.

Figure 4.1: Xie Bingying (right) and a corps member washing clothes by the riverside in Shanghai. Zhonghua (Shanghai), vol. 59, 1937, 31.

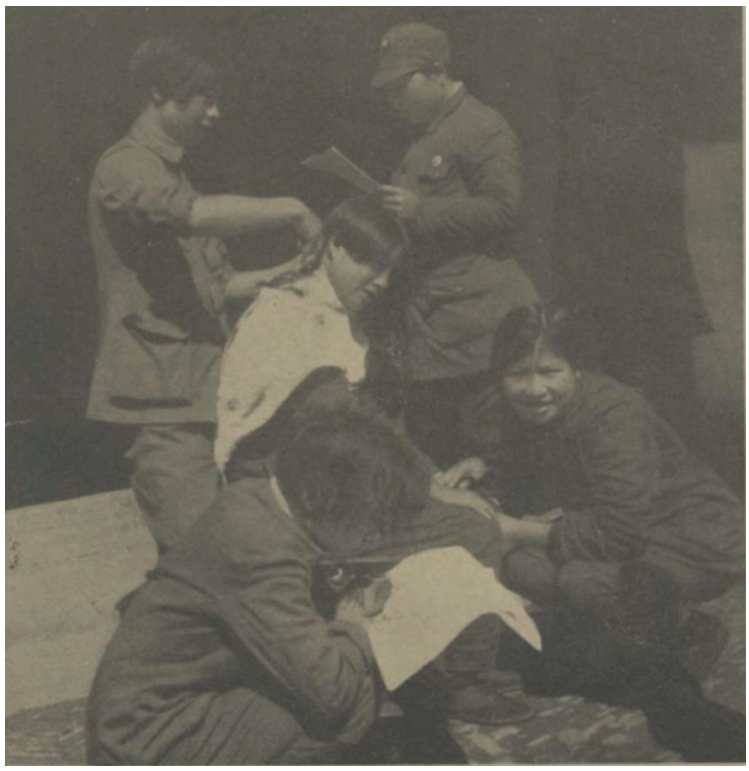

Figure 4.2: Members of Hunan Women's Battlefield Service Corps helped each other to do haircuts. Zhonghua (Shanghai), vol. 59, 1937, 31.

Corps members did not consider that help from locals should be free, but as volunteers living on public donations, they lacked the resources to compensate locals adequately. In her diary entry on November 4, Peng Lingjuan 彭菱娟 recorded that she paid one *mao* (a small unit of Chinese currency) to hire civilians for laundering duties on behalf of the wounded soldiers. When the locals complained that the payment was minimal, she had to appeal to them, saying: 'Our brothers are fighting for the country; you should voluntarily help out'.[103] This process showed that the effectiveness of the women's work depended not only on the aura of the nation-family but also on a more complex process of negotiation with local people. In her diary 'Arguing for a Basket', Peng Qingling 彭慶齡 detailed a commonplace occurrence involving her intervention in a dispute between a soldier and a civilian. The story unfolded through three sequential episodes:

1. Peng witnessed an altercation between a civilian and an injured soldier.
2. She learnt that the cause of the altercation was that the soldier wanted to take a basket from the civilian, but the civilian refused.
3. She explained to the civilian why he should help soldiers, persuaded him to lend the basket to the soldier, and promised that she would return the basket after use.[104]

Zhang Yongfen's 'The Hoe Problem' and Dai Wen's 'A Group of Women Gathered Around' follow a similar pattern.[105] While the individual events recounted by each member may differ, the symbolic pattern and its underlying significance remain consistent:

1. Conflict arose between the national interests represented by the soldiers and the interests of the civilians.
2. The Service Corps engaged in the negotiation.
3. The Service Corps acted as guarantors for the soldiers, leading to an outcome favourable to a national will that was represented by the soldiers' needs, while minimising the loss of civilians.

[103] Peng Lingjuan, 'The Story of the Straw' (daocao de gushi 稻草的故事), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 206–207.
[104] Peng Qingling, 'Scolding Each Other Over A Basket' (wei zhe yige lanzi zai xiangma 為著一個籃子在相罵), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 205.
[105] See Zhang Yongfen, 'The Hoe Problem' (chutou wenti 鋤頭問題), 203; Dai Wen. 'A Group of Women Gathered Around' (yiqun nvren weile longlai 一群女人圍了攏來), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 204.

Therefore, in addition to using kinship terms to bring Chinese people together, members had to take practical actions to safeguard the interests of the locals. The negotiation was not a one-time event but rather ongoing, as members used their amiable image to endorse the soldiers' plunder and stall for time before they, rather than the soldiers themselves, managed to return or pay for looted items on behalf of the military. By grounding the nationalist propaganda in practicality, these women maintained the credibility of the army and made the construction of the concept of family-like nation more tangible.

Patience and gentle persuasion made the service offered by members more accessible and effective. However, the shared pattern shows that the practice of enforcing state discipline was not as smooth as usually depicted in the press but included monotonous repetition. While keeping war diaries enhanced self-discipline, it also provided members with a certain degree of release from the emotional burden. Peng Lingjuan mentioned that due to the meagre remuneration members could give the local people, they had to persuade people to help soldiers, such as fetching water and cooking for them, with as much nationalist rhetoric as they could. However, in some cases, the locals only 'reluctantly' agreed, so members needed to 'make efforts' to get them again.[106] After recording how she consoled a local woman, Yuan Zhiying 袁芝英 added: '[My words of comfort to the woman] were certainly not as simple as what was written'.[107] By indicating that her actual responsibilities were more complicated and demanding than what she documented in her diary, Zhiying implied that her job involved repetitive and unmotivated tasks, and she took on more emotional labour from both the locals and the army, surpassing what readers might envision. Notably, Zhiying projected this sentiment more towards the local people in her diary than towards the soldiers, revealing a subconscious defence of the latter by mitigating their presence in such events.

If seen from the inside, the operation of the Service Corps itself was not solely based on creating a familial connection. Its operational framework was not characterised by the caring mother who tended to her flock or a subordinated soft arm of the masculine state. Instead, effective management and competition allowed the necessary hierarchy and discipline to combine with female intimacy, creating a community anchored by female leaders, not male leaders. When the Service Corps re-elected a deputy head, one of the reasons Xie believed that

[106] Peng Lingjuan, 'The Story of the Straw', 206
[107] Yuan Zhiying, 'A Countrywoman Who Is Afraid of A Japanese Airplane' (yige pa dongyang feiji de xiangfu 一個怕東洋飛機的鄉婦), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 206.

Ms Wang Yanhong was qualified was her motherhood. Xie commented that 'because she [Yanhong] is a mother, everyone regards her as an elder sister. It's the best thing to have a big sister who is kind and enthusiastic enough to manage a group of younger sisters'.[108] The kinship terms used by Xie indicated a sense of sisterhood between her members; that they entered the space of army life that used to be exclusively manly, made it their own, and celebrated rather than retreated from their gender. Another more important aspect of Yanhong's identity that Xie emphasised was her previous role as an instructor at a girls' school before joining the Service Corps. This experience equipped Yanhong with the management skills necessary for supervising young women. Furthermore, in contrast to addressing soldiers as 'brothers', members of the Service Corps always referred to each other as 'comrades' rather than 'sisters' in their diaries, implicating a pursuit to affirm new social identities beyond the traditional gendered roles.

Unlike Zhou Meiyu 周美玉, another female leader on the frontlines who praised her hardworking members as behaving 'like men', the most common term Xie used to describe female revolutionaries was 'great woman'.[109] Nor did Xie use more gender-specific terms such as *jinguo yingxiong* (巾幗英雄, literally means hero in a head kerchief), which refers to women 'who fulfilled their obligations to their ruler or kin with remarkable deeds in warfare', although its reference to the family fitted well with the thriving nation-family concept in the twentieth century.[110] In the 1940s, a reporter used *jinguo yingxiong* to describe the female members of Yao Aihua's 姚愛華 volunteer medical corps, but the separate designations for female and male heroes actually reinforced the foundation of gender difference, separating women's achievement on the battlefield from that of men.[111] Xie's choice of words demonstrated her awareness of overcoming the subordinate position of women, that is, to maintain a female identity without constructing female icons in a male vocabulary. Interestingly, her comments on a man who assisted female members in carrying luggage implied the limitations she placed on both genders. The words she used to praise him were 'honest', 'tender', and 'like a woman', which people usually used to describe female medical professionals during the war.[112] This

[108] Xie Bingying, *New War Diary*, 201.
[109] Barnes, *Intimate Communities*, 146.
[110] Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 111.
[111] Yao Aihua, 'Memoir of Yao Aihua', 206.
[112] Xie Bingying, *New War Dairy*, 55.

gender-binding description showed that she not only acted outside of the gendered boundaries but also attempted to think outside of the regular language to which women were assigned.

The Storyteller of Traumatic Silence: Leaders, Corps Members and Peasants

Similar to the Northern Expedition era, women who served in the War of Resistance received acclaim during the war. However, beyond this transient recognition and the public donations made to support them, few were acknowledged with official pensions or enduring societal acknowledgement after the war. Driven by a sense of duty to prevent her female comrades from fading into obscurity, Xie thought of writing a biography of some women to ensure the perpetuation of their legacy and envisioned entitling it, as mentioned at the end of the previous section, *Great Women* (weida de nüxing 偉大的女性):

> These women who devoted or sacrificed themselves to the War of Resistance did not receive official recognition or pensions just because they were not part of the formal military forces. After their deaths, no one knew about or paid attention to them. Women in China have never had status or been properly valued, and when they die, it is as if people have unknowingly stepped on ants, so of course no one takes any notice. Now that the war has been won … I must introduce these women to society and make people aware that women are also part of the country. During the War of Resistance, they fulfilled their utmost responsibilities.[113]

'The Evening Visitor' (wanjian de laike 晚間的來客), an article Xie planned to include in the collection, recounts how Liu Wanyun 劉婉雲, a platoon leader responsible for rescuing wounded soldiers in another service corps, visited Xie and her corps member Guangguang 光光 and talked to them about her experience.[114] After the male commander who introduced Wanyun to Xie left, Xie and Guangguang invited Wanyun to stay overnight and share with them more about her life story from beggar to prostitute to soldier. Their talk took place in an intimate, all-female space. The three women huddled on one bed, passing a cup of cold water to each other. Physical proximity gradually transformed into emotional closeness. Wanyun told

[113] Xie Bingying, 'Yongfen's Death', 45.
[114] Xie Bingying, 'The Evening Visitor' (wanjian de laike 晚間的來客). *The Age of Literature* (wenyi shidai 文藝時代), 1 (6), 1946, 29–37.

them it was the first time she had the opportunity to tell her story to someone else, and no one had ever listened to her like this before. In this conversation, predominantly recounted by Wanyun herself, Xie seldom articulated her personal viewpoints. Instead, she conveyed her support by tenderly 'holding one of her [Wanyun's] cold hands tightly as Guangguang wiped her tears with a handkerchief'.[115] On this night, their bodies pressed close, their hands folded, and they shared each other's tears. It was an occasion when a women's community embraced an outsider, enveloping her within their sisterhood and offering solace through physical touch. On this small bed, their voices resonated, amplified, and honoured, which, as Xie noted, could otherwise quickly dissipate in a vast society.

A similar moment can be found in Ding Ling's 'When I Was in Xia Village', in which she created 'the character typical to the moment', Zhenzhen, a young woman who was raped by Japanese soldiers and became both a comfort woman and a communist spy in a Japanese camp.[116] Zhenzhen's fellow villagers acknowledged her contribution to the war effort. Yet after Zhenzhen got permission to return home, she became an outsider in the village. People talked about her 'disgraceful' past and sexually transmitted diseases. In a conversation between Zhenzhen, the first-person narrator (a journalist), and a village woman named Agui, Zhenzhen expressed her doubts: 'They all like to steal looks at me. Nobody treats me the way they used to. Have I changed?'[117] Paralleling Xie's experience, this is also an intimate moment full of silence for three women. They gather on a bed in a cave. 'I' pour Zhenzhen a cup of hot tea, and listeners remain silent for most of the time when Zhenzhen recalls her experience:

> At times she [Zhenzhen] stopped talking and looked at us. Perhaps she was searching for reactions on our faces. Or maybe she was only thinking of something else. I could see that Agui was more troubled than Zhenzhen. For the most part she sat in silence, and when she did speak, it was only for a sentence or two. Her words gave voice to a limitless sympathy for Zhenzhen, but her expression when silent revealed even more clearly how moved she was by what Zhenzhen was saying. Her soul was being crushed. She herself was feeling the suffering that Zhenzhen had known before. […] There were many things that I had

[115] Ibid, 32.
[116] See Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 225.
[117] Ding Ling, *I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*, translated by Tani E. Barlow and Gary J. Bjorge. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990, 308.

wanted to discuss with Zhenzhen, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I wished to remain silent.[118]

Zhenzhen's silence provides a mute emotional backdrop to the gruesome tale she is inscribed with, allowing a horrific past to erupt and invade the present. The narrator and Agui have also found silence a mode of receiving and transmitting Zhenzhen's 'historical withholding', to borrow the term from Holocaust studies, in which sympathy for Zhenzhen, other suffering women, and even themselves intertwines.[119] Both Wanyun's and Zhenzhen's sharing made personal memory a re-memory that engendered an empathetic female community with equal intensity. As Marianne Hirsch demonstrates in her analysis of post-memory among second-generation Holocaust survivors, silence, a sign of the erasure of subjectivity through violence by persecutors, can also serve as 'the connective tissue conjoining diverse memory communities'.[120] The attentive silence maintained by the listeners signifies their reverence for the persecuted individual's requirement for a void, which also serves as a reminder of the untranslatability of their suffering. In this sense, the silent moment for collective re-memory corresponds to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms 'allo-identification' or 'identification with' as opposed to 'auto-identification' or 'identification as' which is more akin to personal memory.[121] Instead of an iconic woman warrior model that overshadowed female heterogeneity, mutual understanding incubated among women from diverse backgrounds.

Wanyun and Zhenzhen can be perceived as women warriors from different periods within the War of Resistance. Wanyun's statement embodied a call to align with a broader community of women during the initial phase of the war. She told Xie that after being forced to become a pimp's concubine, she wanted to unite other suffering women and enlighten them that their tragedy was not due to inherent inferiority but rather the result of social injustice. They should, therefore, seize the opportunity provided by the war to emancipate themselves. Zhenzhen's story can be interpreted as a potential continuation or serial to that of Wanyun. It reveals that women who made contributions during the war may face public censure in the post-war era, leading to their forced silence. As always, women begin to talk about how they experienced conflicts at all levels, either in a private space or by waxing tearful among combat girlfriends.

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[118] Ibid, 308-309.
[119] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012, 81.
[120] Ibid, 248.
[121] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 61.

The aspirations of ordinary women to build a socially recognised association might be shattered, but sisterhood retained a great deal of vitality and continued to thrive as intimate communities amidst the changing current of the times. During the war, Xie primarily wrote portraits of heroic male soldiers for propaganda purposes. However, in the year after the war, she commenced writing women's stories, aiming to resume the re-memory as the women's units in the war generation faded and remind the public that women warriors are far from being socially compensated for what they deserve.

While Xie recollected representative women, the voices of the members of the Service Corps were preserved through their own diaries. In the first half of the 20th century, military diaries were a common means of inspecting soldiers' self-discipline during wartime.[122] Xie also required the members of her Service Corps to keep work diaries, recording their daily routines and reflections. Yet unlike formal military diaries with specific text formatting standards and wartime propaganda highlighting heroic figures, the diaries of corps members were characterised by their candid and distinctive styles, portraying everyday encounters in a plain manner. In December 1937, *Kangzhan [Shanghai]* (War of Resistance 抗戰[上海]) published a special issue for the HWBSC. Xie wrote a long essay introducing its establishment, organisation, personnel, and work. She also compiled 25 entries that seven members completed during the first week they worked at the front. As the leader of the Service Corps, a renowned veteran, and an established writer, Xie endorsed the development of an all-female wartime group to a wide readership at the rear.

Members' diaries first revealed that, despite belonging to the same corps, they had distinct life backgrounds and personality traits. Zhang Yongfen and Peng Lingjuan employed a hybrid style in their writing, blending vernacular Chinese (*baihua* 白話) and classical Chinese. They used more monosyllabic work like 'zhu' (助, literally means help), rather than words composed of two characters, such as 'bangzhu' (幫助, literally means help), the latter had become emblematic of modern Chinese following its promotion during the New Culture Movement.[123] Meanwhile, Yongfen and Lingjuan tended to drop subjects when their contextual references

[122] See Moore, 'The Problem of Changing Language Communities'. The KMT also used military diaries to discipline soldiers in the 1940s.

