

3. Engendering Victimhood

WHILE IT MAY BE COINCIDENTAL that a female cigarette vendor was beaten by the authorities, thereby opening a floodgate of Taiwanese discontent and Nationalist brutality, women and the images of women have often played a crucial role in times of crises in both actual national politics and popular imagination. In “The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong’s *Field of Life and Death*,” Lydia Liu examines the co-optation of Xiao Hong’s work by male critics throughout modern Chinese literary history. Beginning with Lu Xun and Hu Feng, Xiao Hong scholarship has been subsumed into a national discourse that insists on interpreting her novel as an anti-Japanese allegory while obscuring or ignoring the plight of rural women.¹ In a way, by refusing to acknowledge that the women in Xiao Hong’s novel are women first and Chinese second, these critics (most of them male) deny them a gendered victimhood and actually inflict a second (albeit symbolic) victimization. Using a rape scene in Xiao Jun’s *Village in August* as a contrast, Liu is critical of this patriarchal national consciousness: “As a sign of symbolic exchange, the raped woman often serves as a powerful trope in anti-Japanese propaganda. Her victimization is used to represent—or more precisely, to eroticize—China’s own plight.”²

Liu’s now classic essay reveals, among many insights, the contestation over the representation of women and the interpretive ownership of the symbol of the female body vis-à-vis foreign aggression at a time of national crisis. This is by no means unique to China; similar battles were waged over women’s veils in colonial Algeria and the practice of sati (suttee) in British-ruled India. In “Algeria Unveiled,” Frantz

Fanon describes the changing role of the women's veil in colonial Algeria. "If we [the French colonial government] want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hid themselves and in the houses where the men kept them out of sight."³ Owing to the veil's metonymic nature, the French colonizers believed that unveiling the women would lead to the total subordination of the Algerian (male) population. During Algeria's struggle for independence, many women unveiled and revealed themselves in their participation in the revolutionary action. Whether the aim was total subjugation or independence, the Algerian women, both veiled and unveiled, were called to perform for colonial conquest and later national salvation. Ironically, as Winifred Woodhull points out, the postindependent Algerian government demanded the revealing of the women because it was essential to recovering Algerian traditional culture and uniting a nation that would otherwise be torn apart by economic disparity and political struggle.⁴ The imposed revealing exposes the high stakes and underlying anxiety at issue when colonial or nationalist patriarchal narratives address the place, function, and symbolic value of women.

Similarly, sati, the self-immolation of widows, took on overcharged religious, nationalistic, and colonial implications in British-ruled India. Lata Mani investigated how the image of self-immolating widows was manipulated by the British colonial government to solidify and substantiate its authority: "The widows were presumed to be uneducated and incapable of both reason and independent action."⁵ What necessitated this denigration of Indian women in general was an imperialistic desire to demean the colonial subjects through a convoluted route of reasoning: "Officials in favor of abolition argued that such action was in fact consistent with upholding indigenous tradition. And indeed this was how the regenerating mission of colonization was conceptualized by officials: not as the imposition of a new Christian moral order but as the recuperation and enforcement of the truths of indigenous tradition."⁶ In other words, the Hindu intelligentsia was considered ignorant of its own culture, hence their endorsement (active or passive) of sati. The widows were double victims of such ignorance, so it is not surprising that "the widow was often described as a 'tender child.'"⁷

This is not to say that all Indian male intellectuals defended the practice; many were passionate and eloquent opponents of sati. What is of interest here is the exploitation of the widows' will—that is, whether or not they willingly immolated themselves along with their husbands. The proponents of sati emphasized women's will, but “the petition [against the prohibition of sati] seeks to demonstrate that the East India Company's criminalizing of sati is based on an erroneous reading of the scripture.”⁸ Women receded into the background but at the same time were turned into a battleground, where the colonial authority and indigenous intelligentsia vied to prove each other wrong in their interpretation of the Hindu tradition. In short, a debate on a practice that is cruel beyond measure became a competition for the authoritative reading of scripture, and the contest between indigenous sovereignty and colonial domination remained the underlying subtext.

In these three regions, women at various times in their nation's history were classified and then declassified as victims of the conquest of imperialism, and they were simultaneously the manifestation of indigenous tradition and the embodiment of the inferiority of their culture. To be sure, Xiao Hong's text differs from the other two because it is fiction, but the subject matter and decades of scholarship point toward a similar tendency to exploit women in the name of nationalism, even though women often exist on the margin of national discourse. By looking at these regions together, I am not suggesting that the issues facing the women in China, Algeria, and India were necessarily identical or even comparable. Rather, a brief consideration of the complexity of interpreting the place of women in the nation's discourse in these three regions gives us a multifaceted point of departure for our inquiry into the interplay between women and the representation of victimhood in Taiwan. What we have seen is the nation's (that is, men's) changing demands on women at a time of colonial domination and national crisis and how unstable the sign of victimhood has been. A similar trajectory can be detected in Taiwan after martial law when the crisis is long over and has been obscured for decades and the image of women as victims figures prominently in the recuperation of that critical moment. This chapter examines several literary texts featuring women in the representation of national (domestic) atrocity.

THE LITERATURE OF ATROCITY AND WOMEN

The four decades following the 2/28 Incident were marked by a government-imposed collective amnesia.⁹ Essential to the Guomindang's government's successful domination of Taiwan, this amnesia is similar to what Homi K. Bhabha calls "the obligation to forget":

It is through this syntax of forgetting—or being obliged to forget—that the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible. The national subject is produced in that place where the daily plebiscite—the unitary number—circulates in the grand narrative of will. However, the equivalence of will and plebiscite, the identity of part and whole, past and present, is cut across by the “obligation to forget,” or forgetting to remember.¹⁰

To defy this obligation and dismantle the nation imagined by the Nationalist government, writers have tried to reconstruct history by creating stories and attempted to recoup the Taiwanese past and redefine Taiwanese culture.

