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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie**

Band (Jahr): **60 (2006)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **21.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147703

THE EROTIC FOREIGNER: FIVE NARRATIVES FROM CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LITERATURE

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Abstract

What happens to a Chinese if he or she falls in love with a foreigner? Love may lead to emancipation, destruction, awareness of differences and a reconsideration of one's own identity; it may bring upon the splitting up of love and desire as well as it may engender feelings of inferiority or superiority. Such is the case of love in general. In present-day China, however, it seems that these natural phenomena are frequently blurred by perceptions of a "national character", which the lovers are supposed to represent. On the basis of five recent novels, the article examines the temptations, satisfactions, vexations, deceptions, and limitations of "going foreign" in China. Written by authors of different generations, the novels also reveal different approaches to the question of "Chineseness". In the narrative focus of the novels by Li Shuang, Wang Anyi, Shen Dali, Wei Hui, and Pipi, the topic of the "erotic foreigner" acts as a catalyst for the quest for a Chinese national identity. The tension between individual and collective answers to this question can be sensed in each of the novels, but the answers also vary according to the perception of the erotic element in both Chinese and foreign civilizations.

1. Introduction

In contrast to European languages, the concepts of "home / abroad", and accordingly also that of the "foreigner", have an absolute status in Chinese. A frequently used term for "China" is *woguo* 我國 "my/our land", and even many thousands of miles away from China a native Chinese speaker exclusively means China when they employ the word *guonei* 國內 ("home/inland") and not the country in which they are currently present, possibly even live in and whose citizen they are. The same applies for the use of the word "foreigner"; here, too, the relation is always absolute and unchanging, so that Chinese, except for in China, are always surrounded by "foreigners". Even today research institutes at

universities are distinguished in the subjects of "philosophy" and "literature" into departments for "Chinese" and "foreign" philosophy and literature.[1]

The so-called "*Xin yimin wenxue*" 新移民文學 ("new emigration literature"), which mainly concerns itself with the pressures of existence and the difficulties of adjustment faced by the Chinese who have emigrated from China since the beginning of the 1980s, devotes special attention to "mixed" relationships and "mixed" marriages (*kuaguo hunyin* 跨國婚戀). The issues addressed here are survival, integration and social advancement in a foreign country as well as the interplay with citizens who have grown up and been socialized there. The fascination that is undoubtedly evident in such encounters often fades into the background behind the harsh conditions of the protagonists' living environment, conditions whose harshness is not only caused by the "strangeness" and the change from China into a Western country, but also made even more difficult by the numerous rigid regulations imposed by the Chinese government, particularly in the 1980s, such as detaining the spouses of those staying abroad as hostages.[2]

In comparison, the topos of foreigners involved in a relationship that takes place "at home" appears suitable as a stage for not just addressing the "Chineseness" of individuals in the company of non-Chinese; but moreover, this topos, addressing so to say "genuine foreigners", also acts as a catalyst for a critical engagement with Chinese national identity per se. Sometimes it seems as if the foreigner takes on the role of a metaphor for "foreign" in such cases, and the Chinese protagonists become radicalized representatives of "Chinese culture" and its claims to self-assertion against the loved and, at the same time,

1 For both the linguistic and the institutional areas observations made in the 1980s still hold valid, cf. Michael Lackner, "Immer gegenüber. Chinas geistige Auseinandersetzung mit dem Westen", in: *China im Widerspruch*, Helmut Steckel (ed.), (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988), p. 139–152; cf. further Michael Lackner, "Anmerkungen zur historischen Semantik von 'China', 'Nation' und 'chinesische Nation' im modernen Chinesisch", in: H. Turk, Brigitte Schulze and R. Simanowski (eds), *Kulturelle Grenzziehungen im Spiegel der Literaturen. Nationalismus, Regionalismus, Fundamentalismus*, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), p. 323–339.