[123] The increase in syllables in modern Chinese is due to the introduction of loanwords and efforts to reduce homophonic confusion, but it also results in less conciseness and compactness compared to classical Chinese, which is based on the literary examples of ancient Chinese literature.

were pragmatically inferable, a stylistic practice aligned with conventions observed in classical Chinese literature. They used personal pronouns not commonly found in modern Chinese, including 'yu' (余, literally means 'I') and 'bideng' (彼等, literally means 'they'). On the contrary, Yan Chao's writing was plain, sometimes lacking fluency, indicating a lower level of education compared other members. Chao's diary was more straightforward in articulating personal thoughts compared to their writings, which primarily emphasised event narration. Regarding the topic of their diaries, Peng Lingjuan often dealt with civilian-soldier conflicts, while Yuan Zhiying showed more interest in describing rural women. The diary of Luo Peilan 羅佩蘭, a member from Hunan, highlighted her aesthetic sensibilities when encountering the refreshing scenery in Shanghai. Before recording war-related affairs, Peilan described the serene mornings during her commute from her residence to the workplace:

> The morning air was fresh, and we all smiled as we walked or ran along the field ridges towards the battlefield hospital. The scenery of Jiangsu and Zhejiang was truly beautiful, with ponds, small bridges, and bamboo groves everywhere. The sun had just risen from the east, resembling a large red ball, casting radiant light on the bamboo groves. The early morning moon had not yet set, with the golden sun rising in the east and the silvery moonlight shining from the west, creating a breathtaking sight.[124]

The landscape, distinct from the familiar terrain of Hunan, unveiled a new realm to Peilan – one steeped in emotions and adorned with natural splendor, diverging from the backdrop of violence and revolution. The war changed women not only by their turbulent displacement but also by giving them new experiences of travelling around China. Diaries exemplified the effect of the war on young women's wartime everydayness, materially as well as emotionally. They, to varying degrees, held on to their own voices while continuously absorbing knowledge from the changing external world; that is, 'no matter how deep the disruption, devastating the damage, and traumatic the turmoil caused by the war, the Chinese people developed new normals, at least for the duration of the war'.[125]

The diaries also showed the various strengths of the members and how they learnt from each other. Peng Lingjuan and Dai Wen mentioned that Zhang Yongfen, who used to be a

[124] Luo Peilan, 'A Day at Work' (yitian de gongzuo 一天的工作), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 208.
[125] Van De Ven, 'Wartime Everydayness', 3–4.

midwife at Hunan Maternity Hospital before joining the Service Corps, consistently handled the financial responsibilities of compensating local people whenever members needed their help or required items for soldiers.[126] This suggests that Yongfen assumed additional roles alongside her general duties in the corps because of her talent. Meanwhile, Yongfen had exceptional ability in public speaking, as she could deliver impromptu speeches on the issue of resistance against the Japanese to a group of civilians, 'leaving the audience deeply moved and willing to spread the talk among their relatives and friends'.[127] Yan Chao entered the Service Corps only upon its arrival in Shanghai. She expressed her appreciation for the knowledge shared during meetings by fellow members. Due to her 'limited education and a lack of a systematic approach to speech', Chao often struggled to express herself clearly. Despite this, she was still eager to improve, believing that she could develop the ability to deliver speeches within the corps.[128] In addition to transcending their familial roles, the war also enabled women to discover and explore more possibilities beyond their previous careers, and the achievements of pioneers served as motivations for later comers.

Out of the twenty-five entries Xie's Service Corps published, eleven focused on members' interactions with the local people, in particular local women. In contrast to the lukewarm or even cold attitudes local women gave soldiers, corps members always received a sincere welcome. Whenever the members visited a local family, the latter would always 'quickly stand up to welcome us and politely pull chairs over for us to sit down'.[129] The locals' common appellation for the members, *nü xiansheng*, literally means 'female first-born', is an honorific title for a teacher or educated person of high standing. Apart from promoting resistance against the Japanese invasion, members provided practical assistance to the locals, such as teaching them how to evade Japanese air raids, providing medical treatment for indispositions, and singing anti-Japanese songs to cheer their children. Some corps members also taught rescue skills to local women, enabling them to become part of the national workforce and exposing them to the nursing profession (Figure 4.3).

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[126] Peng Lingjuan, 'The Story of the Straw'; Dai Wen. 'Two Wounded Soldiers Were Angre' (liangwei bingbing de huoqi zhenda 兩位病兵的火氣真大), *Kangzhan* (Hankou), 9, 1937, 205–206.
[127] Zhang Yongfen, 'A Day at Work' (yitian de gongzuo 一天的工作), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 206.
[128] Yan Chao, 'The Enemy's Plane Was Come. Raining Again!' (diji laile, you xiayu le 敵機來了,又下雨了!), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 205.
[129] Yuan Zhiying, 'You Female First-born Were So Nice', 204.

Sometimes the locals agreed to help the military not because of the propaganda of national salvation or the rhetoric of soldiers-as-family, but rather because of their perception that 'we female corps members are the friendliest, and they hope we can stay here to help them solve some troubles.'[130] Their interactions echo the sarcastic question that Xie put in her diary during the Northern Expedition: 'Why was it that she [a village girl] was not afraid of "girl" soldiers, but only afraid of male soldiers?'[131] Throughout the War of Resistance, Xie's Service Corps was able to achieve more for the people than she could have managed a decade earlier. Members acted as a buffer zone between the military and civilians and a protective shield for the latter. Rather than considering the rural people as objects of reform, they treated them as subjects in need.[132]

Figure 4.3: Village women trained by the Service Corps wrapping the wounds of a captured Japanese soldier. Zhonghua (Shanghai), vol. 6, 1938, 14.

It could be argued that these offerings were part of the members' strategy to subtly persuade the locals to aid the army. Even Xie acknowledged the military benefits of helping local people for the smooth operation of the Service Corps.[133] Yet, members' depiction of rural women diverged from popular necropolitics that collected and broadcast tales of civilian

[130] Zhang Yongfen, 'Publicity at the Wu House' (zai wujiazhai de xuanchuan 在吳家宅的宣傳), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 204.
[131] Xie, *War Diary*, 1933 [1929], 56.
[132] Barnes, *Intimate Communities*, 12, 67.
[133] Xie Bingying, 'Several Anonymous Heroines Sacrificed for The Nation' (jige weiguo xisheng de nvyingxiong 幾個為國犧牲的無名女英雄), *Women's Life (Shanghai)*, 6 (6), 1938, 25–26.

women's martyrdom. The latter blurred the distinction between military and civilian roles, evolving into not only 'the myth of resistance' prevalent during the war and post-war periods but also 'the actual concerted effort by the Nationalist government to resist the Japanese invasion'.[134] Intellectuals with nationalist affiliations, including Xie herself, could be seduced by such a public chivalrous spirit that urged all to die for the nation.[135]

Rather, the empathy that corps members felt towards local women was deepened through their daily encounters. Yuan Zhiying's three entries all focus on local women, two of which are portraits of female peasants. In 'An Unwelcome Old Lady', Zhiying recorded her chat with an unfriendly-looking old woman. She learnt that the woman's husband had passed away, her daughter had married far away, and she had no clothes to wear in the upcoming winter. The old lady told Zhiying that she liked the corps members and was not intentionally giving them a cold shoulder, but sometimes she looked harsh because she was living in an unbearable situation. In the end, Yuan gave one of her only two cotton jackets to the woman.[136] In another entry, a woman terrified by a Japanese air raid also exposed her sufferings to Zhiying because Zhiying was kind to her.[137] As local women dictated their lives, the corps members gained a new understanding of the heartbreak and hardships that the rural people had to endure. Most members were from a relatively privileged class compared to peasants, be that nurses, students, or teachers. Were it not for the war, the two groups of people might not have had the opportunity to cross geographical distances to listen to each other, nor could the often marginalised women's voices reach a wider readership through the members' writing.

Undeniably, some work of the Service Corps, such as fulfilling trivial demands of male soldiers, can be seen as a socialised version of women's traditional household work. However, borrowing from feminist Mary Daly's metaphor, women cross the 'Red Sea' of patriarchal prejudice to reach the promised land, not bestowed by a patriarchal fatherly figure, but by women's exodus community who 'weave tapestries of our own kind'.[138] In this intimate female community, members empowered themselves through a process that began with silence and empathy and developed through communal support and role modelling. Despite the

[134] Linh D. Vu, *Governing the Dead*, 147.
[135] Xie, 'Several Anonymous Heroines Sacrificed for The Nation', 25–26.
[136] Yuan Zhiying, 'An Unwelcomed Old Lady' (yige bushou huanying de lao taipo 一個不受歡迎的老太婆), *Kangzhan (Hankou)*, 9, 1937, 204–205.
[137] Yuan Zhiying, 'A Countrywoman Who Is Afraid of a Japanese Airplane', 206.
[138] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 138.

gendered military roles and the language of patriarchy that was used to bolster male power, a new set of social relations was forming within this community, where women heard voices from each other and spoke themselves without fear of being interrupted, misunderstood, or neglected. In this sense, the service corps challenged the social expectations of some elite women: that women served merely as caring supporters besides men and could only participate in national salvation as the second tier.

Conclusion

The notion that times of war presented avenues for women, the traditionally marginalised group, to emerge onto the political stage and actively participate in China's wartime politics is a familiar one. This chapter delves deeper into the concrete strategies a civilian women's community employed to seize these opportunities and the emotional struggle expressed by themselves. Chinese women struggled to save the story of their community, smaller or larger, to make sense out of the incomprehensible war. Their writings, to make order out of catastrophe and to bring shape to that which is unfathomable, serve as both motivation and solace.

The process of women uniting against oppression could be challenging because, as feminist Andrea Dworkin states, 'truly no oppressed group had ever been so divided and conquered'.[139] In a patriarchal society, women's military work can be subsumed under the rubric of 'crisis femininity', in which women are temporarily relieved from the conventional range of feminine expectations to respond to the urgent national crisis. Then, women's teams could be immediately revoked after the war. During the 1930s, elite women's promotion of gendered militarism encouraged Chinese women to enter spaces that used to be masculine, but it also confined women's participation to a gendered range and constantly required them to invest emotional labour beyond their professional work. During the War of Resistance, Xie's HWBSC showed how a woman warrior who had already experienced disillusion in the Northern Expedition could guide a new group of women to defend their country, unite them as an efficient female community, and allow more ordinary women to speak out as individuals within the limited freedom offered by the war.

[139] Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating*. New York: PLUME, 1974, 20.

For most of the members, participation in the military was initially an extension of the conflicts they were fighting on the family front, but their lived experiences in the war soon sublimated their understanding of the nation, leading them to make both great efforts and great compromises for China's future. Despite heavy emotional labour, women showed resilience in their negotiations with superiors, male soldiers, and local people. The diaries of the corps members not only reflect their diverse backgrounds, personalities, and work content but also indicate that the Service Corps is a combination of military discipline and intimate sisterhood that gives women a sense of security and respect, in which female role models at different levels, such as Xie to the group members, the group members to each other, and the group members to the local women, motivated more women to voice their feelings and encouraged mutual understanding. In cases of enormous horror, they provided the fuel for righteous and redemptive affect, although promoting the power relations of women vis-à-vis the government, as Helen Jones suggests, might be a different thing.[140] Three years after the War of Resistance, Xie accepted the invitation from NTNU to assume the position of a Chinese literature professor.[141] In 1949, she reunited with Jia Yinzhen, her fourth husband, and their children in Taiwan, a land and a political climate that was disconnected from yet deeply intertwined with the Mainland.

[140] Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914–50: Gender, Power and Social Policy*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014, 180.
[141] 'Female Writer Xie Bingying Arrived in Taiwan' (nü zuojia Xie Bingying ditai 女作家謝冰瑩抵臺). *Central Daily News*, 28 October 1948, 4.

Chapter Five: A Warrior's Postwar Dilemma and The Conservative Turn

Introduction

The organisations Xie Bingying spearheaded – the HWBSC, the women's ambulance corps established in the late 1930s, and the *Huanghe* magazine in the 1940s – were all disbanded before the end of the War of Resistance.[1] Similar situations happened to many other women's organisations, including the Chinese Women's Association of War Relief and Self-Defence for the Army in Resistance (Zhongguo funü weilao kangdi jiangshi zonghui 中國婦女慰勞抗敵將士總會) and the Women's National Salvation Association (Funüjie jiuguo hui 婦女界救國會), as well as magazines like *Women's Life*, founded by Shen Zijiu, who later served for the PRC government, and *Women's Resonance* (Funü gongming 婦女共鳴) (1929-1944), founded by Chen Yiyun 陳逸雲, a KMT official who relocated to Taiwan in 1948.[2] Special attention to war-related subjects might have hindered the post-war development of these organisations. However, setbacks were exacerbated by the conflict between the CCP and KMT factious fissures. During the New Fourth Army Incident in 1941, escalating conflicts between the KMT and the CCP revoked the latitude previously endowed to women by the Anti-Japanese United Front. The subsequent Chinese Civil War further limited women's political involvement, in which the military-backed dictatorship of male political leaders, the persistent factionalism among different parties, and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions collectively impinged upon the public spaces women had enlarged during the popular resistance.[3] Along with a sharpened ideological divide in the full-scale civil war, elite women's links split between the left-wing factions who merged their networks into the party framework of the PRC, and the rest, who either disengaged from the political circles or followed the retreating KMT forces to Taiwan.

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[1] *Huanghe* was founded by Xie Bingying in February 1940 and ceased publication for the first time in April 1944. It resumed publication in March 1948 and ceased publication in August of the same year.

[2] For newspapers founded by women, see Caiyun Wen, 'Contribution of women's press to women's intellectual enlightenment in the late Qing and Republican periods and its contemporary value' (清末民國時期女性報刊對女性思想啟蒙的貢獻及其當代價值), *Zhongguo bianji*, 6 (2), 2019, 83–88.

[3] Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Cold War politics existed not only in power relations, state confrontation, and war preparations but also in mobility, education, and culture. It permeated everyday life, and it was up to individuals to maintain a sense of normalcy in such a life. One year after the War of Resistance, Xie began instructing the New Literary Writing module at BWNU, her alma mater. She relocated to Taiwan in 1948, not to evade an overpowering communist atmosphere, but to secure a teaching position at NTNU. Concurrent with the decline of women's political collectives espousing a range of ideologies, was the rise of government-endorsed literary circles and civil education programs. A significant facet in Taiwan involved the official enforcement of a 1945 language requirement, leading to the displacement of domestic teachers who did not fulfil the Mandarin proficiency standards. Writers and teachers from mainland China played a central role in cultural and propaganda institutions. A prevailing career choice for many immigrant women writers, including Su Xuelin 蘇雪林, Xie Bingying, Meng Yao 孟瑤, Chang Hsiu-ya 張秀亞, and Chung Mei-yin, was instructing Chinese language and literature at secondary and tertiary institutions. A subset of them, such as Pan Jen-mu 潘人木 and Meng Yao, pursued teaching vocations even preceding their literary endeavours. Besides teaching duties, Xie was a key member of official cultural institutions. She attended the inaugural conference of the Chinese Writers and Artists' Association (zhongguo wenyi xiehui 中國文藝協會) (CWAA) and contributed to three terms on its board. She also played an active role in founding the Chinese Women's Writing Association (zhongguo funü xiezuo xiehui 中國婦女寫作協會) (CWWA) and the Chinese Youth Writing Association (zhongguo qingnian xiezuo xiehui 中國青年寫作協會) (CYWA).

With Taiwan as her base, Xie travelled to Southeast Asia and North America from the late 1950s, particularly to Malaya and the United States.[4] This trajectory was common among immigrant female writers in Taiwan: They first joined cultural institutions under the KMT government and engaged in 'counterattack the Mainland' (fangong dalu 反攻大陸) literary activities.[5] Then, around the 1950s, they travelled around or taught Chinese in Southeast Asia,

[4] Malaya remained under British colonial rule until 1957. The formation of Malaysia occurred on September 16, 1963, through the amalgamation of Malaya with North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore. This union marked the birth of Malaysia as an independent nation. In her articles, Xie Bingying referred to the region by the older name 'Malaya', which was prevalent before the formation of the unified country of Malaysia.

[5] Danya Lin and Hailin Zhou, 'An Inquiry into the Formation of Women's Literature in Taiwan in the 1950s' (1950 niandai Taiwan nüxing wenxue shengcheng zhi yanjiu 1950 年代臺灣女性文學生成之探究). *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究, 2012, 164–174.

including Singapore, Malaya, and the Philippines – major fronts for Chiang Kai-shek's efforts to unite oversea Chinese and realise his vision of a broader anti-communist bloc. From the late 1960s onward, they travelled between Taiwan and the US for purposes of tourism, academics, or family visits, consistently echoing propaganda to promote Chinese culture overseas.[6] Whether by intentional decision or due to contingencies, the mobility of first-generation mainlanders thrived under the ethos of the time.