In the literary recuperation of Taiwan's forbidden history, women are often, and unavoidably, portrayed as victims. But the discussion would go no further if writers did little more than repeat the common trope of woman as victim, which is a well-worn discursive device found in the scholarship on Xiao Hong's *The Field of Life and Death* or the debates about self-immolated widows in colonial India. For the Taiwanese writers, the choice has been virtually obligatory, since the men were either executed or imprisoned and women were the actual victims, not just a symbol of victimhood. As a scholar pointed out, “For the men who died in the 2/28 Incident, the day marked the end of their stories, while for the women they left behind the 2/28 Incident was the beginning of theirs.”¹¹ Although women can serve as a powerful metaphor for government violence against its people, Taiwanese women were victimized twice in the 2/28 discourse: they were expected to represent themselves as women bereft of loved ones and, often, economic means while signifying something larger than themselves.

In most of the current scholarship on and in witnesses' accounts of 2/28, women are simply called forth to recount the men's stories, with

their own stories receding into the background.¹² It is as if the sole significance of their existence is to bear witness to the fact that atrocious acts have been committed, their own victimization obscured. An example is Jiang Biyu, Zhong Haodong's widow. In "Song of the Covered Wagon," Lan Bozhou's employment of eyewitness accounts accentuates Zhong Haodong's importance while eclipsing the roles played by other equally significant characters, particularly Jiang Biyu, who was summoned only to bear witness to Zhong's heroism. Moreover, such a monolithic rendition reduces her to a mere skeleton of ideology (and a simplistic ideology at that). In *Good Women of Taiwan*, Lan Bozhou ascribes the following epitaph to Jiang Biyu:

The seventy-four years of Jiang Biyu's life are a perfect illustration of how a patriotic generation selflessly devoted its youth to the survival and continuation of the nation [*minzu*], and what historical rewards its members received in a chaotic, orderless and uncertain time for their effort to "help the flowers of peace and democracy bloom."¹³

Although any critique, no matter how carefully and thoughtfully constructed, of the portrayal of Jiang's suffering and achievement can easily be construed as belittling criticism, we must be careful not to subsume the real-life Jiang Biyu under the grand scheme of national salvation. As Gu Erde commented about Jiang Biyu as represented by Lan,

Strictly speaking, Jiang Biyu was not someone deeply involved in politics, as she never led any political movements. Her political aura came from two men. In "Song of the Covered Wagon," the first sentence Jiang Biyu uttered by way of introducing herself is, "I'm Jiang Yunyu [the name she was given at birth]; I'm Zhong Haodong's wife and Jiang Weishui's daughter (adopted daughter)." Her connection to politics originated from her father and husband, one of them a leader of the opposition movement in colonial Taiwan, the other a political victim of the White Terror Era.¹⁴

If we read between the lines, we detect a subtle criticism in Gu's comment, which contradicts Lan's original intention. That is, not only is she represented as playing a minor role in two very political families, but she is stripped of her subjectivity when her self-identification is

contingent on her relationships with the two male figures in her life. In the grand scheme of things, Jiang Biyu as a victim of the White Terror pales in comparison with her role as the wife of a victim of the White Terror.

Other literary works dealing with the 2/28 Incident and the White Terror present a much more complex and controversial portrayal of women as victims. But here too is a problem with the literary project of restoring history. History, as Jacques Le Goff explained, is related to seeing: “This conception of vision as the essential source of knowledge leads to the idea that istor, the one who sees, is also the one who knows, istorien.”¹⁵ In the Taiwanese situation, it is unclear how women, who usually were not present at the scenes of atrocious acts and who therefore did not see them, can claim legitimate representational authority and to what extent their absence from this history can restore that history.

“The Mountain Road” and Revictimization

Chen Yingzhen’s “The Mountain Road” is one of the earliest and best-known stories about the effects of the White Terror.¹⁶ Written in 1983, before martial law was lifted, the story is significant on at least two levels. Historically, its subject matter is audacious, as Chen’s own personal life can attest to the intolerance of the ruling Nationalist government of any dissenting or critical views.¹⁷ Structurally, “The Mountain Road” sets an example for a narrative style of retelling a past that can never be complete, as opposed to the straightforward, linear narration that Lin Shuangbu used in “A Minor Biography of Huang Su,” also published in 1983.¹⁸

“The Mountain Road” is told from the perspective of Li Guomu, whose sister-in-law, Cai Qianhui, is hospitalized at the beginning of the story. Doctors at various hospitals have not been able to diagnose the cause of her illness. When asked whether Cai has recently experienced any great sadness, Li Guomu recalls how his sister-in-law wept over a newspaper report of the parole of four political prisoners who were arrested in the early 1950s, along with her husband, Li’s older brother, Li Guokun, who was executed. The report marks the beginning of the deterioration of Cai’s health. After Cai wills

herself to die, Li finds among her effects a letter to one of the newly released prisoners, Huang Zhenbo, with whom she had had a romantic relationship. The letter reveals that not only was she not married to Li's brother, but she did not even know him well. In the early 1950s, when the government conducted massive arrests of left-leaning intellectuals, her parents had secretly arranged for her brother to cooperate with the government and turn in his comrades. Although he had complied, he still was arrested with those he betrayed. Guilt and shame over her family's action prompted Cai to pretend to be the wife of Li Guokun and to work for the Li family for the next thirty years.