2 The "new emigration literature" is to be found in numerous Chinese literary journals; for a summary of the problems posed by "international marriages" from a Chinese point of view, with numerous passages on "foreigners", see Zhang Wei 張為, *Kuaguo hunlian: Beiju, xiju, zhengju* 跨國婚戀. 悲劇戲劇正劇 (Cross Marriage: Tragedy or Comedy), (Peking: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999) and Ding Zijiang 丁子江, *Zhong Mei hunlian de xingxue fenxi* 中美婚戀的性學分析 (A Gender based Analysis of Marriage and Love Between Chinese and Americans), (Peking: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2001).

hated Westernization. Four recently published novels and one novella are devoted to the theme of the "erotic foreigner"; in dealing with the topos they proceed in completely different ways and thus show the relatively broad spectrum that has in the meantime emerged in the Chinese search for identity, a spectrum located between the poles of emancipatory self-determination of the individual on the one hand and of national, from time to time even nationalistic, self-assertion on the other. The authors represent different fates, but also generations: some lead the existence of a civil servant in China, others are freelance writers, but also the dropout who has turned his or her back on China is represented.

A reading of these works reveals as the lowest common denominator – as could only be expected – an erotic relationship to a non-Chinese. In all five works the peculiarities of the countries from whence the foreigners originate (France, Germany, the USA, Australia and Belgium) also play no noticeable role. Evidence shows us that one could define a foreigner by the fact that they come from "the West". The erotic attraction generated by someone different is nothing new, neither for China nor in the rest of world literature: almost forty years ago Edward H. Schafer showed us the Chinese (male) preference for women from "Western lands" in the seventh and eighth centuries[3]; and in 1885 Wang Tao 王韜, the father of modern Chinese journalism, published a scandalous story about a young English woman called Mary who married a Chinese and suffered a great deal under the pestering of an unrequited English lover.[4] And let us not forget Han Suyin, who gained her world fame through a novel that describes the break-down of love between a Eurasian and an Englishman called Mark at the start of the political confrontation between East and West.[5] It could certainly be enticing to search for further common characteristics: post-colonial theories, gender theories, theories of exoticism (something like the search for a Chinese Pierre Loti), the construction of a Chinese essence, perceived to shimmer through all cultural expressions by the Chinese, so popular in certain circles of Western Sinology, and finally the abusive practice, unfortunately still widespread, of seeing contemporary Chinese literature exclusively as a source of information

3 Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand. A Study of T'ang Exotics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

4 Wang Tao 王韜, "Meili xiaozhuan" 媚梨小傳 ("Mary"), in: Wang Tao, *Songyin manlu* 淞隱漫錄 (Peking: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1983), p. 305–309.

5 Han Suyin, *A Many Splendoured Thing*, dt. *Alle Herrlichkeit auf Erden*, (Genf: Holle Verlag, 1953).

for everyday political issues – all these present themselves as possible approaches. And yet we must reject them, for the only common factor between the foreigners presented here is their respective difference in relation to each of the involved Chinese protagonists. The observation that the other is a specific, respective other may sound trivial. However, the lack of some form of homogeneous "Chinese" reaction to the "foreigners" draws our attention to the fact that the age of "unified thought" desired by the Communist Party is a thing of the past.

2. Emancipation

Although the autobiographical novel *Shuang* may have first been published in 1999[6], the love story between Li Shuang, a Chinese avant-garde artist born in 1954, and Emmanuel Bellefroid, an attaché at the French embassy at the beginning of the 1980s, told in first-person narrative, unquestionably belongs to the first wave of "love affairs" after the Cultural Revolution. The book was written in collaboration with the writer A Cheng 阿城 and, banned in China, was brought out by a publisher in Taiwan. For decades China had been a completely isolated country and the Chinese population had long lost familiar contact with Western foreigners, which into the 1940s had been quite common. Western foreigners were not just regarded by the government as potential enemies; the population, after decades of training in fearing spies, also tended to shroud foreigners in a cloak of exoticism. To find a comparable case we have to reach back into the nineteenth century when the future Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang, against the loud protest of his superiors, married a Belgian woman in 1899; she was not permitted to show herself in public for a further ten years.[7] Li Shuang was treated far worse by communist China: due to this "affair" she was placed in a re-education camp for almost two years. In the eyes of the Chinese government a relationship between a Chinese woman and a French diplomat violated the dignity of the state and could not be tolerated. The drumfire of a calculated press campaign in Chinese newspapers accompanied the "case". Bellefroid left China and back in France initiated several protest actions.