In addition to Xie's frequent presence at literary events and patriotic commemorations, Taiwanese scholarship highlights Xie's pivotal involvement in the Heart Lock Incident. She played a decisive role in the expulsion of Kuo Liang-hui 郭良蕙 from the CWWA and the banning of Kuo's fiction, *The Lock of the Heart* (xinsuo 心鎖) (1962). Kuo, known for her pulchritude and bold depictions of sexual relations, garnered widespread sympathy in the following decades. Scholars have raised critical questions about how a woman once celebrated for her courage in confronting patriarchy could become the first to morally condemn another woman. Some have even speculated that Kuo's beauty and talent might have incited Xie's jealousy.[7] The conservative turn in Xie's writing, characterised by gradual evolution rather than radical transformation, has already manifested in her revisions of her autobiography. As discussed in Chapter Two, Xie simplified the psychological depth of characters and toned-down depictions of wartime violence, casting her past self as the protagonist of an adventure story celebrating human courage. Nonetheless, her evolving views on gender issues and her perceived harshness towards Kuo during the Heart Lock Incident remain unclear in the post-war context.

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[6] The increase in immigration to the US was primarily attributed to the relaxation of US immigration policies. In 1965, the US Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act, establishing kinship and skilled immigration as the main immigration pipeline, and US academic institutions began to expand their recruitment of worldwide professionals. In the 1980s and 1990s, the US Congress further incorporated refugee asylum and the Diversity Visa, a lottery to increase opportunities for people from countries with low immigration levels, into its regular immigration system. In 1980, 61% of Taiwanese immigrants in the US had higher education qualifications, while only 5.4% of Taiwan's domestic adult population had completed a college education. See Suzzane Model, 'Why Are Asian-Americans Educationally Hyper-selected? The Case of Taiwan', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(11), 2018, 2104–2124, 2105.

[7] Feng-huang Ying, 'How can the lock of a heart be open? Remembering a Book Banning Incident Half a Century Ago' (qiewen xinsuo zenme kai ji banshiji qian yichang jinshu shijian 且問心鎖怎麼開？記半世紀前一場禁書事件), *Ziyou fukan* (自由副刊), 14 June 2009. Feng-huang Ying, 'Kuo Liang-Hui's Heart Lock Incident and Taiwanese Literary History' (Kuo Liang-hui xinsuo shijian yu Taiwan wenxueshi 郭良蕙心鎖事件與臺灣文學史), *Journal of Modern Chinese Studies*, 6(27), 2013, 93–98.

This chapter begins with a comparative analysis of Xie's portrayals of two archetypes – female workers and the "Chinese Nora" – in her works before and after relocating to Taiwan. It then explores Xie's motivations for assuming an educator's role and how she integrated the role with her writing. Her response to anti-communist propaganda and cooperation with the KMT's educational scheme may be viewed as a departure from her image as a rebel. However, such interpretations overlook the 'dissonant' voices in her early works that address peasants and workers and fail to examine the consistency in her writing practice over time. Rather than viewing modern Chinese history and Taiwan's history as confrontational forces, this chapter follows Xie's transnational journey to explore how she reconceptualised her understanding of gender and identity within the terms set by borders. Her re-evaluation of Confucianism also underscores a former warrior's efforts to seek an alternative approach to reconciling with traumatic memories.

Victims or Condemnable Women? The Confusion of a (Ex-)Communist

Xie's struggle for women's rights and freedom has been discussed in Chapters One and Four, particularly through her shared experiences with other women, such as Chinese Nora who escaped home for freedom, military cadets, and members of the wartime service corps. The Heart Lock Incident sheds light on a less explored area of her life, that is, how she viewed socially disadvantaged groups when she was an outsider or had already overcome similar challenges. Her modification of the depiction of peasants in different versions of her autobiographies provides an illustration, but more examples are needed to thoroughly examine her evolving gender consciousness in both mainland China and Taiwan.[8] This includes her perspective on workers as an employer, students as a professor, and young revolutionaries resembling her past self as an accomplished writer.

Female Workers: Vicarious Family Members

In the 1930s, labourers were one of Xie's main focuses alongside peasants. In her short story 'Abandonment' (paoqi 抛弃) (1932), Xie depicted a revolutionary couple who abandoned their newborn daughter due to financial problems. Like Xie, the female protagonist, Shanshan, underwent several months of training at a military academy before moving to

[8] For Xie's depictions of female peasants, see Chapter two.

Shanghai for Communist activities. When Shanshan discussed the mansions in Shanghai with her husband, she lamented that those luxury western-style buildings were built by barefoot constructors who had no decent clothes and were not allowed by the employers to rest against the walls they made.[9] In 'Female Coolie' (Nü Kuli 女苦力) (1936), she expressed a deep sense of shame when observing female workers building new roads, considering them and herself as belonging to 'two classes': the former as the honourable labourers, while she merely enjoyed the fruits of their hardship: 'They work so terribly hard to reclaim the mountains and build pavements, but in the future, when automobiles are available, it will be the wealthy who benefit from it'.[10]

This sympathy, however, was accompanied by a sense of unease, especially when Xie realised that some female workers were less inclined to form camaraderie with her because of her poverty. When her husband was arrested for joining the Communist underground in 1930, Xie could hardly afford the house rent and the milk powder for her half-year-old daughter. She depicted in 'Liquidation' how she had to endure the ridicule of the house maid, Mother Yang: 'When the coachmen went back home, their wives would have already burned the stove and prepared for them a bowl of hot tea to dissipate the chill, but what about me?'[11] She lamented Mother Yang's lack of solidarity with her, a feeling of being betrayed by the comrades of the same destiny:

> Sometimes I would rather kill the landlord who threatened me [to throw Xie's luggage out because Xie could not pay the rent in time], the old mother [Mother Yang] who derided me, and the child who troubled me. I, with my sharp knife, would stand beside the bodies and laugh out loud. Alas! Why did the old mother bully me like that? Weren't we the same kind of poor people? Didn't she understand that I go out every day for the happiness of human beings like her?[12]

Xie expected not only professional services but also emotional care from Mother Yang. She likened an employment relationship to the husband-wife metaphor to express her

[9] Xie Bingying, 'Abandonment' (Paoqi 抛弃), *A Way Forward* (Qianlu 前路), Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1932, 53.
[10] Xie Bingying, 'Female Collie' (Nü Kuli 女苦力), *Hunan's Wind*, Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1936, 6.
[11] Xie Bingying, 'Liquidation', 124.
[12] Ibid, 120.

disappointment about Mother Yang's indifference, ignoring that the house maid also played the role of the 'husband', as she was earning a living for her own family. For Xie, Mother Yang should transcend the role of a mere salaried worker and assumed a familial figure's place, which would eventually embody a union of proletarians beyond private ties. When she refused to meet these expectations, Xie exhibited a propensity for violence far beyond that of a typical employer.

The feeling of unease is also depicted in 'Abandonment'. After Shanshan gives birth in a hospital, several middle-aged female care workers ridicule her as a 'poor bone' because she was unable to pay the bed charge. Shanshan feels the same indignation as Xie, believing she is betrayed by those who, in her view, should not have aligned with 'the world of money'. She wants to punch those 'money-oriented' care workers and spit in their faces, thinking that if she has money to pay the surgical and injection fees, those 'ungrateful' would not have been looked down upon her.[13] In contrast, Shanshan is more tolerant of discrimination by those with assets. When the manager of a pawnbroker laughs at her patched jacket, she feels more sadness than anger. Based on the view that the proletarian family substitutes the real family, Shanshan perceives her conflict with the workers as evidence of the lack of emotional support from her intimate comrades. What irritates her is not only the failure of revolutionaries to spread their ideology to ordinary people, but the collapse of an imagined family forged through shared oppression and revolutionary struggle.

Xie's search for an ideal company was fulfilled by another house maid, Mother Meng, in the 1940s. Their bond was based on a mother-daughter relationship rather than class-struggle emotions. When Mother Meng was unjustly deprived of her pension due to lies from her daughter and nephew, Xie promised to treat her as her own mother and ensure she had a dignified burial, respecting Mother Meng's traditional belief in 'being buried to rest in peace' (rutu weian 入土为安).[14] In traditional Chinese culture, proper care for the elderly's funerals is vital to fulfil filial piety.

Notably, this was not a mere emotional connection. Their mutual support was achieved by Xie's superior economic conditions, which enabled her to alleviate Mother Meng's financial

[13] Xie, 'Abandonment', 54.
[14] Xie Bingying. *Aiwan Pavilion* (Aiwan ting 爱晚亭). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1954, 46.

concerns and offer additional support, as well as her regrets for leaving her own mother in her youth. In 1936, Xie had stayed with her sick mother during the final stages of her life until the War of Resistance forced Xie to leave her hometown. The tension between a traditional mother and her rebellious daughter was replaced by a belated affection. More importantly, Xie's nostalgia for Mother Meng was intensified by their separation after she moved to Taiwan, as she was unable to find any satisfactory help in the local market:

> Nearly six years have elapsed since I last saw Mother Meng, and not a single day passes without her absence weighing heavily on my heart, especially when I struggled with domestic helpers. [...] Currently, I hold onto a distant hope that when we eventually return to Beiping, we will reunite with Mother Meng, my steadfast ally and a comforting friend during times of turmoil.[15]

In the early post-war years, although Xie expressed fascination with the scenery of Taiwan, her interactions with the local people were marked by a patronising attitude – an important aspect of the 'guest mentality' – and provided little insight into the thoughts of the Taiwanese community.[16] The island served as a juxtaposition to what she perceived as the more civilised Chinese society. She regarded those unable to converse with her in Chinese as peripheral individuals with inferior knowledge. In 'The Housemaid' (xia'nü 下女), Xie recounted a Taiwanese maid's unsatisfactory performance:

> She was only sixteen years old, dressed in ragged clothes, with unkempt hair that she never combed and a face that seemed to be poorly washed. She was always jumping and bouncing when she walked, and she mumbled a tune we did not understand. Sometimes it was like a Japanese song, and sometimes it was like a Taiwanese song.[17]

After arriving in Taiwan, Xie was actively involved in the cultural sector, where Mandarin served as the official language, and distanced from local communities remaining with Japanese

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Scholars, including Stéphane Corcuff and Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, use the terms 'guest mentality' or 'sojourner mentality' (guoke xintai 過客心態) to describe a belief held by civil war exiles that the KMT regime would take their home back in five years. In addition to the government's staunch counter-attack motto, victory in the War of Resistance yielded a positive outcome for the seemingly forthcoming civil war: the displacement would be over, and all could return home. See Yang, *The Great Exodus from China*, 117. The descriptions of scenery and infrastructure outweighed the descriptions of local people in the works about Taiwan.

[17] Xie Bingying, 'The Housemaid' (Xianü 下女). *Zhonghua ribao* 中華日報, 5 June 1950, 0007.

colonial influence. Xie offered financial support to domestic workers but complained about the need to frequently recruit new staff due to their unsatisfactory performance. The language spoken by her Taiwanese maids was incomprehensible and impenetrable to her – an unfamiliar patchwork of sounds. Therefore, providing them with education in language proficiency and interpersonal skills would ensure their job stability. This viewpoint resonates with her *War Diary*: She empathised with female peasants for enduring dual hardships at home and during wartime, yet also perceived them as uninformed, advocating for the education by revolutionaries. While in Taiwan, her role as professor in Chinese seems to further endorse these comments and deny the testimony of the vulnerable.

Xie's experience abroad further illustrates that her identity as a woman warrior is more sophisticated than mere advocacy for women's rights or the envisioning of a community of shared sympathy among women. From January 1958 to February 1961, Xie taught Chinese at Taiping Hwa Lian High School in Malaya and travelled through the country. Upon her return to Taiwan, she published a collection of her travelogues, *Travels in Malaya* (Malaiya youji 馬來亞遊記) (1961). This work stands out as the inaugural prose travelogue on Malaya by a Chinese woman from Taiwan. Her observations of Malaysian Chinese women, including road builders, construction workers, and rubber cutters, echo her earlier views on female labourers, admiring the diligence and hard work of these 'unsung heroines'.[18] Yet rather than a straightforward depiction of workers' hardships, Xie sought to convey more complex meanings by adding a nationalistic dimension to her question:

> I was stunned when I saw our overseas Chinese men and women building roads, bridges, or standing on two- or three-story buildings with their arms outstretched to catch the bricks and mortar that were thrown to them from below. Why do I never see a Malay woman, an Indian woman, or an English woman taking part in this kind of hard labour? Why is it that only Chinese women are capable of such suffering?[19]

Xie observed that despite their arduous and even dangerous work, Chinese workers prioritised their children's education, sending them to Chinese language schools to sustain their cultural heritage. She acknowledged, from a teacher's perspective, those who love their country and

[18] Xie Bingying, *Travels in Malaya* (malaiya youji 馬來亞遊記). Taipei: Haichao yinyue chubanshe, 1961, 122.
[19] Ibid.

actively worked towards the education of the next generation. Overseas Chinese's willingness to donate hard-earned wages to support Nanyang University further demonstrated their love for the motherland.[20]

In Xie's later portrayals of workers, the themes of education and patriotism become increasingly prominent, particularly with the promotion of the Chinese language both in Taiwan and abroad as a strategy to extend the KMT's influence. The workers themselves may have taken more on a symbolic significance for Xie, as she devoted little attention to individual interactions, instead addressing them as a collective entity. As Xie transitioned from a soldier to a teacher, this shift in focus was not entirely due to compliance with political propaganda but a personal choice. The educational dimension of her writing and the tendency for social stability become more pronounced in the pieces associated with the trope of the Chinese Nora, where she made a radical departure from her past experiences.

Young Nora and Her Mentor Who Used to Be a Nora

If Xie's youthful arguments with her parents, as discussed in Chapter One, were saturated with the 'New Fiction'-style debates on free love, she now made a clear distinction between Nora in Ibsen's work and women who embraced the supremacy of love, a prevalent topic in Chinese literature of the 1920s. As Xie pointed out in the 1950s, the most admirable aspect of Nora is her realisation that 'a woman's duty is not only to her husband and her children, but more importantly, to be an independent individual'.[21] Nora's refusion to be a man's doll was the main factor that led her to leave home. Yet Xie's ensuing argument digresses from Nora's struggles. Rather, she inferred that the story critiques 'the so-called intelligent people who wear masks and ramble about humanity, justice, and morality, while in their hearts there is nothing but greed and lust'.[22] No longer using this story as a basis for exploring love and freedom as in the 1920s, Xie now extracted 'lust' as an undesirable trait for literature. Likewise, she argues in a 1954 collection that Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is 'a cynical woman susceptible to the indulgence of harsh circumstances, and her suicide is a self-inflicted

[20] Nanyang University (南洋大學) was a private university in Singapore from 1956 to 1980. During its existence, it was Singapore's only private university offering instruction in the Chinese language. In the early 1950s, the idea of establishing a Chinese university garnered donation from Chinese people from all walks of life. The Singapore Hokkien Association donated 500 acres in the western Jurong area, which was then largely undeveloped rural land.
[21] Xie Bingying, *Message from the Green Window*, 46.
[22] Ibid.

disaster'.[23] According to Xie, while readers might sympathise with Emma for marrying Charles Bovary, it is disappointing that she repeatedly falls for the same trick because she cannot restrain her feelings. In contrast, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a novel Xie admired since her youth, handles the 'moral issue' well.[24] Specifically, Charlotte, who embodies chastity, chastises Werther for losing control and kissing her, while Werther finally sacrifices himself rather than destroy her marriage.

In the 1950s, Xie published a series of essays on writing, reading, and love issues based on her correspondences with readers, most of whom were middle school students. In addition to the above criticism of prestigious fiction, she advised young women against defying their parents for the sake of romance. While she professed full support for the freedom to love and the modern way of living, she believed it was her responsibility as an adult to educate young people, urging them to 'suppress their feelings with reason' and shift their interests from musical films about sexual attraction to reading and sports.[25] For underage girls who have not yet entered college, Xie remarked that 'they lack a clear understanding of society; their will is weak, and they could be credulous to men's bewildering words, which will jeopardise their precious future'.[26] From this perspective, her criticism of Kuo Liang-hui stemmed more from an elder's concern about the younger generation, particularly students, becoming entangled in relationships that might impede their career development. Although Kuo was 36 years old at the time of *The Lock of the Heart*'s publication, Xie began her open letter by reminiscing about Kuo's middle school years in the Mainland. She noted that Kuo had been a very gifted student in literature while positioning herself in the role of Kuo's teacher.[27] Xie attempted to supplement her criticism with guidelines for action, but her manifestos about 'reason overrides emotion' and 'never forgetting your mission when you left home for Taiwan' not only echo how the CCP defined her in the early 1930s as 'too emotional' and 'giving up responsibility for love' but also proved to be superficial or contradictory.[28]

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[23] Ibid, 55.
[24] Ibid, 39.
[25] Ibid, 71.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Xie Bingying, 'An Open Letter to Miss Kuo Liang-hui' (Gei Kuo Liang-hui nüshi de yifeng gongkai xin 给郭良蕙女士的一封公开信), *Ziyou qingnian* (自由青年), 29 (9), 1963, 337.
[28] Xie, 'Liquidation', 152.