David Der-wei Wang, reading Chen's story as an illustration of Communist hunger politics, observed that "Chen Yingzhen has invested the story of this enigmatic figure with a touching allegory about political idealism and its betrayal."¹⁹ A similar observation can be found in Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang's analysis of Chen's works: "Chen Yingzhen's stories are despondent, lamenting the fate of idealistic individuals betrayed by the unpredictable course of history. They also condemn contemporary Taiwanese society for its rampant materialism and devotion to creature comforts, products of the capitalist evil corrupting people's lives."²⁰ Indeed, as the letter discloses, Cai Qianhui castigates herself for abandoning her ideal and indulging in material comfort. But Chen Yingzhen creates the figure of a self-sacrificing woman in order to indict capitalist society, in contrast to the idealism and self-devotion of young men like Li Guokun and Huang Zhenbo. In the process, Chen describes the inhumane and lasting effects of the White Terror: a family sacrificing other families in order to save their son; a woman sacrificing her own youth as a form of reparation; and a younger brother's inability to face the past resulting from many decades of self-censorship.

Examining Chen's story for the ways that literature bears witness against history, Yomi Braester argues that "'Mountain Path' [*sic*] points to literary testimony as always-already belated, addressing either the mute dead or the deaf living. The author cannot recover a voice free of the doubts—his own and his readers'—that have been ingrained during years of oppression and suppression."²¹ A literary recuperation of a historical past by its very nature cannot but remain fragmentary at best. In Braester's view, such a characteristic in fictional works by

Chen and others “is a sign of Taiwanese writers’ recognition of their inability to redress past wrongs and rewrite history into a narrative of progress and redemption.”²²

We can take Braester’s argument a step further and examine how Chen’s story exemplifies the effects of the White Terror, by applying Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of autobiographical memory as the

memory of events that we have personally experienced in the past. It may also serve to reinforce the bonds between participants. . . . It stands to reason, however, that autobiographical memory tends to fade with time unless it is periodically reinforced through contact with persons with whom one shared the experiences in the past. . . . In any case, autobiographical memory is always rooted in other people.²³

The power of suppression affects people not solely by the loss of their historical memory (the “forgotten” 2/28 Incident) but also by the more sinister effect of isolation, of which Cai Qianhui is the prime victim. Without periodic reinforcement through contacts with other participants, because they either were killed or are still imprisoned, she loses her memory of the past until the day she reads about the release of the one of the political prisoners, a coparticipant.

Conversely, the author exploits the fading of Cai Qianhui’s autobiographical memory, even though it serves the purpose of protesting government suppression, in his attack on the detrimental effects of capitalism, which, in turn, questions the portrayal of the victims, particularly women, of atrocity. Like Li Guomu, whose brother is executed, Cai Qianhui, whose brother also was arrested, is a victim herself, although she may not consider herself one, for she believes that by collaborating with the government to save her brother, her parents have deprived her family of the status of victim. The development of the story suggests that there can be only one kind of victim, and, in a perverse way, this story calls into question the definition of victimhood. What constitutes a victim of political persecution seems to be self-determined in Chen’s story. Cai’s own brother indeed betrays his comrades, but is the betrayal not a result of the suppression of dissident and persecution? Does his right to claim victimhood stop once he is coerced into collaborating with the government? As her letter reveals,

“Six months later Hanting [Cai Qianhui’s brother] returned, pale and exhausted. . . . Unable to endure the pangs of conscience, he started to drink, and on several occasions when drunk he admitted to me that he had implicated many people who were later arrested.”²⁴ Would repentance alleviate his guilt? Although it is not meant as an apology for her brother’s action, my contention focuses more on the effects of the White Terror, which, not unlike the cruel conditions during the Cultural Revolution on the mainland, twisted humanity and stripped many people of compassion and conscience.

Moreover, what is particularly disturbing about Chen’s story is the double victimization the author inflicts on Cai Qianhui in order to convey his well-known opposition to capitalism. As Braester points out, “her survival seems immoral when compared to the fate of the long-imprisoned and the dead.”²⁵ To put it more bluntly, Chen Yingzhen criticizes the Taiwanese people’s complacency and indulgence in material comforts by having Cai Qianhui confess in her letter to Huang Zhenbo: “Your release from prison has shocked me into awareness. I have been tamed by the capitalist commodity society, have been so well nourished that I have become a sort of domestic animal.”²⁶ Cai Qianhui not only is a woman-cum-domestic animal who betrays the idealism of her younger days, but also represents the kind of Taiwanese who pursues sensual enjoyment.

“Feminists can charge Chen Yingzhen with indulging the idea of female self-effacement in support of a male-centered revolutionary cause,” David Wang writes. “I suspect, nevertheless, that Chen Yingzhen is no more an ideological fanatic or a misogynist than he is a modernist informed by the (anti-)heroism of the absurd.”²⁷ While some may argue that Chen is likely more an ideologue than a misogynist, we cannot help but question the employment of women as the embodiment of comfortable domesticity and, more important, Chen’s portrayal of a self-sacrificing devotee to the dissidents’ cause, particularly because her redemption is denied to her twice. Cai Qianhui willingly turns herself into a *de facto* servant of the victim’s family to redress a crime committed by her family. “When the men [in her life] are imprisoned or die for righteous causes and justice, the women have to take care of their offspring, but when the women accumulate a bit of wealth as a result of their hard work, they are condemned as domestic animals.”²⁸ She slaves away for the victim’s family, not only to

compensate the family whose son was implicated by her own family, but also as a way to punish herself: “I worked extremely hard. I worked myself as though I were being driven by a cruel and abusive master, making myself a slave physically and emotionally.”²⁹ But her labor only leads to the enjoyment of a comfortable life (albeit self-proclaimed), from which she needs to be redeemed once more, this time, by her death. On the narrative level, when her mission of atoning for a crime she did not commit is accomplished, the author has Cai Qianhui will herself to die in order to deliver his political diatribe. We are reminded of the Algerian women who were unveiled and veiled at the whim of the male colonial and Algerian governments in their effort to recoup (male) dominance and authority.