6 Li Shuang and [Gu] A Cheng 李爽，阿城, *Shuang* 爽 (The Autobiography of Li Shuang), (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1999).

7 In Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1992), p. 58.

In 1983 Li Shuang was granted early release – due to the intervention of the French Foreign Minister at the time, Michel Jobert – and was permitted to leave for France to rejoin her lover. They married in 1984.

She had met him in 1980, and it was the very first time in her life that she had had contact with a foreigner. "At first glance it strikes me that the foreigner has a particularly large nose. His blonde hair is cut at collar-length; good and evil are not clearly recognizable in his big eyes." (p.182) "Large nose, blonde hair and big eyes" are almost uniform physiognomic characteristics which we will encounter repeatedly in the other novels and stories.

Li Shuang does not become involved with just anybody, but rather with a foreigner who speaks her language. "I was very nervous, but as I heard him speak Chinese with a Shandong accent, I could barely suppress a laugh and then forgot that he was a foreigner." From this moment onwards she is preoccupied with the subject of "foreigners". This becomes clear in the passages in which the narrative voice detaches itself from the experiencing persona and comments on the encounter: "In time I find that the foreign devils are not evil and frightening spirits. They know how to say 'sorry' when they bump into someone in a crowd. In comparison, here you often only hear 'out of my way!' or 'are you blind?!'" (p.183).

Until he is really no longer an exotic foreigner takes however a little longer than the first-person narrator believes. During later encounters Li Shuang still wonders about his body hair: "You've got so much hair. I have never seen anything like it; you look like a hairy ape." (p. 192). Although for her he is "a very reliable person" and she feels that she "can get closer to him" (p. 195). After the first touching of hands and eye contact he asks her to marry him. She is filled with "gratitude" and has the feeling of being "at home" (p. 196). Then they begin to date and meet with each other. Overall it is a very traditional Chinese story that follows the adage *xian hun hou ai* 先婚後愛 ("only after the match does love begin").

However, this romantic happiness is constantly threatened by the political atmosphere prevailing in China at the time: the couple are forced to develop a courage more appropriate to wartime just to be able to see each other once a week. It is only by the "underground work", through which Li Shuang is smuggled into his apartment in the French embassy in Peking, that their first night together can take place. But the shock of a certain physiognomic characteristic must first be overcome: a "foreign thing" generates "anxiety" due to its size. As she cries for fear, he comforts her: "You need not be scared. We're also human" (p. 201). He is not only human, but moreover the right man for her,

one who can help her achieve a climax (*gaochao* 高潮), even when she cannot quite understand the French word for it because the "French-Chinese dictionary" she consults, compiled in a puritanical spirit, only cites examples like "greeting the new climax of socialist progress".

Li Shuang is certainly convinced that Emmanuel Bellefroid is in the first instance human and only in the second instance a foreign man. But towards her parents she initially must do a lot of convincing. Her father is strictly against the liaison: "How can anyone want to marry a foreigner? Don't you know that contact with foreigners is dangerous? Furthermore, he is a diplomat. The diplomatic corps are an extremely complicated affair. You want to go abroad and yet you can't even speak French. Customs and values are very different" (p. 209). Nevertheless, her mother wants to meet him. They meet at an exhibition. Mother is "serious and incredibly nervous" (p. 209). It is hardly imaginable that she would be just as nervous if her daughter were to introduce her to a Chinese boyfriend.

Later, as she was in the re-education camp, several prisoners came to see her because they had heard that Li Shuang had had a relationship with a foreigner. They were disappointed: "She's not good looking, she even looks worse than I do" (p. 287).