Despite repeated references to counterattacking the Mainland, she hardly believed that a hot war between China and Taiwan would happen in the foreseeable future. The KMT's re-capture the Mainland plan lost the credence it had in the early 1950s and turned into an obvious fantasy. What stood in contrast to the turbulent international atmosphere were the peaceful new homelands of Chinese immigrants in Taiwan, where Xie had come to value peace more than dedication to armed struggle. A direct illustration of her attitude can be found in 'Mother's Love' (mu ai 母爱). Xie described how her old house maid arrived three hours early to make Xie breakfast because she needed to rush back to prepare her son's luggage for camp. Seeing the maid crying in pain, Xie reassured her that there was no danger in being a soldier in Taiwan:

> 'Grandma, why are you crying? It's good to be a soldier. He'll be back in a few months. Last year, he went there for training and came back in four months. Didn't you say he had gained a lot of weight? He ate six big, steamed buns for a meal and did not get sick. Isn't that nice?'
> 'I am afraid he'll go … to fight?' She uttered these words with difficulty. Tears burst out again.
> 'Grandma, don't you just invent things. Taiwan is very peaceful now. There is no war here. Why do you suddenly think of war?'[29]

The consolation implied that Xie did not take the KMT's armament as a firm promise. Not only was going to the front not a threat, but a soldier could even enjoy better living conditions. Xie's greater concern lies with events that could destabilise the status of peace and cause public unrest. In her open letter to Kuo, she pointed out that beneath Kuo's erotic depictions lay a dissatisfaction with social reality that could incite disturbance among a wider cohort:

> You [Kuo] even raised the issue of 'art' with a straight demeanour. You wanted revolution, revolt, anti-tradition, and anti-feudalism ... So you advocated 'incest' in your book. You made your male protagonist' claim that all human beings need sex as much as animals. So you could make money from it! The more fortune you get from the book, the more misfortune you cause.[30]

[29] Xie, *Bingying's Reminiscence*, 236
[30] Xie, 'An Open Letter to Miss Kuo Liang-hui', 337.

At the heart of Xie's critique of Kuo was that her writing could have destabilised Taiwan and therefore endangered peace. This statement ironically recalls Xie's father's critique that 'New Fiction' hindered young people like Xie from filial piety and harmonious marriage.[31] Between the dual aspects of a warrior loyal to her nation and an anti-patriarchal 'girl rebel', Xie now seems to lean more towards the former. The anti-communism she advocates in her work therefore lacks sincerity, as she disregards any deeper social tensions that have the potential to incite genuine conflict, adopting an almost appeasement-like stance.

The tension between Xie and Kuo also reflects the change in the literary ethos and writers' mindset. Compared to those of the postwar period, female writers who grew up in the early 1920s often sought external validation to justify their works, a habitual defensive stance to secure space in the public arena and distinguish their writing from the disdained sentimental literature.[32] Xie noted that she should not have felt resistant when her friends first proposed that she write an autobiography, as it would have been relatively easy to organise material from her diaries. However, she hesitated due to the profound 'responsibility' she sensed it would entail. After the first version of *A Woman Warrior's Autobiography* was published in 1936, the increasing number of letters and readers' encouragement intensified her apprehensions:

> Instead of blaming me for the bluntness and clumsiness of my writing, they said that my passion and courage inspired them. Some girls even wanted to imitate my method of escaping from their families. I read these letters with both infinite joy and deeply hidden sorrow. I found happiness in having many spiritual friends, which meant I would not feel lonely anymore, and I was no longer engaged in a solitary struggle. The worry was because I was afraid of harming the future of these young ones. I have endured countless heartbreaking hardships, and I question whether these girls' little hearts can also withstand the merciless realities of society.[33]

The semantic doubleness of the Chinese character 'zhuan/chuan' 传 suggests another pronunciation of 'autobiography', zizhuan 自传, as zichuan, which refers to the author's capability to transmit or communicate her life stories.[34] The merging of these two meanings

[31] For Xie's discussion with her parents, see Chapter one.
[32] See Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters*, 4.
[33] Xie, *Autobiography of a Woman Soldier*, 1985, 7.
[34] Ma, *The Stone and the Wireless*, 113

of 传 engages women's articulation in a larger communicative process while highlighting their unease during the incipient period of feminism.

A Dark Alley Without Exit: The Case of The Sacred Soul

In Taiwan, Xie tended to write fiction featuring school life, infusing these works with greater educational significance. *Love in Baguio* (biyao zhilian 碧瑶之恋) (1957), set in the Filipino-Chinese diaspora, encourages youthful independent thinking. Yet Xie frighteningly depicted the penalties to be faced by students for making the wrong choices: After young women fall into the CCP's trap in the name of emancipation and leave their parents for the Mainland, they end up as hostesses traded among insidious politicians. In 1959, *Love and Hatred* (ai yu hen 爱与恨), a fiction about the dangers of early love, was published in Malaya. It illustrates how students become engrossed in romance under the influence of fiction and films. Despite their genuine affection, the male protagonist is imprisoned for impulsively stabbing a female student out of jealousy. At the beginning of these stories, the characters are vivid due to the delicate depiction of their inner changes. However, once they leave their parents, Xie often hastily concludes without convincingly depicting the characters' growth amid personal wills, social dynamics, and differing ideologies. This unresolved issue creates a cycle of contradictions in her educational fiction. Although these works aim to encourage readers to mature, the characters are condemned for love or political ideas, while their paths are often extreme and irreparable. Although Xie opposes violence, her characters tragically become either perpetrators or victims, hardly extricating themselves from the dilemma.

Xie appears to have lost faith in ideals of romantic love and defiance of parental authority. In her fiction *The Sacred Soul* (Shengjie de linghun 聖潔的靈魂), Xie's struggles about taking actions act is even more pronounced. Serialised in *Chinese Literature and Arts* (Zhongguo wenyi 中國文藝) in 1952, *The Sacred Soul* tells the story of Baozhu, a young Taiwanese woman who falls in love with her teacher, Jiang Zhennan, a man from mainland China. Baozhu is forced into prostitution by her parents, who see her as an unwanted adopted daughter. She tragically ends her life after being overwhelmed by the humiliation of her patrons. Zhennan appears only in the first part of the story and then lingers within the haunting confines of Baozhu's recollections. However, he is consistently portrayed not only as a lover but also as a spiritual guide, as implied by both his profession and his name, which literally means

'revitalising the South'. Bearing her vulnerable identities as a student, an adopted daughter, and a hostess, Baozhu turns to Zhennan for salvation and affirmation. The mainlander assumes the role of an arbiter. When they date after Baozhu escaped the brothel for the first time, Zhennan commends Baozhu's proficiency in Mandarin, believing the skill accretes her adorability:

> Jiang Zhennan gently caressed Baozhu's arm, noticing a slight chill. He quickly draped his dark blue tweed jacket over her. Baozhu smiled and took it off:
> 'I'm not cold. Whenever I'm with you, I feel warm all the time,' she remarked.
> 'Baozhu, you're truly lovely. How fluently your Mandarin! I am a Hunan native, but my pronunciation is nowhere near as accurate as yours. In the future, when we go to the Mainland together, people will have to rely on you to be a Mandarin teacher!'[35]

The romance is rooted in a foundational aspect where the man from the Mainland, acting from a pedagogic perspective, recognises Baozhu's proficiency in Mandarin. His acknowledgement suggests that Baozhu, a young Taiwanese who struggles with her adoptive father's Japanese habits and the perceived rudeness of local women, has an opportunity to achieve reverent status even among the mainlanders. Zhennan's occupation and his connection to Hunan, the author's hometown, reflect an element of her self-projection. Through the vision of Baozhu's potential role reversal, Xie conveyed hope for the integration between mainlanders and Taiwanese, albeit dependent on the complete assimilation of one party by the more 'educated' group.

The dynamic of mainlanders as educators and Taiwanese as the students evokes Xie's critique of her maid's dialect in 'The Housemaid'. However, Baozhu's fate ironically illustrates that proficiency in Mandarin does not guarantee decent work, and that Zhennan, the 'more civilized' mainlander, offers her nothing but false promises. Zhennan's implication of the Mainland's superiority over Taiwan triggers unease in Baozhu. She immediately asks whether he feels homesick because he has already married or has a girlfriend elsewhere, worrying that many mainlanders deceive Taiwanese women into bigamous relationships. To reassure Baozhu about their future, Zhennan urges her to be patient, linking their felicity to the prospect of returning to the Mainland:

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[35] Xie Bingying, *The Sacred Soul* (shengjie de linghun 聖潔的靈魂). *Zhongguo wenyi*, 1952. Cited from *The Selected Works of Xie Bingying* (Xie Bingying zixuanji 謝冰瑩自選集), Taipei: Liming wenhua, 1980, 40.

‘Nan, let me ask you, what if my father forbids me to marry you?’

‘It is best to persuade him to abandon the idea of mainlanders against locals, and of the poor against the rich. If that does not work, then we will run away.’

‘Flee – to where?’

‘Hunan!’

‘There are communists in Hunan. How can we go there?’

‘So, I would advise you to bear with your parents until the counter-attack is achieved. After that, our problems can be solved as well.’

‘And how long do we have to wait?’ Baozhu asked anxiously.

‘Whether it is one year, three years, or five years, in any case, if you have faith and everyone is willing to work hard to do more work for our country, then victory will finally come.’

‘What if my father forces me to marry someone else while the victory is still yet to come?’

‘The only way is to delay it and to persuade him with all the good words. If that doesn’t take effect, then we will have to rebel!’[36]

Zhennan is not a romantic hero, but a fairly useless man whose feelings are directed toward nostalgia that prevents him from achieving a lasting connection with Baozhu. Just as Xie’s letter to students, while Zhennan encourages Baozhu to endure difficulties, he fails to offer her tangible solutions for overcoming them. For him, leaving home appears to be an unpromising path, and suicide is a foolish escape. Baozhu confesses that she, a Taiwanese woman, does not understand or know how to implement the mainlanders’ ‘grand ideas about freedom and courage’, and she has no confidence to rebel against her adoptive father. Zhennan holds her in his arms, silencing her from saying such ‘inauspicious’ doubts and instead suggesting she look to the moon as a witness to their engagement.[37] Zhennan’s stonewalling of Baozhu’s question on elopement can be disappointing to modern readers. His response, which seems to favour avoiding familial conflict and relying on fortune, contrasts with the expected demeanour of a revolutionary, thereby making it difficult for readers to reconcile the author’s portrayal of Zhennan with her own image as a warrior woman who once scorned ‘superstition’ and fled her home on a stygian night.

[36] Ibid, 47–48.
[37] Ibid, 49.

The couple's dialogue concerning freedom, courage, and defiance against hegemonic patriarchy has its roots in the May Fourth period, which was criticised by the KMT authorities during their reign in Taiwan. The archetype of the Chinese Nora from that time – women who left their families for love or independent lives – would find these concepts familiar. However, Baozhu marks her distinction as a poor Taiwanese woman, for whom the recollection of such an alien cultural paradigm bears little pragmatic significance. Unconvinced by the blueprint Zhennan proposes, Baozhu mourns her inability to escape the oppressive circumstances inflicted by her adoptive parents. She is a victim of Taiwanese society, where the problems of adopted daughters and prostitution were both chronic problems that existed long before the KMT's arrival.[38] Baozhu's endeavour to find female role models in Taiwan also fails: the newspapers she reads portray professional women, such as bus drivers, as being too aggressive, and her adoptive mother is too timid to oppose her husband's decision to sell their daughter.

Zhennan's ineffective attempts at consoling Baozhu highlight a common predicament faced by mainlanders, who believed their values were more privileged but discovered that they could hardly align with the context in Taiwan. Zhennan lacks the financial means to ransom Baozhu from her family, and he is unwilling to sacrifice his position as a teacher to elope with her. Unlike in the Mainland, Taiwan's limited geographical scope and employment opportunities constrain people's options. After this date, Baozhu is forced back to the brothel by her parents, and shortly afterwards, she commits suicide because of losing her virginity. As a potential Nora with no means of leaving, Baozhu's elegant Mandarin becomes a futile embellishment for her plight. In Zhennan's perspective, Baozhu's salvation could only stem from the distant aspiration of a successful counterattack against the CCP. This perplexity,

[38] The foster daughter system: Because of the patriarchal view in Taiwan, parents often abandoned daughters or gave them to others to raise in times of financial difficulties. What was originally intended to be mutual help had gradually evolved into adoptive parents using their adopted daughters' labour or marriage for profit, and there was even physical abuse or forced prostitution. During the Japanese colonial period, the Japanese rulers legalised public prostitution in Taiwan. See Iáp Îng-tsing, 'Problems of Adopted Daughter' (yangnv wenti 養女問題), *Essays from the Half-Wall Studio* (banbi shuzhai suibi 半壁書齋隨筆), Taipei: Zhongyang shuju, 1965. Prostitution problem: In the post-war economic downturn, there were still women who made a living through prostitution or were sold by their families into brothels. Prostitution was also practised in many catering and entertainment businesses. Since many politicians and businessmen travelling between the Mainland and Taiwan met at restaurants, waitresses became a selling point to ingratiate male customers. See Jianming You, 'When Mainlanders Meet Taiwanese Women: Women's Discourses in the Postwar Taiwanese Press, 1945-1949' (dang waishengren yudao Taiwan nüxing 當外省人遇到臺灣女性：戰後臺灣報刊中的女性論述 1945-1949), *Collected Works of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica* (zhongyang yanjiuyuanjindaishi yanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊), 47, 2005, 165–224.

claiming to be enlightened when confronted with the Taiwanese but unable to refer to familiar cultural metaphors or find an alternative path to address oppression, also lurked underneath the author's seemingly staunch counterattack discourse.

Notably, *The Sacred Soul* does not accentuate an anti-communist narrative but rather the Mainlanders' nostalgic sentiments, who yearned to 'return home' through Zhennan's words. It was not until 1954, following Xie's friends' execution by the CCP, that she expressed resentment, stating, 'the wounds of my heart cannot be healed until all communists are killed'.[39] She portrayed the Mainland as shrouded by an 'iron curtain' of totalitarian sovereignty, from which thousands of refugees desperately fled across the Taiwan Strait. Regarding the young 'day-dreamers' in Taiwan who still harboured illusions about Communist freedom and egalitarianism, she remarked, 'Just let them be cheated once; it's a valuable lesson'.[40] Xie made it clear that young people from the mainland to Taiwan should bear a mission, but under what she identifies as social responsibilities, she was unable to provide the youth with a clear guide to action beyond general writing instruction, whether in military, literary, or political contexts.

Cultural Education in Textbooks: A Way of Political Engagement

We can now suggest that Xie's conservative turn was the result of multiple factors: her wish for national harmony, which aligned with her warrior identity; flashbacks to her parents' education; traumatic memories of her youthful wanderings; regrets about leaving home; societal expectations for her public role; and her disapproval of the CCP. To what extent, then, was her writing a political act? Criticisms by Taiwanese scholars in response to the Heart Lock Incident exposed the collective dilemma she faced as a first-generation immigrant: indulging in echoes of KMT's education policies and nostalgia for her homeland while losing inclusiveness towards creation. This seems to be particularly evident after the lifting of martial law in the late 1980s, when growing debates about Taiwanese literature's distinctness from Chinese literature further marginalised her work in the literary scene.

[39] Xie Bingying, *Aiwan Pavilion* (Ai wanting 愛晚亭). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1984 [1954], 34–35.
[40] Ibid, 34–36.