On the surface, Cai Qianhui appears to be a positive, sympathetic character, a figure like Mother Earth, but in fact, she is a triple victim: of the White Terror, of her own convictions, and of the author’s need to condemn capitalism. Her death “is a necessary means for filling in the blanks in history.”³⁰ We could even argue that her death is inevitable, for the author needs her to die in order to make a point. David Wang put it most succinctly by contending that “‘Mountain Path’ faces the challenge of recalling, elegiacally, the bygone days of political fervor amid the ruins of revolutionary praxis”³¹ and that after atoning for her brother’s failure to be a true revolutionary, Cai Qianhui now has to redress the failure of a whole generation.

Moreover, this narrative strategy renders her a powerless woman who seems to live *in* the past and *for* the past. The occasions in which we see her speaking are mostly taken up by reminiscences of the past and often in fragments, as she lacks contact with her coparticipants in the past. A similar view can be found in Lucien Miller’s analysis of Chen’s works: “For many of [Chen Yingzhen’s] characters, this contemplative mode of participation and transcendence is difficult to achieve because too often their reflection is carried out in a self-enclosed world of their own making.”³² The last instance of Cai Qianhui’s inability to speak for herself is the letter, unsent and discovered posthumously. The mystery of the cause of her death and the reason for her self-sacrifice are finally solved by the male narrator, who refuses to share the letter with anyone, including his wife, who also is portrayed as a caring, hardworking woman. The textual violation and narrative violence in the way that female victims are presented

is disturbing and reflects the problems with Chen Yingzhen's gender politics: "It is the effect of a male-centered historical view to have a female protagonist as the one who transmits and forgets the memory of the White Terror, and it is undoubtedly an 'example' of 'ideological predetermination.'" ³³

"A Minor Biography of Huang Su" and Madness

Compared with the other works analyzed in this chapter, Lin Shuang-bu's story falls into a category all by itself. Whereas all women in the other stories are guilty by association, "A Minor Biography of Huang Su" places the female victim directly at the scene of the massacre. In other words, the female victims in other stories suffer because men in their families (parents, brothers, or husbands) are implicated or involved. By contrast, rather than characterizing these women as victims of family connections, Lin's story describes the firsthand experience of an innocent victim who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"A Minor Biography of Huang Su" is the story of nineteen-year-old Huang Su, who, in the space of a single day, changes from a happy bride-to-be into an accused murderer and eventually into a madwoman. The story opens on a spring day in 1947, as Huang Su awakens at the crack of dawn, filled with excitement. She is getting married in two weeks, and her mother is taking her shopping in town. After making purchases at a fabric store, Huang Su and her mother arrive at a sundry shop, where her mother picks out a cleaver for Huang Su just as a commotion breaks out on the street. Two crowds of angry mobs attack each other with clubs, bricks, and broken liquor bottles. Huang Su, separated from her mother, is carried along with the mobs and eventually falls down on a corpse when she is hit on the back. The cleaver, intended as a domestic instrument for her wifely duties, is mistaken as a weapon in the public outcry, and Huang Su is arrested, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. But she then is proclaimed not guilty at the execution ground, at the moment the executioners are about to shoot her. She is literally shocked out of her wits and goes mad. When she returns home, she learns that both her parents have fallen ill during her imprisonment

and that the marriage proposal has been withdrawn. After both parents die, Huang Su is neglected by her brothers and sisters-in-law and wanders around the village aimlessly as an aging madwoman. The story ends with her walking down a railroad track as a train bears down on her.

Scholars who have examined Lin Shuangbu's story inevitably mention his revelation of its background. According to Lin himself, the character of Huang Su is based on the image of a madwoman in the village where Lin attended middle and high school. But the story would lose its significance if it were not for another extratextual figure: Lin's high-school English teacher, who somehow let the words "2/28" slip into his lecture one day. Lin claimed that he raised his hand to ask the meaning of 2/28, but the teacher, in a state of panic, adamantly denied that he had said anything. The author continued with his questions after class, and finally the teacher, speaking Taiwanese, told him the first thing Lin had ever heard about the 2/28 Incident. The teacher also mentioned the madwoman in town and explained why she had gone mad.³⁴ It was not until many years later that Lin Shuangbu finally decided to write the story.

It is difficult, perhaps pointless, to determine the veracity and credibility of the extratextual story, but the author's intention to re-create history is clear, as Lin himself explained: "A concrete individual case in a historical event emerges and the cold setting now finds a lively protagonist."³⁵ In a way, we can argue that the re-creation of history—the story of Huang Su—is the joint effort of a high-school English teacher, his student, the adult author, and the madwoman and that the story would probably have been much different if even one of the participants had been omitted. The creation of this story mirrors the unearthing of the 2/28 Incident's history: from ignorance (the young author) and self-imposed silence (his teacher) to inquiry to finally naming the victims. Although we may fault the author for exploiting the image of a madwoman, we could make an equally valid case for the author's attempt to redress historical wrongs and for his giving a name to the madwoman.