Even if an "erotic foreigner" laid the foundation stone of Li Shuang's fame, who today spends her time mainly creating collages that recall Chagall and the art of the Ukiyo-e, a large part of the novel is devoted to recollections from her childhood and youth. Inconceivable poverty and the oppressive political atmosphere allow Li Shuang to perceive in "her" foreigner something very exotic for the conditions prevailing in the China at the time, namely the aura of prosperity and freedom. Starting in her youth, Li Shuang admittedly also possesses something else that distinguishes her from most of her contemporaries: a healthy dose of individual naivety and curiosity, characteristics which see her become a kind of groupie amongst the avant-garde artists (*xingxing huapai* 星星畫派, "stars") at the beginning of the 1980s. Hardly any of these artists were able to complete regular studies and hardly any of them considers rejoining official cultural life, which in the meantime has been somewhat liberalized. Li Shuang – after several lovers and quite a few abortions – brings an unusual store of erotic experience into the relationship with Bellefroid. Basically, Bellefroid signifies a culmination of all those freedoms, which she has already fought so hard to secure. For this freedom she initially has to pay a high price.

Li Shuang left China before the outbreak of the so-called "culture fever", which started in the mid-1980s, a variation of the international "cultural turn" in the humanities and social sciences that once again – in contrast to earlier modernisation theories – accentuates the significance of cultural activities in social life. While in the West this "cultural turn" strove to achieve a stricter internal differentiation of culture (and thus moved away from notions of homogenous "national culture"), in China it acquired a distinctly national bias. [8] Any reference to possible "cultural differences", to the sweeping opposition between "Chinese" or "Eastern" culture and "Western" culture, so popular in China since the middle of the 1980s, is still completely absent in Li Shuang's work. While her father certainly draws her attention to the different nature of "customs and mores" in distant France, even this comment lacks any strategy of essentialising "East" and "West", a strategy which later barely any literary or scholarly work dealing with the western world could do without. Li Shuang flees from the cultural and material Stone Age she comes from, a Stone Age that, in turn, as at all initial encounters between cultures, had made all foreigners and all that is foreign into "devils" per se – a flight assisted by a Frenchman who has mutated from a "devil" into a saviour. Contrary to what her fellow prisoners in the labour camp believe, not just beauty is needed to "earn" oneself a foreigner, but above all courage. Beyond the admitted erotic fascination generated by the different physical qualities, the foreigner is a guarantor of the unhindered expression of her own artistic endeavours. Hence, Li Shuang does not just flee from "Chinese culture" to "Western culture", but rather – to overstate the case – from a lack of culture into culture itself. In Li Shuang's own life, as in her autobiographical novel, the foreigner is a topos of emancipation.

8 Cf. Michael Lackner and Michael Werner, *Der cultural turn in den Humanwissenschaften. Area Studies im Auf- oder Abwind des Kulturalismus?* Bad Homburg 1999, Schriftenreihe Suchprozesse für innovative Fragestellungen in der Wissenschaft, Nr. 2, also Ann Anagost, "Cultural Nationalism and Chinese Modernity", in: Harumi Befu (ed.), *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia. Representation and Identity,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 61–73.

3. Destruction

Wang Anyi, like Li Shuang born in 1954, ranks as one of the best-known and successful writers in contemporary China.[9] She has been awarded numerous translations and literary prizes throughout her life. Unlike Li Shuang, after the "Cultural Revolution", during which she was an agricultural worker and then later a cellist in a "revolutionary" music troupe, Wang Anyi decided to rejoin state-supported cultural life; she has belonged to the Writers' Association since 1980 and thus receives a state salary as a "creative artist". Accordingly, she believes she is able to contribute to the building of a "strong China" through her works. Like many others, focusing initially on coming to terms with the wounds inflicted by the "Cultural Revolution", she has turned her attention since the mid-1980s towards the "search for one's roots" – as has become fashionable in China and world-wide –, a search that in the Chinese context frequently leads to viewing the turmoil of the preceding years merely as a kind of accident against the contrasting backdrop of the traditional myths, values and forms of behaviour allegedly still rooted in the Chinese people. Wang Anyi has further made a name for herself through her depictions, unusually permissive for the puritanical China of the 1980s, of female eroticism and the autonomy tied to it.

"Wo ai Bi'er" (I Love Bill)[10] is the story of a young art student who is first of all expelled from the university because of her love for Bill, a young American cultural attaché in the consulate at Shanghai, only to then lose him. Deeply disappointed, she gets involved with a series of different foreigners and in the end lands in prison.