At the turn of the millennium, more scholarly emphasis was placed on works that had been eclipsed or unjustly marginalised due to the official promotion of counterattack literature and female immigrants' writing received broader attention.[41] Both Mainland and Taiwanese academics agree that, although political demands imposed by the KMT authorities during the martial-law period led to the emergence of 'a sloganeering eight-legged literature of uniform ideology' that disconnected literature from Taiwan's reality, women produced mature works that diverged from mere anti-communist proposition.[42] For instance, they disinter the significance of 'housewives' literature, finding in it women writers' adaptation to post-war life and their exquisite observations of domestic life. By moving away from a linear historical perspective that 'solely prioritises the anti-communist policy', according to Fangming Chen, immigrant women intricately depicted 'Taiwan' instead of 'China', integrating themselves into unfamiliar environments to create a new sense of home and replacing the temporal orientation of male writers with a spatial one.[43] Similarly, Yunhong Wang emphasises that female writers popularised the theme of 'Taiwan as a new home', in contrast to their male counterparts who often echoed propaganda related to anti-communist policies, major historical events, and prominent heroes.[44]

Nonetheless, concerns on an alternative pathway tends to overstate women's adaptation to Taiwan's political climate, highlighting more the localisation efforts and femininity in their works. Such commendations risk downplaying women's roles in the political discourses of the Cold War milieu, while also allowing for accusations of the inadequacy of social consciousness in their work.[45] Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang suggests a complicity between the national

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[41] See Ming-ru Fan, *An Overall Study on Taiwan Fiction by Women Writers* (Zhongli xunta 衆裡尋他 臺灣女性小說總論), Taipei: Maitian, 2002; *Jialing Mei, Gender or Nation? On Taiwan Fiction of the 1950s, and the 1980s and 1990s* (xingbie haishi jiaguo 性別還是家國 五零與八九零年代臺灣小說論), Taipei: Maitian, 2004.

[42] Rui-jin Peng, *Forty Years of New Literary Movement in Taiwan* (Taiwan Xinwenxue yundong sishinian 臺灣新文學運動四十年), Taipei: Zili wanbao, 1991,75, 98, 100.

[43] Fang-ming Chen, *Fifty Years of Essays by Mainland Female Writers in Taiwan* (wushinian nüxing sanwen 五十年女性散文), edited by Chen Fang-ming and Zhang Rui-fen. Taipei: Maitian chuban, 2006, 13.

[44] Xunhong Wang, 'Taiwan As New Home: Mainland Female Writers' Localisation in the 1950s And 1960s' (Taiwan xinguxiang 臺灣新故鄉 五六十年代遷臺女作家的在地化書寫), 1, *Socialist*, 2011, 133–137.

[45] Some studies focus on lyrical reminiscences of family life during the Mainland period. An illustrative example is Lin Haiyin's *My Memories of Old Beijing* (1960), one of the most acclaimed children's novels of the twentieth century. It challenges the stereotypes prevalent in Mainland China during the 1920s regarding the socially vulnerable. Romantic and familial relationships were another popular topic, which incubated the Qiong Yao model of sentimental romance prevalent in the 1960s. See Lin and Zhou, 'An Inquiry into the Formation of Women's Literature in Taiwan in the 1950s', 171. For a critique of female writers' distance from politics, see Shih-tao Yeh, *Outline of Taiwanese Literature* (Taiwan wenxue shigang 臺灣文學史綱). Gaoxiong: Chunhui chubanshe, 1987, 96.

propaganda and female immigrant writers' creation, namely the need for the former to establish a new literary paradigm in denial of the realist literary legacy of the May Fourth era, and the latter garnered robust backing to take their place in cultural and educational institutions.[46] The role in sculpting cultural narratives was not exclusive to immigrant writers through their contributions. The government, too, leveraged literature as an instrument to sway the perspectives of the general population in Taiwan and the ethos of successive generations. However, Chang stresses that female writers satisfied government's expectations through a tacit attitude, avoiding discussing that they also actively engaged in or even led political activities. Yet it was the CWWA, with Xie as the preparatory committee, that took the initiative to expel Kuo Liang-hui from the association and demanded the seizure of *The Lock of The Heart* by the KMT authorities, not the other way around. Su Xuelin, another core member of the CWWA and a professor at National Cheng Kung University, also criticised Kuo for deliberately violating moral principles with her 'stunts' – an unforgivable act in a Confucian society.[47] The invocation of traditional culture to limit sexual emancipation was where Kuo's supporters questioned them for being outdated.

Was it that women writers avoid talking about politics, or were the political connotations in their narratives depoliticised? Could this depoliticisation itself be a form of resistance by contemporary Taiwanese, to the extent that some writings by mainland writers were simplified? The question at hand is whether it is necessary to unconditionally assume a departure from the counterattack literature of the 1950s when we discuss the creative autonomy of first-generation migrant women writers. In other words, should we delineate the research value of a work by this criterion and suspend the writer's reflections on their own situation? Categorising certain writings by a female writer as 'works whose political implications harm their literary quality' and deeming them inconsequential to the true genius of the author understates the political agency of immigrant women, regardless of their visible presence as a public figure or compliance with the official instructions.

[46] Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, 79. During the martial law period, the KMT government suppressed the realist literary tradition of the May Fourth era and banned discussion about most leftist writers due to suspicions that readers might have affiliation with the Communist regime. See Xiaobing Tang, 'On the Concept of Taiwan Literature', 51–65.

[47] Su Xuelin, 'Reviews of Two Erotic Novels: Country and Beauty and The Lock of The Heart' (Ping liangben huangse xiaoshuo Jiangshan meiren yu xinsuo 評兩本黃色小說 江山美人與心鎖), *Wenyuan*, 2(4), 1963.

Xie's work with textbooks provides a clearer illustration of how her political life evolved through education over time. Textbooks enforce a pre-determined didactic structure for the utilisation of educational materials.[48] They play a crucial role as mediators between the intended curriculum, defined by official educational policy, and the implemented curriculum executed by teachers.[49] As a monitoring instrument in the educational system, they can limit comprehensive learning within set parameters.[50] Notably, the domain that came under the most pronounced control of the authorities was not college education, but rather the middle school system, 'the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of "truth", "order", and "reality" become established'.[51] Mainland writers, through their use of standardised Chinese, employed their writings to evoke nostalgia for the land across the Taiwan Strait. The Ministry of Education favoured the inclusion of their works in school textbooks, fostering a blending of subsequent generations from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. This, combined with the fact that they were usually teachers and educators, assisted the KMT government's cultural strategies.

When Xie was on the ferry from Beijing to Keelung, she imagined Taiwan as a pastoral idyll away from political struggles and the ashes of prolonged wars, where people could finally 'breathe fresh air and take some comfort from your academic studies. The burdens of life may be heavy for you, but what a joy it would be to work with lovely and enthusiastic young people'.[52] She spent much of her time marking undergraduates' essays and promoting their publication.[53] In addition to her teaching duties, six of Xie's articles were chosen for middle-school language modules, including 'Two Extraordinary Embroideries' (liangkuai bu pingfan de cixiu 兩塊不平凡的刺繡), 'Aiwan Pavilion' (aiwan ting 愛晚亭), 'The Stone Lion at the Marco Polo Bridge' (lugou qiao de shizi 盧溝橋的獅子), 'Sketches of Taiwan' (Taiwan sumiao 臺灣素描), 'Keelung, a Rainy Harbour' (yugang keelung 雨港基隆), and 'Roasted

[48] Janine Remillard, 'Examining Key Concepts in Research on Teachers' Use of Mathematics Curricula'. *Review of Educational Research*, 75 (2), 2005, 211–246.
[49] Gilbert A. Valverde, *According to the Book: Using TIMSS to Investigate the Translation of Policy into Practice Through the World of Textbooks*. Netherlands: Springer, 2002.
[50] Ina Mullis, Michael Martin, Albert Beaton, Eugenio Gonzalez, Dana Kelly, Teresa Smith, *Mathematics Achievement in the Primary School Years: IEA's Third International Mathematics and Science Study*. Chestnut Hill, MA: Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy, Boston College, 1997.
[51] Bill Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial literatures*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, 7.
[52] Xie Bingying, 'From Beiping to Taiwan' (cong beiping dao Taiwan 從北平到臺灣). *Taiwan Tourism Monthly*, 1, 1949, 31–32, 31.
[53] Xie, *Bingying's Reminiscence*, 85.

Sweet Potatoes in Hometown' (guxiang de kao hongshu 故鄉的烤紅薯). They were first published in *Free Flow* (changliu 暢流), a newspaper featuring Mainland writers' nostalgic works, before being included in Xie's *Aiwan Pavilion* (1954) and Taiwan's middle school textbooks. Among these articles, 'Two Extraordinary Embroideries' and 'Roasted Sweet Potatoes in Hometown' convey Xie's memories of her mother and nostalgia for the landscapes and culinary tastes of her native place. 'The Stone Lion at the Marco Polo Bridge' and 'Aiwan Pavilion' incorporate China's traumatic defiance against Japanese imperialism, designed to stir up patriotic sentiments among the readers.

Situated in the Qingfeng Gorge on Mount Yuelu, Hunan, the Aiwan Pavilion is a place Xie has been familiar with since she was a child. Her descriptions of this pavilion varied at different times. In the early 1930s, Xie lived alone in the Qingfeng Gorge after returning from Beiping because of a double failure in marriage and career. She recalled the sweet times when she read diaries to her young lover by the Aiwan Pavilion and how she had wished they could become a pair of small shrimps living in the clear stream. However, the future for the young couple was dim:

> In a time of grief, it is even more desolate to revisit old haunts. Again, I thought of being buried in the Qingfeng Gorge, with the blood-red maple leaves as my coffin and the gurgling streams playing a beautiful elegy.[54]

Yet in 'Aiwan Pavilion', Xie introduced three notable features of Mount Yuelu, beginning with its rich collection of ancient monuments and the tombs of martyrs:

> When admiring the well-known scenery and cherishing the spirit of the martyrs who sacrificed for our country, one cannot help but feel a sense of reverence and admiration from within. Gradually, their personalities are influenced, and their spirits are inspired. I once saw a poet wandering and chanting for two hours in front of Huang Xing's tomb. I also saw soldiers and journalists writing down in detail the martyrdom of several martyrs.[55]

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[54] Xie Bingying, *Ten Years of A Female Soldier* (nübing shinian 女兵十年). Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1947, 93–94.
[55] Xie, 'Aiwan Pavilion', *Ai wanting*, 47–51, 48.

Articles that fulfilled the role of fostering patriotism and nostalgia were given precedence for textbook inclusions. The emphasis was on pieces that transcended mere sentimentality, presenting substantive historical context and educational worth.

Likewise, 'The Stone Lion at the Marco Polo Bridge' details the long history of the Marco Polo Bridge and praises its exquisite craftsmanship, noting its significance as a major route to the capital dating back to ancient times. Historical monuments, the Mainland's scenic beauty, and travellers' sentiments are intricately intertwined, projecting a cohesive picture of the remote motherland:

> On July 7 in the twenty-sixth year of the Republic of China, after the enemy fired the first shot at Gongji City by the Lugou Bridge [盧溝橋, the Chinese name for the Marco Polo Bridge], the name 'Lugou Bridge' rocked the whole world. The sacred War of Resistance caused by it has written the most glorious page in our country's revolutionary history. The glory of the Lugou Bridge is as brilliant as the sun and the moon.
> I stood quietly at the head, looking down at the flowing water under the bridge. It was so turbid and slightly crimson. Because of the high slope, the water rushed fast and heavily. The red water appears to symbolise the blood of the warriors, and the roaring rapids represent the cry of the warriors as they charged forward to kill the enemy.[56]

Identification with the territory is often accomplished through the shaping of natural landscapes and sites. By mapping an idealised and quite recent Chinese history across the Chinese landscape, nostalgic writing delineates an organic form of nationalism that 'linked national identity to a shared territory and history'.[57] It seeks to activate the Chinese people's collective memory of a unified nation and rekindle their sense of patriotism.[58] In this regard, Xie's memories participate in the construction of the Mainland's landscape and are closely associated with the building of Chinese national citizenship in Taiwan. By contrast, although she described Taiwan's landscape in 'Sketches of Taiwan' and 'Keelung, a Rainy Harbour' when

[56] Xie Bingying, 'The Stone Lion at The Marco Polo Bridge', *Ai wanting*, 52–55, 54.
[57] Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880–1940*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001, 4.
[58] For the relationship between tourism and the nationalist agenda, see Yajun Mo, *Touring China: A History of Travel Culture, 1912–1949*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2021; Madeleine Yue Dong, 'Shanghai's China Traveler', *Everyday Modernity in China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011, 195–226.

she first arrived, her observations were more out of tourist curiosity without probing the locals and intertwined with declarations like 'single-heartedly waiting for the counterattack'.[59]

Many of Xie's works have different versions to accommodate her rethinking of the past. Her representative autobiography even underwent three major self-revisions in the course of two decades from 1936 to 1956, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, the six essays in textbooks are identical to the original texts in *Free Flow*, except for 'Mourning' (aisi 哀思), which has been retitled 'Two Extraordinary Embroideries' since the 1969 version of *Aiwan Pavilion*.[60] Although Xie did not explicitly address her attitude towards her articles being chosen for textbooks, like many Mainland writers, her nostalgia for the homeland resonates throughout her Taiwanese oeuvre. Through recurrent evocations of her home, Xie showed commitment to the literary and educational fabric of Taiwan, which aligned with the KMT government's cultural directives. However, though suggestive, these works are not yet direct political statements: They were completed in the Mainland or in the early years of Xie's arrival in Taiwan and were selected by educational sector, not the writer herself, for textbooks. As Sung-sheng Chang suggests, by restating memories of China, female writers indicated support for the KMT authorities in a way that seemed to have nothing to do with politics, turning political compromise into 'positive' values.[61]

Xie's initiative in producing Chinese textbooks was revealed in the 1960s. It coincided with a discernible transformation in her perspective towards traditional Chinese literature, especially Confucian classics. Although Xie's father required her to recite classical texts from an early age, she had little interest in them while in mainland China. Rather, she read New Fiction, translated Japanese and Western literature, and wrote in *baihuawen* (vernacular Chinese). In 1936, Xie went to Nanning, Guangxi, and became a Chinese teacher at Nanning High School. She insisted on teaching *baihuawen*, even to the extent of refusing to mark students' essays in classical Chinese. Her resignation and subsequent departure from Guangxi were partly due to her dissatisfaction with the students' persistent requests for guidance on classical texts.[62] This stance began to change with her travels between Taiwan and the US in

[59] Xie Bingying, 'Sketches of Taiwan', *Ai wanting*, 56–59, 58.
[60] The first edition was published by *Changliu Monthly Press* (Taipei) in 1954; the second edition was published by Sanmin Shuju in 1969, and the third edition was printed by Sanmin Shuju in 2006.
[61] Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, 8–9.
[62] Xu Lang, 'Xie Bingying hated Classical Literature' (Xie Bingying tongwu Guoxue 謝冰瑩痛惡國學), *Xi Bao*, January 1936, 4.

the late 1960s. She settled in San Francisco with her husband in 1974, where she remained until passing in 2000. In her later years, Xie adopted a more introspective approach to the richness of traditional Chinese culture and its potential to forge interpersonal connections.

In 1966, Xie co-edited *A New Interpretation of Four Books* (xinyi sishu duben 新譯四書讀本) with Li Hsien, Liu Cheng-hao, Chiu Hsieh-yu, Lai Yen-yuan and Chen Man-ming. She noted in two prefaces that the status of the *Four Books* in China is equivalent to that of the *Bible* in the West, addressing the reasons for compiling the book:

> Industry has experienced high-speed development since the end of the Second World War. Pursuing material wealth has certainly improved people's living conditions, but it does not exert an equivalent influence on cultivating human virtues.
> The *Four Books*, which include *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius*, and *Mencius*, represent the core of Chinese traditional culture. In society, they have formed a perfect order of ethics and morality – the spirit of loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness – within which people can live together in greater harmony and happiness.[63]

Her emphasis on human touch, or *renqingwei* (人情味), illustrates a re-evaluation of traditional Chinese literature. She sought to understand the intangible bonds that unite individuals within a family and how these connections extend to a broader affiliation with China, as well as the sentiments of Chinese communities worldwide. By virtue of the economic takeoff and the impressive international flows in East Asia, philosopher Tu Wei-ming also takes Confucianism as a cosmopolitan solution, arguing that diasporic Chinese intellectuals' search for identity cannot be achieved solely through self-centred pursuits but through positive interpersonal interactions and cultures that civility and mutual learning can pervade.[64] As Tu states, the self as a centre of relationships is an open system, in which self-realisation involves establishing an ever-expanding circle of human relatedness, that not only encompasses the self, family, and country but also 'transcend[s] selfishness, nepotism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism' to sustain the dynamism of an imagined Chinese community.[65]

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[63] Xie Bingying, *A New Interpretation of Four Books*. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2011, 1.
[64] Xie, *Bingying's Travelogue*, 505.
[65] Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1985.