Both Xu Junya and Jian Suzheng consider the story to be an example of gender stereotyping by a male writer. Lin Shuangbu "employs a gender conception based on a patriarchal value system and turns women into a symbol of Taiwan. When the country is in turmoil,

women cannot help but be dragged in to become the most innocent victims.”³⁶ Echoing Xu Junya’s reading, Jian Suzheng adds that what truly concerns the author is not the experience of women but the destiny of the collectivity. Indeed, what can better represent the ultimate effect of the 2/28 Incident than an innocent woman, particularly one who is just about to be married? We also recall that the widow destined for sati was often portrayed as a “tender child,” invoking a pathos in the contrast between the young woman as the epitome of innocence and the injustice inflicted on her.

Different from the rhetoric of anti-sati discourse are the metonymic characteristics of this betrothed madwoman. On a textual level, the marriage proposal is withdrawn because of the possibility of contamination (which also appears in Yang Zhao’s story “Yanhua”). Her fiancé’s father has told her mother that his son cannot marry a former political prisoner (not a madwoman). Her mother retorts,

“You know fully well that Asu [Huang Su] isn’t one.”

“What does it matter whether I know or not,” Wang Jinhai’s father sighed. “People’s words are poisonous.”³⁷

Even though Huang Su is released, she will have to carry the stigma with her for the rest of her life. In accordance with the politics of representing atrocity, we detect in the fiancé’s father’s words a slippage from the actual, physical disability of mental illness to the abstract, amorphous but omnipotent stain of having been a political prisoner. Needless to say, the latter is more pernicious and pervasive in its power to terrorize and thwart any hint of dissent.

Following this line of reasoning, we find that Xu’s and Jian’s critiques seem incomplete, if not misapplied altogether. What is at issue in this story is not merely a helpless woman representing a powerless Taiwan at the mercy of the Nationalist government, but the trope of a betrothed woman plus madness. In her analysis of *Jane Eyre*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests that the function of the madwoman, Bertha Mason, is “to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law.”³⁸ In a similar vein, it is only through his description of the subhuman figure of Huang Su that the author can convey a sense of outrage over injustice and senseless killing.³⁹

A novel published in 1989, Chen Ye's *Muddy River*, also features a woman gone mad after her fiancé is arrested and executed. But madness alone cannot and does not adequately represent the severity of suffering endured by the Taiwanese. Interestingly, Chen Ye's mad-woman, Yinchai, like Huang Su, also loses her fiancé, which leads us to wonder whether the combination of a marriage proposal, a woman, and her madness is the most effective means of representing state terror (we will see that both Cai Qianhui and the nameless woman in Yang Zhao's "Yanhua" are unmarried, and, as my analysis shows in the last section of this chapter, even though the Grieving Founding Mother in Li Ang's "The Devil in a Chastity Belt" is married, she is rendered sexless by the demand of opposition politics). The ending of Huang Su's engagement resulting from her madness means that the possibility of childbearing is forever denied her. If we consider her a sort of "everywoman" of Taiwan, then Huang Su and her madness are far more significant than merely serving as a symbol of indiscriminate violence, for her childlessness mirrors the absence of the local Taiwanese elite for the first two decades after the incident.

Furthermore, a fundamental difficulty of this kind of representation can be surmised from the suspended ending, when Huang Su is standing on the tracks and facing a fast-approaching train. That is, if the protagonist were to be hit by the train, would her death intensify or lessen the senseless and indiscriminate persecution that starts Huang Su's journey down the road from madness to death? Would it be more tragic? Whether intentional or not, Lin Shuangbu's portrayal of Huang Su's uncertain fate alerts us to the issue of effectively representing tragedy.

"Flower in the Smoke" and Questionable Victimhood

In an essay on women, provincial origin, and history in 2/28 fiction, Jian Suzheng delineates three stages in the fictional representation of women in 2/28 literature: the period between retrocession and martial law (1945 to the early 1980s), the years shortly before the lifting of martial law (in 1987), and the post-martial law era. This periodization helps illustrate the changing portrayals of women, from innocent victims to ameliorating and unifying figures of provincial divisions to

personifications of the complexity between public/national history and private life.⁴⁰ The lifting of martial law in 1987 was indeed a watershed for Taiwanese literature. Before that year, writers understandably practiced self-censorship, whereas the period after martial law ushered in a cacophony of literary subjects, including political satire directed at the president, and female sexuality. Hence, periodization encompasses this subgenre of 2/28 literature both synchronically and diachronically, although the expansion of topics and the increasingly transparent references to 2/28 have been contingent on the gradual relaxation of government control. While it is not my intention to conduct a survey of Taiwan's literary works on this subject, let alone their periodization, it is important to examine how the representation of women evolved. To do that, I look at a 1987 story by Yang Zhao entitled "Yanhua."⁴¹

Narrated by an omniscient "third" person, "Yanhua" describes an encounter between a young woman and Jin Hongzao, a friend of her father's. The young woman's father, a member of a committee investigating the bloodshed caused by the illegal cigarettes incident and later a member of a settlement committee, was arrested and then executed. The wife of Jin Hongzao, a mainlander, also died during the incident when a group of angry demonstrators stormed the police station where she had sought refuge. The intertwined past of the story's only two characters is revealed through their conversation. The story does not contain much action until one day the young woman invites Jin to her house, where she asks him in and guides his hand in touching her naked body. Shortly after that night, which appears to be the climax of the story, Jin is arrested and dies in prison.