At one of her own exhibitions, held jointly with two other artists, A San meets Bill, who is wearing jeans and a striped shirt. The young man has chestnut hair and "eyes filled with joy", a type often presented as a typical young American in films or television (p. 404). He, too, speaks Chinese and bears a Chinese name given to him by his Chinese teacher: Bi Herui. A fascination for

9 And correspondingly extensive is the scholarly literature devoted to her; here we cite just one example, Ulrike Schelmecke, *Zwischen äußerer und innerer Welt: Erzählprosa der chinesischen Autorin Wang Anyi von 1980–1990*, (Bochum: Projekt Verlag, 1995). Further information available under http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/wang.htm.

10 Wang Anyi 王安憶, "Wo ai Bi'er" 我愛比爾 ("I Love Bill") in: *Shanghai di san si jie chang zhong duan pian xiaoshuo youxiu zuopin da jiang huo de zuopinji* 上海第三四屆長中篇小說優秀作品集 (Award-winning works from the third and fourth Shanghai writing competition), (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999).

foreignness and a cultural voyage of discovery opens up between A San and Bill. For A San this voyage is more one of losing herself, or in the words of the author, "A San's striving is actually a flight from her own fate" (p. 500).

Bill loves China. His China is made up of "Chinese food, Chinese script, Chinese opera and Chinese 'appearance'" (p. 405). A San understands that Bill's China is different from her own. "But she doesn't say anything. On the contrary: she encourages him to love China even more. She shows him Chinese folk art: the Shanghai opera, the peasant paintings of Jinshan. They go to the City God's temple to drink tea and to the Zhou court to view the traditional houses from the Ming and Qing dynasties" (p. 405). They behave like two culture couriers (p. 407). Even as they stand facing one another as man and woman, A San's eyes radiate for Bill "an Eastern mysticism" (p. 407). But Bill tries to calm himself despite this seductive variation of Eastern mysticism because he is aware of another form of Eastern mysticism from ancient China, virtuous women and their notions of chastity.

A San remains persistent though. She paints a woman whose long hair covers her face and out of which lush water-hemp grows. But out of her private parts there proudly blooms a giant pink-coloured flower. She entitles the painting "A San's Dream" and shows it to Bill. In fact, she wants to show Bill the sexuality of the Chinese and she then passes over to concrete action: she puts on a silk jacket over her white dress, over this a dressing-gown, then a further jacket and finally another jacket. Then she invites Bill to demonstrate the sexuality of Westerners: Bill takes off one jacket after the other and then finally – encouraged by her inviting glances – also her white dress. She covers her virginal blood with her blanket without Bill noticing anything. What does A San want to keep secret from Bill or herself? The author offers the answer that A San wants to conceal the "truth by a dividing line", on the basis of which many other differences will show themselves (p. 500). This "dividing line" is for the author the one running between Chinese and Western culture, even if she does not expressly put it so.

Bill begins to grasp the "sensitivity of the Orientals towards sexuality", it is "more sensitive and refined" than in the West (p. 409). A San undertakes everything possible to please Bill. She knows that she cannot measure up sexually to Bill's other lovers with their blonde hair and blue eyes; thus, she attempts to outdo them by creating a special romantic atmosphere with the aid of her artistic gifts. Her only resource resides in – according to the author – her being "Chinese" (p. 500). "She did not wish that Bill sees her as Chinese. But she attracts Bill because she is Chinese" (p. 412). In this way she becomes an

inmate, a prisoner of Chinese culture, precisely because she is Chinese and is loved as one; she will not succeed in crossing over into Western culture, as the novella shows us with the imprisoned life A San leads, a life that is a fundamental failure. But basically she does not know what being "Chinese" actually is. As Bill says in reply to her question about the "spirit of the West" that the Chinese place value on the "Tao" and the West on "man", A San reports about a play depicting a young nun and her yearning for the earthly world. To Bill's comment that the story could happen in the West, A San reacts defiantly: "All good things are in the West!" (p. 412).