Notably, the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (zhonghua wenhua fuxing yundong 中華文化復興運動), launched on July 28, 1967, featured among its ten stated objectives by Chiang Kai-shek the revision of educational textbooks to incorporate Confucian classics for primary and secondary school students, alongside the translation of important works aimed at promoting Chinese cultural dissemination abroad.[66] These initiatives sought to foster ethical and moral values within Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities in an accessible manner, serving as a direct countermeasure to the cultural upheavals precipitated by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution. While the Executive Yuan received petitions regarding the movement and the annual organisation of the Chinese Cultural Revival Festival as early as November 1966, Xie's initiative to revise Confucian classics predates these events. She had already outlined several intended uses in the first edition of *A New Interpretation of Four Books*: as a simplified guide for self-cultivation, as a textbook for college and secondary school students, as preparatory material for the Joint College Examination and the Joint High School Examination, and as a study aid for various other specialized exams.[67] In the preface to the new 1987 edition, Xie praised the advantage of promoting Confucianism in maintaining social stability, a viewpoint consistent with her critique of Kuo Liang-hui's *The Lock of The Heart* during the 1960s.

In April 1971, Xie co-edited *A New Interpretation of Guwen Guanzhi* (xinyi guwen guanzhi 新譯古文觀止) with Chiu Hsieh-yu, Lin Ming-po, and Zuo Sung-chao. In 'Why I Interpreted *Guwen Guanzhi*' (wo weishenme yao fanyi guwen guanzhi 我爲什麼要翻譯古文觀止), Xie explains that ancient people's experiences and writings are the cornerstones for the Chinese to promote their national culture in the modern world:

> We start with the famous and applicable classics, and gradually expand to the more specialised and intricate parts, so that the ancients' words, theoretical ideas, and the essence of their texts will again be familiar and used by everyone. […] Chinese culture is like an old banyan tree. Its roots are old and traditional, but its branches and leaves are new and modern. This tree is whole in itself: the root part always supports the growth of new leaves.[68]

[66] Nancy Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
[67] Xie Bingying, *A New Interpretation of Four Books*, 2.
[68] Xie Bingying, 'Why I Interpretated *Guwen Guanzhi*'. *Central Daily News*, March 1971, 9.

Unlike the previous book where Xie reflected on her journey from disliking classical Chinese to discovering moral cultivation in it, this book echoes the ambitions of the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement, aiming to disseminate traditional culture as a means of strengthening Chinese communities.

Xie's collaboration with the government has steadily increased. in August 1977, she worked with Chiu Hsieh-yu and Liu Cheng-hao again to co-edit *The Basic Textbook of Chinese Culture* (zhongguo wenhua jiben jiaocai 中國文化基本教材), a textbook produced in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Chinese Language Curriculum Standards. It includes well-known chapters from the *Analects of Confucius* and *Mencius*. Most of the texts Xie discussed were aphorisms and short historical stories, and her exegetical work involved minimal personal elaboration. Her purpose in reworking and publishing these works was less about presenting novel analyses compared to previous scholars but more about disseminating the easily understood aspects of Chinese culture to a wider audience. By promoting Confucian classics and language education, Xie aligned herself with the 'obscure scholars', as Stephen Owen describes in reference to Li Qingzhao's postscript to *Records on Metal and Stone*. These scholars have continually compiled these ancient texts over the centuries, contributing to their enduring vitality and allowing the 'old banyan tree' to grow new leaves.[69]

Through the metaphorical concept of the 'old banyan tree', Xie proposed an alternative path to the singular genealogy that the May Fourth logic assigned to traditional Chinese culture, reimagining it as a vast network of interconnected diversity with human-relatedness at its core. The existence of 'the root part' avoids leaves succumbing to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe as the 'nomadic rhizome', which considers identity as a free-floating possibility and celebrates a hybrid figure as a decentering product.[70] Meanwhile, rather than being constrained by fixed identities or predetermined paths, the old banyan tree constantly reinvents its body. It reflects the horizontal influence of cultures from various regions and embraces the vertical timeline of its own past – the historical experiences that have shaped it over time. The presence of Confucian classics as modern teaching materials is an allusion to

[69] Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986, 82.
[70] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi. London: The Lions Press, 1992, 25.

the path from the past to the future. As Tu Wei-ming, who also uses the tree metaphor in the introduction to the insightful collection *The Living Tree*: *The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (1994), points out, the alternative narration of Chineseness not only tempers the tendency of diaspora Chinese to return to a distant homeland but also 'create[s] a public sphere for Chinese intellectuals to reconstitute themselves as a cultural force, imagining the future by reanimating the past'.[71]

In addition to compiling Confucian classics as textbooks, Xie actively participated in events organised by overseas Chinese communities and Chinese schools, being gratified to see that they supported each other and engaged in friendly exchanges with the locals. In 'Where there are Chinese, there is Chinese culture' (you zhongguo ren de defang jiuyou zhongguo wenhua 有中國人的地方就有中國文化), Xie quoted a speech of a headmaster of a Chinese primary school in Connecticut, saying that Chinese education abroad aims to promote the Chinese language, and the higher goal is to unite the Chinese in the neighbourhood to form a contact centre through relevant cultural activities. For Xie, the Chinese language serves as an important fabric out of which Chineseness is constructed among overseas Chinese. It is defined by two main components: Chinese speech and Chinese scripts. In a letter to Taiwanese readers in 1985, Xie expressed her delight that a Hong Kong publisher was compiling her correspondence with readers' in 'Grandma Jia's Mailbox' (jia nainai xinxiang 賈奶奶信箱), her column in *World Journal* (shijie ribao 世界日報, also known as the *Chinese Daily News*) in the US. She hoped that this book could encourage young readers in China and abroad to love speaking Chinese, writing Chinese characters, and reading Chinese books from an early age, 'so that after they grow up, they can research Chinese culture and make it flourish around the world'.[72]

Xie's experiences in the US broadened her interest in traditional culture. Being away from the cultural matrix centred on Chinese heritage enabled her to reflect on how to position her cultural background in a new context. In her travelogues, Xie praised various aspects of American life, from the convenience of modern appliances such as dishwashers, vacuums, induction cookers, and ovens, which also echoes another of her findings that women had a

[71] Tu Wei-ming, *The Living Tree*: *The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, x.
[72] Xie Bingying, 'Late Happy New Year' (baige wannian 拜个晚年). *Bingying's Travelogue* (Bingying youji 冰瑩遊記). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1991, 123.

wider range of careers as they did not have to spend time on housework, to the plenitude of reading material in primary school libraries. However, she also noted problems in interpersonal relationships, which led her to appreciate the core value of humanity in Chinese ethics. In one essay titled 'Could You Be My Mom?' (nizuo wode mama haoma 你做我的媽媽好嗎), Xie recounted the peculiar experiences of receiving several phone calls from a young American girl, who expressed a desire for Xie to be her mother. Perplexed by these unexpected calls, Xie sought answers from her friends, who offered possible explanations that the rings might be from orphaned children out of loneliness, as they also received similar ones from individuals seeking companionship.[73] The telephone coil, a representative of human-made modern technology, situates emotional transmissibility under larger communicative processes and technical media. By rendering the material dimension into emotional significance, Xie's conversation with the girl reveals how it comes into being, as well as how its medium is also forged – solitude eluded itself prior to the acoustic substance.

Beside the negotiation between governments, repositioning oneself in the Western world remains a personal challenge for the first-generation diaspora from the Global South. Their identity often revolves around their place of origin and a sense of rootedness in that cultural heritage.[74] As Adam McKeown notes, similarities help diaspora communities construct an extended relationship where 'an even richer texture of common practices and attitudes can be produced'.[75] The motivation for such a relationship lies not only in economic factors but also in the production of culture in a more ideological and imagined sense and the shaping of a shared sentiment that transcends political loyalties. Xie's revaluation of the traditional Chinese culture can be seen as part of the KMT's cultural policy, but it is more an individual's endeavour to sustain a community with shared values. Her invocation of Confucian classics in the Heart Lock Incident and textbooks was consistent with the expanding sense of being a Chinese.

[73] Xie Bingying, 'Could You Be My Mom'. *Fog in San Francisco* (jiujinshan de wu 舊金山的霧). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1974, 89-93.
[74] Connie Rapoo, 'Scripting Diasporic Identity in Ama Ata Aidoo's The Dilemma of a Ghost', *English Academy Review*, 36 (2), 2019, 16-24, 21
[75] Adam McKeown, 'Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842 to 1949'. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58 (2), 1999, 306-337, 330.

The Retro Orientation towards Home

Xie's attempt to find solace in a way that was detached from the May Fourth literary legacy and avoided elements threatening social stability aligned her post-war writing with the cultural policies of the KMT. Yet summarising it as merely a compromise would be an injustice to her self-reflection on familial bonds and the vitality of Chinese culture. What she experienced was not a sudden or forced conservative turn but rather a consistency with her revisiting of memories.

As we have seen, one important aspect of Xie's rethinking of traditional culture and her harshness with students who wanted to escape home for love centres on parent-child relationships. She attempted to communicate to young people a plain notion, based on her own experience as a painful daughter, that parents' objections to their children's views originate from a place of love. Xie's mother passed away a year before the outbreak of the War of Resistance, and her father died before she moved to Taiwan. During this period, Xie seldom stayed in her hometown to comfort them. Although her parents had long since reconciled with her on her marriage issue, Xie increasingly felt regret for the pain her earlier reckless choices had caused them. She recalled in detail the tender moments spent with her mother:

> The divide between my mother and me from the past has now vanished completely. In its place was the motherly love that flowed between us at all times. She asked me in great detail about how I was doing without uttering any word about our past conflicts. She requested that I bring back a copy of each of my published books for her to read, and she often gently caressed my head and face with her left hand. Unfortunately, just a week later, I had to leave her once again to go to Changsha.[76]

When Xie refused the arranged marriage in her twenties, her mother reprimanded her for abandoning the classical teachings on how women should be good wives. To Xie, a young warrior, her mother represented the outdated, subservient female archetype prescribed by the Confucian tradition, seemingly without a voice of her own. This perspective had long ago been transformed by her mother's gentle touch when she returned home for the first time from her

[76] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 302.

failed marriage with Fu Hao.[77] Now her mother further demonstrated a willingness to engage with all her daughter's books, even though most of Xie's work prior to 1937 focused on her struggles with family roles, often portraying her mother as a hindrance to her aspirations as a modern woman. Whether Xie's mother felt the same resolution of their conflicts is unclear to readers, but her intent to read suggests a desire to reconnect with this wandering Chinese Nora, not by speaking, but by listening.

Furthermore, Xie's mother insisted on confirming with Xie's father that the property to be divided for Xie had been signed and confirmed, and she was reassured only when receiving an affirmative answer. The *Women's Movement Resolution* (funü yundong jueyi an 婦女運動決議案) initially stipulated women's inheritance rights as early as 1926. The *Civil Law on Inheritance* (minfa jicheng bian 民法繼承編) of 1930 further stated that both married and unmarried women had equal inheritance rights as their brothers.[78] However, despite these legal advancements, the traditional custom of denying women's inheritance rights, particularly for married women, persists in rural China.[79] As observed by socialist Fei Xiaotong in Jiang Village, people showed no tangible signs of change even after seven years of implementing the new law.[80] Considering that Xie had three older brothers, her mother's persistence in breaking with conventional practices to formally bequeath her daughter a portion of landed property surpassed the norm of rural China during that time.

It is thus less surprising that Xie elaborated on her skepticism towards the idea of viewing breaking familial ties or indulging in lust as feasible solutions to dilemmas in her correspondences with the youth, a seemingly radical departure from her previous identity as a rebel against patriarchy. In Taiwan, she advised students to prioritise their studies and careers, suggesting that women could then realise there are more important aspects beyond romance and marriage. In a letter to a middle-school girl who complained her mother's interference with

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[77] For Xie's debates with her parents and her changing attitude, see Chapter one.

[78] Wei Guo, *Full text of the Supreme Court Interpretation* (zuigao fayuan jieshili quanwen 最高法院解釋例全文). Shanghai: Shanghai faxue bianyishe, 1946, 6.

[79] The property of married daughters remains insecure in contemporary rural China. See Yajiao Li, ''Waijianü', 'Chujianü' and 'Nongjianü' in China'. *Human Culture Creation Science Series*, 18, 2015, 183-189.

[80] Fei Xiaotong, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (jiangcun jingji 江村經濟), Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe, 1997, 67. Rural women's inheritance typically came in the form of dowries given by their parents before marriage. A survey conducted by the Mantetsu Survey Department of Japan in the 1930s found that dowries in Chinese rural areas usually consisted of items like cutlery, mirrors, clothes, bedding, and so on, with very little land or money included.

her pursuit of love due to 'rigid rituals', Xie emphasised that her parents restricted her actions out of concerns for her safety. Drawing from her own experience, Xie reflected:

> Now, I would like to remind you that if your mother didn't intervene at all and granted you complete freedom, you could indeed leave home right now and follow your boyfriend to some distant place. However, I dare to assert that in less than a year, you will lose your innocence and happiness forever. You will become a wife burdened with worries, pain, and immeasurable regrets.[81]

In another letter to a distressed middle school girl, Xie illustrated a tragic incident where a young couple committed suicide due to romantic entanglements. Xie illustrated that students often dismiss parental guidance as obsolete customs, overlooking their own pivotal stage for developing intelligence and social skills. Assuming the role of a mother, Xie also counselled her readers who were parents to confront challenges in education and take full responsibility for their children's well-being.[82]

In *The Sacred Souls*, Xie even correlated Baozhu's ultimate liberation with an imagined maternal figure. Prior to her suicide, Baozhu envisions her own mother awaiting her with smiles and open arms, despite having never seen her before:

> Well, isn't that my mother's voice? It is! It must be! Only a mother's voice can be so loving, so gentle, and so passionate! I want my mother; I want to throw myself in her arms and be caressed and comforted by her everlasting love. Alas! Poor mother. She might have died long ago, or else, for eighteen years, I had never seen her shadow or heard her voice. I must die to find my mother!

In her last moments, Baozhu hears what appears to be Zhennan's cries, yet death represents not only an escape from suffering but also a long-awaited reunion. She chooses to perish in the embrace of this imaginary mother rather than eloping with Zhennan and waiting for a tenuous promise of counterattack.

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[81] Xie, *Message from the Green Window*, 69.
[82] Ibid, 90.

A more nuanced interaction between traditional culture and familial bonds can be found in Xie's memories of childhood. In *Bingying's Reminiscences*, she recalled her childish disdain for ancient texts and her father's teaching: 'When I grow up, I will write new poems. It's just like talking. I can write whatever comes to my mind'.[83] In her later telling, Xie reflected that her early rejection of traditional Chinese poems was rooted in a lack of understanding of their significance and a juvenile spirit of rebellion. She recast the development of her political thought over her life as a metaphorical story, in which during middle school, Xie was among the students who criticised short-haired girls, citing Confucius's saying from the *Classics of Filial Piety*: 'Our bodies – to every hair and bit of skin – are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them.'[84] Believing that preserving one's body was fundamental to filial piety, Xie asserted that if a woman cut her hair and wore trousers, she would become unacceptably indistinguishable from a man. Other students' criticisms only strengthened her resolve, until her brother persuaded her to consider whether her stubbornness was due to a fear of losing face rather than autonomous thinking. The notions of backwardness and progress are merely relative.

A detail absent from Xie's early autobiographies is that her mother was the first person to nurture her appreciation for poetry during her primary school years. When Xie felt uncertain about what to write in her first composition class and was overwhelmed with anxiety, her mother sat beside her, patiently guiding her crafting an essay on the theme of chrysanthemums. Before this class, Xie had only heard her father reference Tao Yuanming's famous line, 'picking chrysanthemums under the east fence', but it was her mother who argued for her right to go to school and illustrated the poet's acute observation of life.[85] Such moments with her parents are rarely depicted in her earlier works about military life. In an introspective critique of her youthful resistance to her family and disregard for classical literature, Xie's later embrace of Confucianism aligns with her profound guilt towards her parents.

Nostalgia for the Mainland as a geographical location was intertwined with memories of loved ones who lived on that land. In 'Return Home', Xie recalled her journey back to her hometown of Lantian from Wuchang after the Northern Expedition:

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[83] Xie Bingying, *Bingying's Nostalgia* (Bingying huaijiu 冰瑩懷舊). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1991, 3.
[84] Ibid, 17.
[85] Ibid, 77.