Jian Suzheng places Yang Zhao's story in the second period, with the following justification:

2/28 fiction written toward the end of the martial law era was gradually divested of its angry, dark accusatory tone, and the indiscriminate antipathy toward the Mainlanders slowly dissipated. Most of the works now took into serious consideration the fact that the Mainlanders were also victims of political persecution. Yang Zhao's "Yanhua" . . . , though also using female characters to describe the fate of the Taiwanese, broadens the definition of "Taiwanese" to include the Mainlanders and eliminates the dichotomy

of “self” and “other” that in earlier 2/28 fiction placed the Taiwanese at the center. Moreover, the kindness and tenderness of female characters was also used as a medium of communication between provincial groups.⁴²

Jian’s characterization of Yang’s story emphasizes the common features of fictional works written during this period.⁴³ Without a critical analysis of this approach, Jian gives the impression that she is satisfied with merely pointing out similarities. A closer examination of the story, however, exposes the fallacy of using women as a trope for harmony among provincial groups.

What immediately attracts an informed reader’s attention is the fact that the young woman does not have a name, whereas the mainland man does: Jin Hongzao. At one point, the young woman is referred to as Wang Heshun’s daughter. The lack of a name symbolizes the absence of a discernible individuality, which may signal the author’s intention to present her as the quintessential Taiwanese woman, the “everywoman” of Taiwan. Moreover, it underscores the double victimization derived from the contaminating effects of the 2/28 Incident, as evidenced in the withdrawal of the marriage proposal in “A Minor Biography of Huang Su.” For many members of the victims’ families, the 2/28 Incident was a contagious disease; they were shunned by society and harassed by the military police or the secret service. In the young woman’s own words,

Except for the closest relatives, “none of his friends, colleagues, supervisors and subordinates dared come [to pay respect at his bier]. Not a single one of them dared to come.” All of a sudden, [the family] was isolated, like being quarantined during the plague. . . . From then on, she felt that she herself was like a plague. Shunzi’s [Heshung’s] daughter. That was Shunzi’s daughter. Occasionally someone would sneak something to her or help her secretly because she was Shunzi’s daughter, but in public every one of them stayed clear of her, absolutely clear of her.⁴⁴

Her profession seems to confirm the author’s intention. Although nowhere in the story does the author explain how she became a prostitute, it requires little imagination to deduce that after her father’s

death, the girl's family fell on hard times and she turned to prostitution as a way to survive. Prostitution, like rape, is a well-worn metaphor for the injustice inflicted on the subjugated.⁴⁵ In this story, prostitution has an additional significance and serves an important, if disturbing, narratological function. That is, the woman has sex with American GIs, not Taiwanese men. Although we could read too much into this trope, it is impossible to avoid discussing the meaning of such a choice of profession (albeit by the author). Is prostitution the only weapon in the author's narratorial arsenal to portray the devastating effects of the 2/28 Incident? He appears to be convinced that no other line of work could adequately convey the sense of injustice. But in the process of personifying the atrocious crimes of the 2/28 Incident, the author symbolically victimizes the victim's daughter a second time.

The young woman's profession also serves to criticize the absurdity of provincial differences. She reveals to Jin Hongzao that after her father's death, her grandmother made every child in the family swear never to marry a mainlander, and her romantic relationship with a mainlander is therefore forcefully terminated by the elders in the family: "I cannot marry a Mainlander," she said, giving him an eerie but enchanting smile, "but I can sleep with foreigners."⁴⁶ Jian Suzheng reads this passage as a stricture against control of the female body: "The female body becomes a battleground for political struggle; women, under the domination of family clan and provincial groups, lose autonomy and control over their own bodies and sexuality."

Earlier in the essay, Jian described Yang Zhao as a male writer with a feminist consciousness, and the comment just quoted suggests a positive reading of Yang's condemnation of the Taiwanese people's irrational hatred for mainlanders. Although we may find it difficult to disagree with Jian's estimation of Yang's endeavor, we must also question whether the juxtaposition of provincial divides and nationality differences is itself also biased and why provincial disharmony must be censured in terms that further emphasize the division between self and other. In other words, Yang seems to be implying that having sex with foreigners is a more serious violation of Taiwanese individuality and supremacy than is marrying a mainlander. He has found it necessary to articulate the narrowly defined provincial identity through a nationalistic paradigm.

Jian Suzheng approaches this issue from a drastically different perspective, particularly in regard to the scene in which the young woman asks Jin Hongzao to touch her:

His hand shook slightly as it rested on her gaunt, bony shoulder. He wanted to remove his hand, but he couldn't. . . . Taking a deep breath, he let his hand slide along her shoulder, her right arm, her right elbow, her right wrist, and her right palm. Her hand grabbed his and put it on her neck. . . . Carefully he moved his hand along the space between her breasts all the way down to her abdomen and her navel. He realized it wasn't as difficult as he'd imagined, but she suddenly grabbed his hand again, this time to place it on her right breast. . . . She took a deep breath and placed his hand on her private part while opening her legs slightly. . . .

Shaking his head, he said, "No, we can't." She said insistently, "You promised." His hand touched her hair, very very gently caressing the most sensitive area. He arched his upper body to look at her. The expression on her face was not the kind of flushed beauty or charm associated with sex; instead it was more like peace from redemption.