Bill says to A San that he values her due to her uniqueness. But the word "love" A San is waiting for does not come. Often A San thinks to herself that she could be happy together with him, even if she had to die (p. 414). Bill, however, values her "modesty" the most (p. 414), a virtue frequently ascribed to the Chinese.

Bill starts to attract attention at the university A San attends because he often visits her in the student hostel on the campus. After a discussion with security officials from the university, A San leaves her student hostel without having told Bill of her problems at the university and takes a room with peasants in the countryside. Later she finds out from one of her fellow students that the university has expelled her.

A San has changed considerably, since she has lost her normal environment, but her love for Bill runs its inevitable course. Bill is surprised at the changes, but "he understands nothing about them. This tiny woman, who makes love with him, is actually very distant. And yet he senses a danger that lurks behind the Eastern mysticism. Nevertheless, Bill is aroused; something external to her body attracts his sexual desire. [...] His desire is not only of the flesh, but also supersensory" (p. 416). As A San finally declares her love to Bill, after a long silence he answers thus: "As diplomats of our country we are not permitted to fall in love with women from a communist country" (p. 417).

Before Bill returns to the States for a vacation, A San is extremely sad because Bill is going away even though they are so close to one another. They see each other one last time at a large consulate party. He is very elegant; A San is lost amidst the mass of guests. Then Bill is gone. At the appointed time, as A San waits at a friend's place for Bill to phone, he does not call.

A San takes up painting again and this strengthens her. But the planned exhibition falls through because the organiser leaves for France. "Actually it makes no difference that one goes away. The worse thing is that the will of all the other artists is undermined by their leaving. It appears to the rest of the artists

as if fortune winks at them. Young and old foreigners go past on the street and no one knows which of them are capable of supporting you" (p. 425). China is gripped by emigration fever and the artists are no exception. A San works hard on her painting and is pleased with the results. She also tries to establish contact with Western gallery owners and quite often immerses herself in memories of Bill.

The border between Chinese and Western culture appears to A San to be insurmountable in art, too. For her, the thinking of the Chinese is like *yinke* 陰刻, the deep incision in bronze vessels and stone tablets, while in contrast that of the West is like *yangke* 陽刻, relief script. "When I paint with my brush on rice paper, my way of thinking becomes economical and implicit. I value subtraction. The world is then Chinese and is based on 'simplicity'; but canvas and colour allow me to see a world that 'increases', a world of addition. This world is the direct opposite of that of China" (p. 429). She senses that she is approaching the core of things, but she cannot touch it. Something is pushing her back. Nonetheless, she is convinced that "both extremes" can find "a link" (p. 430).

With A San's failure the novella wants to show us however that "both extremes" cannot be brought into reconciliation. After her intense painting phase, A San meets Martin, a twenty-four-year-old gallery owner from a French province. Martin is "a villager and has yet to see the world" (p. 439). But a "certain ability for understanding art" is concealed in his nature, an ability that "cannot be expressed through language. The history of European art since Michelangelo is another vein that pulsates through the European. They can distinguish in art the genuine from the fake, as well as good from bad taste, exactly like a moral person can recognize the truth" (p. 440). The first judgement Martin makes is that painting is something different than what A San has practiced. At this point A San loses her ability and also the passion to paint.

But Martin and A San have become more and more intimate. A San finally hears from Martin the declaration of love, which she had so long expected, in vain, from Bill. Certainly, Martin is aware that this is for him an exotic dream that will soon come to an end. "Sometimes he opened his eyes and gazed at the Chinese face of A San in the dim light that fell through the curtain, a small and delicate face. Barely noticeable, her fine nostrils twitched, suddenly enlivening this face with such little profile. He recalled his distant home, the Chinese restaurant, and a portrait of a woman from ancient China made out of ivory. A Chinese face is particularly suitable for relief sculpture, in shadowy depths and heights flows a simple and mysterious atmosphere" (p. 445). Such lyrical moods do not prevent him, however, from answering rationally but also honestly as A

San asks him to take her back to France with him: "I've never imagined life with a Chinese woman. I fear I can't do it" (p. 447).