> It was precisely on the fourth watch of the night when I arrived at Lantian. As I called for the gate of Yutongheng to be opened, they all suspected that it was just the return of my ghost and would not believe that I was still alive in the mortal world.[86]

As Xie passed through the gate of Yutongheng and returned to the home she had once escaped, the significance of Lantian became apparent: It served as a spatial threshold separating two worlds – the world with her mother and the world without her, and the world where she was a wandering spirit and the world where she regained her form. After Xie arrived in Taiwan, memories merged old locations with new ones. She never saw the staff quarter as shabby. Instead, the small gardens surrounding it reminded her of the garden her father had lovingly cultivated in her hometown. His affection for the garden influenced her, and during the routine acts of watering the flowers and weeding, memories of their leisurely chats in her childhood resurfaced: He would recount stories like Meng Zong's quest for bamboo for his mother, a narrative from the *Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety*, and he would lead by example, digging up bamboo shoots in the winter and preparing them for Xie's grandmother.[87]

Global mobility nourished a complex mood of repentance and nostalgia. Xie re-evaluated the poignant nature of filial piety, suggesting that couples who have diligently raised their children do not anticipate remuneration for their efforts but selflessly give their love without conditions. In a similar vein, when receiving benefits from others, humans are obligated to consider avenues for reciprocation. This mutual support represents a fundamental requirement of humanity.[88] Xie admitted in 'The Great Mother' (weida de muqin 偉大的母親) that her previous judgement of her mother was unfair: 'I always thought she was too old and stubborn in her thinking', but, in fact, she 'loved her husband, her children, and her nation'. 'Although she grew up in the feudal era, she never accepted the idea that women were weak and must rely on men to survive'.[89] Although Xie herself was known as a rebel for running away from marriage, the first female rebel in her life was her mother, who assertively persuaded the headmaster to accept her daughter and made her the only female student in the school, just like how she insisted on her daughter's inheritance later. By reflecting on the problems of taking

[86] Xie, *Autobiography of A Woman Warrior*, 1980 [1956], 45.
[87] Xie, *Bingying's Nostalgia*, 94.
[88] Xie Bingying, 'Between Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law' (poxi zhijian 婆媳之間). *The Light of Life* (shengming de Guanghui 生命的光輝). Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1978,158.
[89] Ibid, 90–91.

the enlightenment discourse as a critique of traditional culture, Xie challenged her most popular social image, i.e., a girl rebel who left her family to pursue freedom. Xie wrote her heaviest confession to her parents in a eulogy for her father:

> What is my life like?
> The weakest grass lives in the dust.
> Neither is beneficial to the public,
> nor conducive to my family.
> I am a sinful and unfilial daughter. I once left my parents heartbroken in order to go out to study and fight for the freedom of marriage. Although they eventually forgave me and never blamed me for my past, I always feel sorry for them. I always have regrets.[90]

'Regrets' do not imply that Xie would have made different choices under the same circumstances. Although memories of her youthful separation from her parents continued to traumatise Xie, societal responsibility remained an important aspect of the woman warrior's later career. Even in her most poignant confessions, Xie highlighted her parents as patriotic citizens, with her mother cherishing the 'nation' and her father supporting the national revolution. In 'Father's Will' (fuqin de yizhu 父親的遺囑), Xie recalled that her father was also a rebel on his own. Despite being a scholar of the Qing dynasty, he placed no value on the medals and official uniforms that signified his prestige, dismissing them as 'products of the feudal era' and giving them to his children as toys. Xie expressed pain for not being a more 'useful' person to both the public and her parents. This claim could hardly reconcile with the local Taiwanese efforts for nativisation and the younger generation's desires for a liberal environment, even though she once experienced a similar struggle.

Conclusion

Xie's mobility and her writing practice aligned with the KMT's efforts to disseminate traditional values. Her early publications in Taiwan might have exemplified what Sung-sheng Chang suggests as the reciprocal relationship between propaganda and women's literary production, which was particularly evident in 'the delimitation of historical and geographical

[90] Xie Bingying, 'My Father's Will' (fuqin de yizhu 父親的遺囑). *Bingying's Nostalgia*, 183–184.

references in literary and artistic representations'.[91] Yet from the 1960s onwards, Xie became more actively involved in Chinese education, even preceding government-initiated programs. She and the CWAA demonstrated a stricter stance towards perceived transgressions than the official political and journalistic entities, thereby facilitating or accelerating the latter's punitive actions. In this context, the arts and culture sector served as a bellwether for policymaking. Readers familiar with Xie's early intimate communities with other women – formed during her early years in Beijing and Shanghai, wartime, and her imprisonment in Japan – may be disappointed by this transformation. She appears to have downplayed the fight for women's free expression and compromised with state apparatuses.

However, her quest for a stable society remained consistent both during and after the war. From the time she began revising her autobiography in the 1940s, Xie endeavoured to portray her past self as a happy, courageous soldier with pure goals, rather than a leftist warrior embroiled in factional strife. Even as scholars have continued to define her as a military writer, the focus of her post-war writing has already shifted to the education of the young. Perhaps drawing from her own experience of leaving home in her 20s, Xie urges schoolgirls not to prioritise love above all else, but rather to focus on their studies and careers. While this may come across as overly dogmatic to contemporary readers, the real issue lies in her unsuccessful attempts to merge educational ideas with art. Her work shuns the political pressures in Taiwan, resulting in a narrative that feels hollow in terms of both life guidance and aesthetic values.

My study of Xie's post-war writing certainly does not represent the first-generation mainland women writers as a group; nevertheless, her mobility provides vivid individual evidence for the various permutations of the politics of gender and identity during the Cold War. The importance of culture and its intermediaries to modern nations cannot be overstated. Women's writing, whether they actively deviate from the dominant narrative or not, is never outside politics. It would be an oversimplification to claim that they can somehow shun the dictatorship to achieve the antithesis of masculinity. The linguistic and cultural portrayal presented in Xie's works suggests that the dynamic between individual identity and national consciousness is far from straightforward. It encompasses intricate nuances, reciprocal influences, and internal struggles. For instance, when correcting the Mandarin spoken by local Taiwanese, Xie grappled with a desire to reclaim a lost literary heritage that she connected with

[91] Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, 79.

through language, although this fusion primarily remained at the lexical level. Her reflections on socio-family relationships, the reinterpretation of Confucian classics, and her travels in the United States occurred almost simultaneously. These experiences witnessed her attempts to reposition herself conceptually within the imagined community after being unable to physically return to her homeland. The conception of an ideal Chinese community based on humanity, as sketched in the ancient texts, might compensate for Xie's regret about what has passed. However, this can only be metaphorical. There is an uncrossable temporal distance between the blueprint of a warm community and the real home.

To borrow Akram Al Deek's words, displacement falls 'somewhere between nationalism (Oedipal, rigid, imposed, created, and closed) and nomadology (anti-Oedipal, open, flexible, creative, and free), allowing for a critical and aesthetic distance, and balancing the central authority between past and present, tradition and modernity, by translating (between) them'.[92] Xie's recollection and reinterpretation of traditional classics reveal not only the shaping of a nation's past but also an anticipation of how the traumatic past and the exiled present can be reassured through the lens of a to-be-realised future. After all these years, Xie has been updating her perception of the Chinese language and those who use it through her expanding mobility around Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the US. She never returned to the place she was born true home but continued constructing Chinese landscapes, people, and cultures in new locations. Constant departure from home had given her a more cosmopolitan perspective to reflect on the importance of humanistic concerns in traditional Chinese literature and communicating with other cultures, as well as the deprivation of family life by the discourse of enlightenment. Xie longed for her Chinese homeland, but she was also a mobile individual, refracting with the wandering rebel she had been decades before.

[92] Akram Al Deek, *Writing Displacement: Home and Identity in Contemporary Post-colonial English Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 6.

Epilogue: Ways of Remembering

Before We Embark, After We Remember

To bring together the arguments expounded in this thesis, I commence with an excerpt from Xie Bingying's 1971 article and invite all readers who have reached this page to join me for a final moment of reflection. In this short work, Xie reflects on four New Year's Eves, one of which recounts the celebration of 1926 with her instructors and fellow students at the Central Military Academy. At that time, the initial phase of the Northern Expedition had just achieved remarkable success, and the academy was filled with a sense of exuberant optimism. The battalion chief convened the young female recruits, soon to be deployed to the frontlines, in an assembly for mobilisation:

> This is a proud time for you all, our female students. You did not want to let Hua Mulan, Qin Liangyu, and Shen Yunying stand out alone in history, so you came to the military academy. You came here to dedicate yourselves to our country. You should regard the academy as your home and learn from the example of Qiu Jin, who was willing to make sacrifices for the nation …[1]

Xie concluded her recounting of the speech with an ellipsis, then shifted focus to a scene when the battalion chief became animated, believing that the students were applauding out of admiration. In reality, as Xie revealed, they were merely amused by his peculiar speech mannerisms. With a playful attitude, Xie mimicked his tone and elicited chuckles from all around:

> It was an incredibly exhilarating, joyful, and ecstatic Chinese New Year's Eve. The commander had generously granted us special permission to celebrate until the stroke of midnight. We dispersed into classrooms to enjoy snacks and singing, and we discussed the diverse New Year's Eve traditions across China. Our team comprised over 200 female students, each hailing from different regions, including remote Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Heilongjiang. Despite the considerable distances separating our hometowns, we had students representing each province. Engaging in conversations about these diverse

[1] Xie Bingying, *Prose by Xie Bingying*, 390–391.

customs was an incredibly captivating experience. It was so fascinating to share our distinctions.[2]

This excerpt evokes several key themes we have crossed in the thesis: women warriors under the spotlight, coloured memories, long-distance travels, meteoric friendships, and the ominous shadow of imminent destruction. The battalion chief, together with the military authorities he symbolised, expected these female cadets to embody the ideal of 'women warriors', a myth perpetuated in Chinese history since the story of Hua Mulan. The names he mentioned had long been ingrained in the childhood memories of Chinese people, representing a collective of women endowed with bravery, passion, loyalty, and other virtues, that, while positive, somehow diminish the focus on individual autonomy.

During times of national crises, societal expectations urged women to imitate and integrate themselves into the broadly circulated literary depictions of women warriors and chivalrous knights-errant, those loyal rebels who revolted against the service roles assigned to women within the patriarchal structure and resisted invaders or previous dynasties, while at the same time, they realigned their allegiances and a spirit of service with the evolving demands of the new government. Scholars including Louise Edwards, Ying Hu, and Xiaohong Xia, each from their unique vantage points, have emphasised the limited empowerment that the prospect of national resistance offered to women during the Republican era.[3] The cultural nourishment of envisioning themselves as warriors motivated Chinese women to dress as their male comrades and voluntarily engage in nation-building efforts. Yet despite appearing to forge an alternative path by transcending the nation's geographical, social, and cultural boundaries alongside their male counterparts in the mission of national salvation and reconstruction, many women reverted to traditional roles after the war, with women's organisations facing either dismissal or co-option. This pattern can be observed not only in China but globally. Whether in Russia and Poland, where women could serve in battalions, or in Britain and France, where women were not allowed to enlist but engaged in war-related positions such as nursing and journalism, there tended to be a common postwar relapse into gender conventions that reasserted pre-war

[2] Ibid, 391. The number of female applicants significantly surpassed the initially planned quota of 40. By February 1927, as the recruits commenced their duty, a total of 183 women had joined the academy. This number further expanded with the inclusion of 30 individuals from the Hunan Regiment, leading to a total enrollment of 213.
[3] See Ying Hu, 'Qiu Jin's Nine Burials: The Making of Historical Monuments and Public Memory'. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 19(1), 2007, 138-191; Xiaohong Xia, 'The Great Diversity of Women Exemplars in China of Late Qing'. *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 3(2), 2009, 218–246.

gender norms.[4] Optimistic interpretations tend to focus on the future, suggesting that women warriors' struggles serve as a source of inspiration for future generations and that their efforts will be rewarded in a retrospective way, just as they benefited from the pioneering work of their predecessors, who advocated for women's suffrage and the right to enlist.[5]

Nevertheless, Xie's embarking on new journeys after facing multiple disappointments underscores the complex nature of individual decision-making. Her dedication, along with that of many other women, to the nation was shaped by the cumulative effect of personal choices. This exceptional night in 1926, which still lingered in Xie's memory forty-five years later, can be seen as one of the pivotal moments driving these decisions. It offered her and her peers a fleeting sense of freedom that transcended both military regulations and the burdens of embodying the ideal woman warrior – a singular figure that, in its construction, required no plural, as it symbolised either a continuous collective or a solitary icon. Instead of adhering to the formal tone of the battalion chief's speech, these young women bent its gravity with humour and whispers, subtly challenging the legitimacy of an attempt to situate the history of women warriors within the heroic tradition. An intimate female community was formed through listening, sharing, and companionship. By exchanging their diverse backgrounds and stories, a tangible understanding of the geographical expanse of their country emerged: It was not merely a concept built as part of a political entity but rather an affective unity held together by individuals of diversity and solidified through their interactions.

The New Year's Eve gathering also suggests a subtle misalignment between the personal feelings of women warriors and the way they were perceived. This misalignment is not confined to the early stages of the women warriors' lives but extends through their wartime journey and into the aftermath of war. For all this, the Northern Expedition marked a fresh start: Prior to the political complexities and the outbreak of far more brutal wars, young women converged from far-flung geographical locations, driven by one or more similar objectives such as evading arranged marriages, pursuing personal fulfillment, or changing their country. They came together to establish a youthful community that would soon venture farther afield. They

[4] See, for example, Laurie Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006. Weronika Grzebalska, 'Militarising the Nation: Gender Politics of the Warsaw Uprising', *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence*, edited by Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Pető, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, 121–133.

[5] Hong, 'Heroine of One Thousand Faces', 181.

believed that they were embarking on a straight path, from which the revolution for freedom would extend to the most remote cities and inhabitants of China. This was a rosy picture for Xie even after decades, albeit one that proved to be transient when compared to the other three gloomy and more realistic New Year's Eves in the same article: spending the day alone in a cramped rented house in Shanghai, celebrating with a few fellow Chinese students in Japan while longing for home, and feeling melancholy for the never-go-back Mainland while in the US.

The relentless passage of time intensifies the sense of tragedy in personal sentimentality, with which Xie constantly tried to live in various ways during the postwar period. In her memory, meaning is never fully present or immediate but rather always delayed and stretched out across time, a reciprocal interplay between the past and the future, driven by individuals' unrelenting frustration. Each chapter of this thesis can be seen, in part, as one of Xie's many attempts to navigate the tension. I would like to draw readers' attention to several deferred moments that cast a shadow over her once-courageous journeys: Xie feeling lost about the future with Aizhen sleeping besides her in the lower cabin of a ship to Shanghai (Chapter One); Xie, persistently revising her memories and denying her former self in her autobiographies (Chapter Two); Xie, hiding her torn socks and injured feet in front of the Japanese (Chapter Three); Xie, who believed that female soldiers were like ants forgotten by history after the war, and sought to document the stories of her fellow women (Chapter Four); and Xie, haunted by the belief that she had sinned against her parents (Chapter Five). With these recollections of our shared exploration, we return to my main research question: how a publicly recognised woman warrior perceived war at its various levels and the people within it, and how she negotiated her emotional struggles across different contexts. The methodology for this exploration involved a close textual analysis of Xie's works – both fiction and non-fiction – as well as open letters, correspondences, newspaper articles, and political statements. These texts were examined in dialogue with a three-pronged analytical framework: women's memory, autobiography, and emotion, all within their broader historical context.

Unfolding from what happened after she left the academy, I went through her interpersonal tensions, the evolving nature of her war memories, the women's communities she established, goal conflicts, long-distance displacement, and the interactions between self-identity and national identity. I employed Xie's autobiographical writing as a lens to examine both the shared and distinctive elements of a woman warrior's wartime experiences and the

aftermath of those experiences. The external structure of this thesis follows the chronological trajectory of Xie's life – escaping an arranged marriage, studying in Japan, her military career, and her eventual relocation to Taiwan. However, it is important to note that the internal structure is shaped by the retrospective nature of Xie's reflections and determined by themes. For instance, Chapter Two, which focuses on the Northern Expedition, spans nearly sixty years. In Chapter Three, Xie's evaluation of Hayashi Fumiko, a Japanese writer who glorified Japanese militarism during the War of Resistance but later struggled with psychological issues, was written almost forty years after they met. Chapter Four addresses the contrast between going to the front with other women in 1927 and 1937. Chapter Five explores the disparities between Xie's early and later depictions of her relationship with her parents. This compels us to approach her writing with caution, considering both the external context – when, where, and to whom she was recounting these memories – and the internal dynamics, exploring whether these adjustments in her narrative are a means of coping with trauma.