She nearly jumped up to grab hold of him. Choking on tears, she said, "I always felt that my body was so filthy I could never cleanse it no matter how I tried." Her tears dripped onto his body through the open collar of his shirt. "Last night that White GI pushed down hard on me and kissed every part of my body, including. . . . I hate him. It's fine now; now I feel fine. My body is mine again."⁴⁷

In Jian Suzheng's view, the young woman's action represents a new attitude toward provincial identities:

The contradiction that [the young woman] "cannot marry a Mainlander but can sleep with foreigners as a prostitute" can be resolved only after the barrier between provincial groups is dismantled and the provincially based labels of "self" and "other" are peeled off. There is nothing sexual about the young woman playing an active role and guiding Jin Hongzao to caress her body. First of all, it is a symbolic gesture of the mingling of the Taiwanese and Mainlander, and secondly, it represents a female resistance to political struggle and demand to take back the control of her own body.⁴⁸

Jian's well-intentioned reading notwithstanding, it is difficult not to consider this passage an expression of male fantasy, as it remains unclear how a young woman guiding an older man, her own father's friend, to touch her naked body constitutes the elimination of provincial differences. Jian and perhaps the author seem to be suggesting that the mere fact that the young Taiwanese woman asks a mainland man to touch her is evidence enough for the emergence of a new attitude toward provincial differences. Such a reading/writing inevitably elides the issue of victimhood and simplifies the cause of the 2/28 Incident. That is, by using the intimacy between a Taiwanese woman and a mainland man, both of whom are victims of 2/28, to suggest the elimination of provincial hatred, Jian and Yang imply that provincial differences were the sole or primary cause of the incident. Although I will not present historical research to refute such a simplistic explanation, the many works by historians and scholars clearly point to far more complicated causes.

How the young woman's action can represent resistance to political struggle remains unclear as well, both logically and narratologically. This reading likely comes from the fact that at her grandmother's request and at her father's bier, she swore not to marry a mainlander, so that actively seeking body contact with Jin, a mainlander, and thus disregarding her earlier promise can be considered a defiant act. But the passage just quoted displays at best a crude understanding of female subjectivity vis-à-vis ethnic conflict. If indeed the young woman is motivated by a desire to defy familial control over her body, then doesn't Jian Suzheng's idea of symbolic attitude toward provincial harmony mean a different kind of ideological yoke? Once again, female subjectivity has been subsumed under ethnic politics.

Who Is the Victim in "The Devil in a Chastity Belt"?

"The Devil in a Chastity Belt" is the first story in Li Ang's famous and, to some, infamous collection *Everyone Sticks Incense into the Beigang Burner*. Criticism of the collection following its publication is well known and not particularly relevant to my study.⁴⁹ Suffice it to say that the story and others in the collection explore the relationship between sex and politics and the means by which women gain power in Taiwan.

The debates and scandal, however, have obscured the aspect of the female victim of an authoritarian government and Li Ang's subversion of the definition of victimhood. The stories examined in this chapter so far have focused on female victims who suffer either because of family members (father or brother) or because of an untimely presence at the scene of a massacre, all of them "guilty" by association. Common among such literary works, women appear innocent even by today's standard; that is, none of them is portrayed as a member of the Communist Party or as a left-leaning intellectual, even though there were a few female activists and Communist Party members.⁵⁰ Furthermore, these women are usually presented as passive recipients who atone for other's crimes or are simply incapable of living on their own. It is in this discursive milieu that Li Ang's story becomes poignant and meaningful.

The nameless protagonist, later nicknamed the "Grieving Founding Mother," comes from a Taiwanese middle-class family, which gives her an education in music, Japanese tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and literature. As a high-school music teacher, her only connection with politics at first is her husband, "Cannon," a legislator who was arrested during a crackdown on political dissent. After her husband, whose only crime was meeting with foreign observers, is sentenced to fifteen years in prison, she is elected as a people's representative and later becomes a legislator.

Similar to other female protagonists in stories dealing with the 2/28 Incident or the White Terror, the nameless Grieving Founding Mother is an involuntary participant in politics. In this way, Li Ang underscores Taiwan's gendered political arena, in which women are not expected to and are usually discouraged from playing an active political role.⁵¹ Unique to Taiwanese opposition politics, however, a few women, like the protagonist, gained visibility and political positions when the men in their lives were arrested and imprisoned during the White Terror. The irony of the Grieving Founding Mother is that it is precisely her husband's arrest that gives her the opportunity to become active in politics. Accordingly, if active participation in politics is a form of female empowerment, then Li Ang has completely subverted the definition of a female victim by problematizing the meaning of victimhood. That is, without her husband's arrest, she would never have become a victim, but her victimhood, in turn, has

given her political resources unavailable at the time to many other Taiwanese, men and women alike.

Nonetheless, the author refuses to pin down the definition of victimhood by making her protagonist's participation dubiously motivated. The Grieving Founding Mother has gone into politics not because she is interested in opposition's cause but because she believes that it is the only way for her to be reunited with her husband. Even she herself, after a remarkable performance in the congress, intimates to a woman writer that "there is nothing great or admirable about me; I didn't choose to make this sacrifice willingly. All I want is to go back to the life I had before, with my husband back beside me, and a home of our own, and our two children."⁵² Her confession may read like a glorification of motherhood and wifedom, but a sense of irony is discernible if we contrast the emphasis on her role as a mother/wife with the grandiose nickname/title, the Grieving Founding Mother, bestowed on her. That is, she would rather be a full-time mother than the founding mother of the nation, but circumstance and the political realities of Taiwan demand that she forgo the former and adopt the identity of the latter.