A San though has thought the whole time that this Frenchman would enable her to "become human" again. But Martin, after his verdict of her painting, makes his second judgement: a judgement upon A San's life. According to the author, Martin is in truth "an inspector who examines the qualifications of A San's entry. She has lost almost all of her 'resources'. She cannot pass through with Martin standing at the gate" (p. 499). As the author tries to make clear several times, the only 'resource' A San possesses resides in her being Chinese. Following this logic, the "ruin" of A San is predictable.

After the episode with Martin, A San has nothing left, not even her art. She begins to approach and then seduce foreigners in large hotels. She hardly ever spends the night in her own apartment. Now it finally becomes clear to A San: "The romances of a European in China are limited to two weeks" (p. 470).

A San has exhausted all her resources – as the author puts it –; she must come to a bad end. Her last game with three Englishmen ends with one of them wanting her to accompany him to his room and the other two – concerned about their compatriot – alarming the police.

The author tries to show us how somebody can fail when they renounce their own cultural substance. In a commentary written for the new edition of the novella she writes: "The figure of Bill actually represents a dominating force in our current life. This force is extremely strong; with great power it consumes our existence, our consciousness and our means of expressing emotions. It calls and drives you under the flag of humanism and – very considerately – into a large world community – a wonderful world filled with festive dances and songs. Your belated arrival there gives this world fresh resources. You cannot manage to say 'no' to it. Who can afford to reject progress? The question is: what do you have left when all your resources are exhausted? And since the resources are consumed at great speed, this day will soon arrive. Where is your place then? Do you possess an entry ticket at all?" (p. 499).

By applying the term "resources"[11] to the course of A San's life, familiar to us from the environmental discussion and in Chinese variations of geopolitics, the author makes it clear that she is concerned with depicting more than an

11 Much is made of China's "resources" (*ziyuan* 資源) in the series of ultranationalist "say no" works of the 1990s, e.g. Song Qiang 宋強 et.al., *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* 中國可以說不 (China can say no), (Peking: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996), and *Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu* 中國還是能說不 (China can still say no), (Hongkong: Mingbao zhoukan chubanshe, 1996).

individual fate – the "consuming power" is nothing other than the Westernization Chinese cultural conservatives portray as the portent written on the wall, a danger that is on the point of eradicating the "resources" of a China that has just arrived on the world stage. The erotic foreigner Bill is suited as a metaphor for this demonic power. In a radical contrast to Li Shuang's perception, the foreigner in Wang Anyi's novella comes across as the epitome of a threat to the Chinese substance.

Is this substance to be understood as a cultural one? Credit must be given to Wang Anyi for making no illusions about how the foreigners, enflamed with an enthusiasm for China, and the Chinese, who first rediscover their own culture and sense of "Chinese" through the eyes of strangers, become accomplices. In the end, Bill does not love the person A San, who inwardly resists her "Sinification" through Bill, but rather an image that he has formed of China and projected onto her: a museal China patched together in a makeshift way by the tourist industry, one that the greater portion of the Chinese population has associated with a vague national feeling only since the beginning of the 1990s when the Party undertook a massive cultural propaganda programme. The rediscovery of Chinese culture is primarily due to foreigners (of course, also including the numerous Chinese living abroad). Official China has used the resulting enthusiasm for an unprecedented cultural campaign that shall help the weakened national self-consciousness back on its feet and create at the same time a private sphere apparently detached from politics.[12] To this end, it was possible to fall back on Chinese intellectuals who, searching for emancipation from the eternal black-white schema, had already at the end of the 1970s discovered one field of activity that could take on the role of a niche: aesthetics. At first still obediently oriented on the Church fathers (Hegel, Marx, Engels), Aesthetic Studies soon gained undreamt of prestige through the inclusion of original Chinese themes, culminating in the clumsy study *The Path of Beauty* (*Meide licheng* 美的歷程) by the national Marxist Li Zehou[13], who wanted to distil – against all foreign influences, such as for example Buddhism – an "art of the line" as China's aesthetic essence.