This two-fold structure offers a new perspective on understanding the dynamics of women and wars in twentieth-century China, one that disrupts the fixed nodes in our narrative journey and points to some important connections that would have easily been overlooked without a reflexive space. It directs our attention away from any single historical event, movement, organisation, or agent as the decisive cause for such dynamics. This allows us to reinterpret important historical affairs such as the Northern Expedition, Puyi's visit to Japan, the War of Resistance, and the KMT's retreat to Taiwan as closely related events that witnessed the changes in women's identification, communities, political engagement, and emotional lives. The individual woman warrior posed a challenge to official state narratives around nationalism, sometimes in a way that she herself even found more contextually adapted or fulfilled her social obligations.

Displacement, Women's Network, and the Journey of Self-Positioning

The prolonged wars in the twentieth century allowed numerous young women to leave their families and depart their hometowns for new destinations. In the expanded contexts of national resistance and reconstruction during wartime China, these spaces not only featured women warriors as active participants but also incorporated their various socio-political positions and relationships. This allowed them to connect with one another in a broader spectrum of roles, ranging from soldiers, politicians, caregivers, teachers, advocates for

political propaganda, journalists, or simply as women. To a significant extent, the emergence, progression, and transformation of women's social roles and links were not merely aligned with but also interacted with the social, cultural, and political dimensions of wartime China.

The new social roles carried with them the formation of intricate interpersonal layers and emotional experiences, which wove the fabric of women's lives. This thesis has chosen Xie not because her journey was the most representative among her contemporaries, but because her distinct writing practices provide a feminine lens to connect different spaces, memories, and people on an iridescent spectrum. From Xinhua to Wuhan, Hubei, Changsha, Shanghai, Beijing, Japan, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and eventually to the US, Xie traversed land and sea while editing her memories. Her journey was marked by diverse friendships, intermittent poverty, romantic entanglements, concerns about women's fate, incarceration as a political dissident in both China and Japan, introspection on family relationships, and constant mobility due to political and social upheaval. Xie's escape from her arranged marriage can be viewed as a response to the classical problem facing modern women in twentieth-century Chinese: 'What happens after Nora walks out?' In the mid-1920s, the revolution provided a welcoming refuge for women who had left their families to pursue freedom. Xie and her comrades' military experiences even played a part in inspiring the 'revolution plus romance' literary model of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Public commemoration also portrays Xie as a role model who resisted injustice and the delegates of injustice, be they her family members or enemies, neglecting that her journey was filled with inner conflicts, self-denial, and reconciliation.

It is important to note that she did not embark on a solitary path but on a continuous cycle of lifelong interpersonal interactions, growth, and learning. The journey commences with our warrior's search for identity. Xie embarked on her Nora-like journey when modern women warriors were abandoned by the revolution in 1927. Initially, she was a 'father's daughter' who primarily sought approval from her father and masculine values while often rejecting her mother. However, as she decided to break away from patriarchal norms, she grappled with the absence of clear guidelines on how to behave and feel. Since traditional feminine virtues had been discredited by the discourse of women's emancipation, she struggled to fully embrace or be embraced by female elders beyond the myths of the distant women warriors. In her quest to dispel the negative associations with Chinese women, she encountered an internal imbalance that shattered the rosy picture she had envisioned. Upon leaving the military academy and her

parents, she found herself without a promising direction, and it was at this point that she encountered other Chinese Noras who, like her, were grappling with frustration.

At specific stages of the journey, exemplified by events such as the dismissal of the women's team, imprisonment, gap years, and the displacement of women during and after wars, Xie began her descent. It was a phase marked by what seemed like an unending period of sadness, grief, and rage, as well as a quest to retrieve the lost parts of herself and confront the crisis femininity. It was a period of voluntary isolation – a time of darkness, silence, and contemplation, with a focus on 'being' rather than 'doing'. While the external voices, including that of Lin Yutang, might have labelled this phase as depression or stagnation, it was, in fact, a courageous journey that required trust in fellow women and reflections on their roles. In Xie's account, many of her friends also embarked on the journey, only to discover that it felt devoid of fulfillment. A woman was either considered 'successful' in a male-oriented culture or dominated and dependent in a traditionally female role. It was often a process obscured by heroic narrative or the discourse of emulating heroic figures for a woman to discover herself and other women. In the end, following the period of descent and reconstruction, our warrior slowly embarked on the path back home to heal the mother-daughter divide, addressing the wound that originated from the initial rejection of a belittled femininity. They celebrated their achievements amidst the pain of separation and the sweetness of communication.

As the war generation faded, with failing memories and decades of silence in between, women's lived experiences and their affect were often concealed beneath the idolatrised image of warriors, shooting a call for xenophobia, shared hatred, and collective action. Writing became Xie's way of coping with the oblivion of history. In the postscript of her 1929 *War Diary*, she urged female cadets not to lose hope for revolution because of the dismissal of their team in the Northern Expedition. Yet the encouragement had shifted to profound disappointment in her 1946 commemoration of her comrades who sacrificed on the battlefield. Rather than expecting that the ranks of the women soldiers would shoulder the weight of all Chinese women, Xie hoped that her portrayal of her comrades would somehow prolong their lives in the recollections of later generations, arousing public attention to women who had never been properly compensated.

Xie's autobiographical practice also functions as a conduit that illuminates a network of interconnected channels involving the trajectories of individual women. Her portrayals range

from her mother and friends ensnared in patriarchal family structures to friends in universities, cadets at the Central Military Academy, female prisoners in Japan, members of wartime organisations, and Chinese diasporas. All these women, often overlooked in tributes to the woman warrior, crossed paths with her on a winding path, and she diligently recollected them from the meander of memories. Xie's recollections reveal how they reconciled the complexities of personal feelings with the ever-shifting promises presented by their times.

This effort was not solely her own. The work diary she required her corps members to maintain became a gateway to understanding the multifaceted identities that individuals construct within their personal narratives, as well as how ordinary women preserved their wartime everydayness on the frontlines. The effectiveness of national and media forces in shaping women's thoughts and behaviours was undeniable. However, intricate nuances existed in how they responded to and adopted these influences. Xie further encouraged young people to write after she went to Taiwan and Southeast Asia, where she published volumes of essays on writing. According to Malaysian historian Jin-zong Li, Xie was enthusiastic about promoting Chinese literature and literary creation during her time in Malaysia. Liang Yuan, a patriotic Malaysian Chinese poet, was among the students who found inspiration from Xie and pursued a writing career.[6] A librarian from Taiping Hwa Lian High School reminisced that students' interest in writing initiated by Xie endured for several years. Even those who were not directly taught by her were absorbed in the atmosphere.[7]

Authorship vs Censorship: Navigating the Representation of The Woman Warrior

Another noteworthy aspect of remembering is the autobiographical author's relationship with the reader and the characters she created. In classical Chinese lyric poetry, feminine subjectivity was primarily constructed from a masculine perspective, under which women's creative expression was confined to domestic spaces or private female societies. With the introduction of autobiography as a genre in China and the dissemination of feminism, women

[6] Jin-zong Li, *Singapore and Malaysian Literature Step by Step* (xinma wenxue bubu zhuizong 新馬文學步步追踪). Singapore: Qingnian shuju, 2008, 29. Some of Xie's essays instructing essay writing that were published in Malaya can be found in her collections: *How do I Write* (wo zenyang xiezuo 我怎樣寫作) (1961) and *Smile in Dreams* (mengli de weixiao 夢裡的微笑) (1967).

[7] Wenrong Xu and Yanzhuang Sun, 'Literary Transnationality and Communication: The Southeast Asian Experiences and Writing of Su Xuelin, Xie Bingying and Zhong Meiyin' (wenxue de kuaguojie yu huitong: Su Xuelin, Xie Bingying ji Zhong Meiyin de Nanyang jingli 文學的跨國界與會通: 蘇雪林、謝冰瑩及鐘梅音的南洋經曆與書寫), *Chinese Comparative Literature*, 1, 2005, 115–128, 121.

found a means allowing them not only to delve into the tensions between their modern individual roles and traditional ones but also to circumvent male stereotypes regarding female creativity. Yet at the same time, writing one's own life can evoke anxiety in women writers about whether their stories deserve a broader public reception. Hayashi Fumiko experienced such concerns early in her career, but she confessed that she could not suppress the passion for writing. Xie, on the other hand, faced greater pressure beyond fulfilling her desire for creative expression. Unlike Hayashi's candid portrayal of female lust and degradation, Xie's first work on military life established the foundation of her career and public persona. Straying from that narrative made her apprehensive about its potential impact on readers. Although Xie admired Hayashi, she paradoxically criticised the similarly 'bold' erotic depictions by Kuo Liang-hui for their harm to social stability, as the latter's works more closely mirrored life in Taiwan, while she perceived Hayashi's writing as a more distilled but distant form of artistic expression.

It is not surprising that some scholars view Xie as having transitioned from a fighter into a patronised state writer after her move to Taiwan. Beyond her prominent roles in official literary organisations, she demonstrated political sensitivity in her output by aligning her work with the political propaganda of the KMT, both in public writings and private correspondence. It appeared that, in conforming to the regime's conservative policies, Xie's political commitment took precedence over her gender concerns. Nonetheless, this critique of Xie's betrayal of her past overlooks the entanglements that she embodied in her repeated revisions of her work, her reflections on revolutions in China, and the shift in the focus of her writing after she moved to Taiwan. Shaping her writing through a process of self-reflection, Xie's intention extended beyond mere occurrences of events to navigate the representation of women warriors.

Even in her early years, Xie appeared almost self-aware in positioning herself, or the image of the woman warrior in her works, as assuming an educational responsibility, to the extent that she concealed her own subjectivity behind the character she created. Her initial realisation regarding this separation emerged when she escaped an arranged marriage and led an impecunious student life in Shanghai. On a day when she could not afford food, a reader who did not recognise her recommended *War Diary* as a book that young women like her should read, but she was reluctant to admit that she, a poor student who could barely pay her bus fare, was the author of the book. Xie noted that many readers had enquired about the veracity of these poignant stories, and she repeatedly reassured them that the experiences

recounted were indeed genuine. To achieve this, she attributed the inconsistency in her original works and revised works to the intentional involvement of editors or her own immaturity, as can be seen in 'Self-criticism of War Diary', prefaces to her autobiographies, and her correspondences with friends. Her responsibility to the reader might have been a motivating factor behind her efforts to refine the image of the female soldier in each revision. Amid the conflicting messages, Xie's war accounts tell her evolving insights about war, which may or may not comply with dominant narratives.

The publication histories of Xie's self-adaptations indicate that her autobiographical writings go beyond mere representations of 'truth', but a form of self-censorship that transcends the ideological dimension. While defending the image of the woman warrior she crafted, Xie harboured an underlying concern that this portrayal, similar to the liberating implications associated with the Nora motif that resonated with the May Fourth generation, might usher in an overly idealised icon that misled their imagination about more complex social issues. Leaving homes without proper preparation might only expose women to more oppressive aspects within hierarchical gender systems. This awareness of duty extended beyond the themes of love and freedom. Even during the war years, Xie remained cautious about encouraging young women to serve the frontlines under the banner of patriotism. When a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl expressed a desire to join the HWBSC to assist wounded soldiers, Xie advised her to act with careful deliberation, considering her responsibilities to both her parents and her education, rather than acting on impulse alone. Despite Xie's commitment to national revolution, her traumatic political experiences and subsequent disillusionment had already unveiled the disheartening reality that the leaders who had professed to lead the masses away from despotism might have ultimately contributed to a political monolith. The escalating intolerance for any middle ground had a subversive impact on individuals, particularly within a vulnerable community like women.

As for reception, the author's expectations of the implied reader seemed only gratified in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, literary debates centred on the representation of decadent modernity, exemplified by eroticism and the portrayal of feminine bodies. With the war expanding, literature was oriented towards national salvation. The image of gender-neutral women warriors served as a source of inspiration for latecomers, motivating more women to assert control over their bodies and minds for the country. A simplified yet potent 'female military legacy' cultivated a sense of connectedness between the author, her

female readers, and even illiterate female audiences.[8] Through the act of writing, reading, listening to, and circulating heroic women's stories, an 'imagined' community of Chinese women was forged.

Even though the woman warrior's image continues to stand as a constructed monument today, the practice of an old woman warrior has seemed anachronistic during peacetime, when a multitude of debates and diverse aesthetics are freely unfolding. Compared to many of her contemporaries and the literature that has long flourished in the marketplace, Xie's works perform less sophistication and attractive force on an artistic level. Her peak seems to have merely occurred during wartime. Rather than being continually reprinted like *War Diary* and *The Autobiography of a Woman Solider*, most of her essays and fiction have faded into dusty archives in university libraries. However, it was her incongruous declarations of patriotism that initially drew us to the compelling image of the woman warrior – a figure intertwined with some of the most chaotic and bloody struggles in human history, while imbuing the individual with an enduring glory, also contains ambiguous languages and unforgettable hidden pains.

The juxtaposition of Xie's obsessive depiction of women in her orbit, capturing their everyday lives and exposing the complexities of her emotional struggles, against her persistent oversimplification of her own image as a passionate warrior, creates a multifaceted representation. Her consistent retrospective look at memories exposes the instability that wars and conflicts brought to an early woman warrior and how she struggled to reconstruct the way to remember herself and others. Xie's writing provides a glimpse into the lesser-seen side of modern Chinese women warriors, urging us to persist in questioning how women warriors' physical and mental lives ought to be analysed through a lens of female affect, although their intentions may always be misconstrued.

Final Words

Upon reflecting on the trajectory of this thesis, I acknowledge that both internal and external challenges have limited my ability to pursue more in-depth investigations. Although I have explored female friendships throughout various chapters, some more subtle aspects about

[8] Li Guo, *Women's Tanci Fiction in Late Imperial and Early Twentieth-Century China*. Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2015, 74.

affection remain unclear because of a special focus on war, such as the extent to which the same-sex affection could be oriented toward what we might term love. In *Letters To the Young*, Xie references the sensational 1932 homosexual love murder case. Tao Sijin and Liu Mengying, both students at the National Academy of Fine Arts, had vowed never to marry men in order to preserve their relationship. However, frequent arguments fueled by jealousy and suspicion ultimately led to Tao Sijin killing Liu Mengying after a fierce struggle. Xie adopted a dual role in her review of this tragedy: after reading it in the newspaper, a 'younger sister' asked if homosexuality is normal, and an 'older sister' responded that it is detrimental to both an individual's physiology and social development. Perhaps due to the widespread attention the case garnered within the literary world, Xie incorporated it into this book about academic and vocational problems of young people. Yet the 'older sister' in the narrative also remarks that 'those rich in emotion, especially fond of their same-sex friends, may unknowingly embark on the path of homosexuality', and 'there was no one who was not a lesbian at The No.1 Girls' Normal School in Changsha, Hunan' – a middle school Xie attended in 1921.[9] When studying in Japan, Xie expressed her wish to live with a female friend forever, with one of them managing work and the other taking care of the household. Rather than speculating whether Xie herself engaged in same-sex relationships, the intent here is to expand the concept of love in the context of intimate confessions between women, the blurred boundaries between friendship and romance, and the potential for harm. Whereas heterosexual love is often viewed through an evolutionary lens leading to motherhood, same-sex love may be seen as a path toward self-fulfillment and emotional completeness.

Due to limited access to Xie's publications in Taiwanese newspapers, certain texts – despite their relevance to discussions on Confucianism and Chineseness – were inaccessible during the course of my research. Examples include 'The Spirit of Confucius' (Confucius de jingshen 孔子的精神) published in *Lianhe Bao* in September 1956, 'Why the Level of Chinese Language Proficiency Fell' (Guowen chengdu weishenme hui diluo 國文程度為什麼會低落) in *Free Youth* in October 1965, and essays she wrote during her 1965 visit to Korean female veterans and Chinese schools in Korea. These writings are invaluable for enhancing our understanding of Xie's 'conservative turn' and will enrich my analysis of the post-war psychology of female soldiers, as well as the negotiation between the author's subjectivity and

[9] Xie Bingying, *Youth Letters* (Qingnian shuxin 青年书信). 2nd ed., Shanghai: Beixin Bookstore, 1934, 133.

political censorship. Xie's belief in Buddhism since the 1960s also deserves further research, particularly how this interacted with her more well-known identity as a warrior who once criticised 'superstition'.

Despite these potential limitations, we have undertaken a comprehensive research journey that avoids reducing the narratives of women warriors to mere biographical accounts or military histories. In common with many public figures in Chinese history, Xie's life story is consciously forgotten, recollected, and appropriated by commentators to suit their varied needs and specific circumstances. We transcend the tension between personal memories and national histories, exploring more nuanced dimensions of women's emotions, sisterhood, and mother-daughter relationships. These complexities and the diverse imagery they evoke inevitably shape a multifaceted and gendered portrayal of war. A tortuous journey still lies ahead as we venture down the untrodden paths and press forward on the road ahead for possibilities of a better future, while at the same time, we have to critically review the historical debris left that continues to propel human beings forward.

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