Li Ang also seems to be proposing a different kind of victimhood, one derived not from the imprisonment of her husband but from the unbearable burden of martyrdom. In contrast to the ambiguity concerning the force behind the protagonist's transformation from a graceful music teacher into a political activist, Li Ang explicitly portrays her as a desexualized being: "Her romance and her love-life as a woman had forever ceased to be in her thirty-second year, on the Christmas Eve of the Big Arrest."⁵³ From then on, frozen in time and space, she can only be the "grieving mother of the nation," leading a life of "forced celibacy and repressed sexuality,"⁵⁴ not a woman with feelings and desires. The process and function of defeminization call to mind Ban Wang's discussion of the sublime and gender:

Sublimation is a transformation from a lower to a higher, purer state of existence. In psychoanalytical terms, this would mean a transformation of instinctual and libidinal energies into "higher," culturally sanctioned and valued activities. In the light of the tension between the masculinist sublime and the feminine detail, this implies that culture is a process of overcoming and sublimating the

feminine. It is a constant vigil to defend against those disruptive, feminine elements.⁵⁵

In the masculine world of opposition politics, the feminine is indeed considered disruptive, and sexual desire must be suppressed in order for the grieving mother to complete her induction into the hall of (male) politicians.

But more important, the grieving mother stops smiling after she is forced to send her children abroad to avoid discrimination. In other words, the formation of the Grieving Founding Mother is completed by her separation from her children, not by her husband's arrest. Thus we must ask, for whom is the founding mother grieving? As a mother, she grieves for the loss of her children, but she is not simply a mother; she is the mother of the country (*guomu*). A different, higher meaning is ascribed to her, a simple woman with a simple wish for a happy family life, and she is doomed to play the greater role. Appealing to her motherly role in the family (*jia*) to counter the political persecution from the nation (*quo*), she nevertheless falls into the trap of a depersonalized identity, because the meaning of her existence, not unlike that of Cai Qianhui, is contingent on the rhetoric of family.

This kind of victimhood is gender specific and is inflicted on the woman not only by an oppressive government but also by men in the opposition camp. In order to exploit the image of a political prisoner's wife, the men in the party prescribe a rigid quasi-widowhood, and her career as a public figure is forever clouded by suspicion regarding her ability to fully participate in opposition politics:⁵⁶ "Since women were defined in terms of reproductive and caretaking functions for which they were assumed to be suited by nature, they were excluded from full participation as citizens."⁵⁷ Ironically, it is precisely this function of caretaker that is exploited by the opposition camp. That is, the image of a mother grieving for her fatherless children (not for her loss of a husband) serves as the ultimate accusation against government oppression.

Also noteworthy is Li Ang's moniker for the female protagonist: the Grieving Founding Mother (of the Nation), or Beishang de guomu. Quoting John Schaar's writing on authority, Kathleen Jones observed that "the founding of communities constitutes a symbolic birth unique among all births: it is a birth without mothers."⁵⁸ But the birth of an imagined Republic of Taiwan is a birth by mothers alone. Whether by

serendipity or by design, Li Ang creates a *guomu* not only to counter the dominant discourse of the Guomindang, whose iconic founder, Dr. Sun Yat-sun, is the founding father, *guofu*, but also as a gesture to reclaim authority in the ambivalent status of women in the opposition camp. Consequently, the grieving mother in Li Ang's story operates in a narrow space cracked open by the unique political conditions of Taiwan, but she is forever walking a tightrope that is the very embodiment of such ambiguous victimhood.



At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced women from three different regions and the pivotal roles they played (willingly or unwillingly) in shaping their nations' tradition at a particular historical juncture. In colonial Algeria, the unveiling of the indigenous women became a civilizing project for the French, and the revealing by the Algerian male authority represented a sign of recovered Algerian cultural heritage. Indian widows and sati were turned into a virtual site of immolating Indian tradition in a contest of scriptural interpretation. In both countries, women were marginalized, set aside as trophies to be claimed by the victors. Similarly, in their readings of Xiao Hong's novel about women and suffering, Chinese male intellectuals chose to view them as victims of foreign aggression rather than as women oppressed by Chinese culture and poverty.

It is no coincidence that women in Algeria, India, and China gained such discursive attention at similar junctions of their history: the birth of a new nation, which was carried out through the contestation of traditions and the creation of new historical narratives.⁵⁹ Not dissimilarly, Taiwan after martial law witnessed the birth of a new nation with a new historiography, particularly in the literary field. Writers are re-creating scenes in and the impacts of various events to fill in the gaps in history, and a new Taiwan is being written into existence. In this body of literature, women as victims are clearly considered one of the most powerful tropes to convey a sense of injustice. What I cite as examples in my examination of the literary employment of female victims can be considered as quasi-archetypes: self-sacrificing wife, madwoman, prostitute, and grieving mother. This obviously is not an exhaustive list of female victims in reality, for, as mentioned earlier,

literary works generally exclude female activists and Communists. We read about fictional re-creation of Zhong Haodong's unflinching walk toward the execution ground, but we cannot find a literary portrayal of female victims in such a circumstance.⁶⁰ This sort of selective, somewhat narrow, roster is politically motivated because writers need a particular type of victim to advance their agenda, whether to condemn moral degeneration and a loss of ideals or to indict the pernicious effects of the White Terror.

Yet as I have shown in analyzing Li Ang's story, the definition of victimhood is in fact never transparent. Such equivocal portrayals of women as victims not only indicate an evolving understanding of Taiwanese history but also become a crucial narrative device that helps avoid what was best summed up by David Wang: "A ritual account of the most repugnant crime can degenerate into a most boring pastime and ultimately trivialize the crime itself. A literature of constant engagement will produce the effect of a literature of alienation."⁶¹