This reduction of Chinese culture to the area of aesthetics has doubtlessly left its mark on the writer Wang Anyi: while she may certainly be capable of

12 See Michael Lackner, "Konfuzianismus von oben? Zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem Konfuzianismus in der VR China", in: Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, Michael Lackner (eds.), *Länderbericht China*, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1998), p. 425–449.

13 Li Zehou 李澤厚, *Meide licheng* 美的歷程 (The Path of Beauty), (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001; first edition 1987).

dismissing as a Western error the sweeping attempts undertaken by Bill to culturalize everything and see "China" in A San, she placards at the same time however the "Chinese aesthetic" – extended to include sexuality – as a bastion of Chinese culture. She leaves the more ideological question, whether the West respects "man" and China the "Tao", suspended in an ironic uncertainty. What is definite for her is that Chinese painting is directed "inwards" (in the sense of engravings), Western painting "outwards" (in the sense of reliefs), and that "simplicity" and "subtraction" versus "increase" and "addition" thus represents the secret formula for the opposition between "East" and "West". Here is where we have to locate the substance Wang Anyi views as being endangered by a West that entices with the power of Eros.

Neither Bill nor later Martin, the French gallery owner whose feeling for style A San admires as an expression of the Western understanding of art, are in themselves bad persons or even "devils". The construction of the Chinese self-image has long distanced itself from such simplifications born out of a defiant inferiority complex. What brings A San from the "straight and narrow" – not unlike the street ballad of a maid – and sees her end in a labour camp – perhaps unjustly, but with stern consequence – is rather the rapture of letting herself go and giving in to something that, while admittedly beautiful, is not her own beauty. The defence against the globalization of a Western feeling of style must be accompanied by a construction of a genuinely Chinese aesthetic sensibility – even if her sexual practices, namely the onion-skin veiling of her body, the hair covering her face and the covering-up of the blood from the *prima nox*, may stand in a logical opposition to the "simplicity" of Chinese aesthetics propagated later. The reader will nonetheless recognize the point. It is quite conceivable that Wang Anyi let herself be inspired by the "case" of Li Shuang: the parallels are all too obvious, the culture attaché, the painter, the foreigner's enthusiasm for China, and finally the labour camp. However, Wang Anyi twists the story of emancipation into its opposite.

4. The Unhappy Consciousness

Shen Dali, author of the novel *Menghu qinglü* (The Lovers of the Dream Lake, in allusion to the "Ode au Lac de Bourget" by Lamartine) published in 1999[14],

14 Shen Dali 沈大力, *Menghu qinglü* 夢湖情侶 (The Lovers of the Dream Lake), (Peking: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 1999).

has written numerous novels and an impressive array of scholarly treatises and translations (from French into Chinese and the other way around). He is currently director of the Research Centre for Foreign Literature at the Peking Foreign Language University. He belongs to a generation, which has basically had to become practised in concealment since the mid 1950s. During the numerous campaigns started against "intellectuals" (meaning in the Chinese of the People's Republic of China in fact "intellectual elements", i.e. people with secondary education assigned to a suspicious category in the language of the brutes), this generation has sought to orientate itself on the example given by the "scholars living in seclusion" (*yinshi* 隱士) from the third to fifth century and whose ethos barred them from serving cruel dynasties. Constantly searching for niches to be culturally active in, their scholarly and artistic work has first of all embellished unsuspicious subjects (Shen Dali for example has dealt with the Paris Commune and the composers of the "Internationale", Eugène Pottier and Adolphe Degeyter); increased contact with the West brought them – who had frequently been the Chinese informers about the West – into the unexpected role of informers about Chinese culture in the West. Hence, there arose amongst many members of this generation of suspect "intellectuals" a timeless image of "Chinese culture" that was frequently gained from an essentialist opposition to the inaccessible "West".

"The Lovers of the Dream Lake" meet one another in China in the 1960s. Yi Mang, a former "rightist element", can hardly believe that Sabine, a lecturer from France, has fallen in love with him. But as an outcast he knows how frosty reality indeed is. Sabine's contract soon ends and she has to leave China. They see each other one last time, and Sabine would like to use this opportunity to entrust herself to him completely. But at the last moment Yi Mang's reason triumphs over his feelings. Sabine leaves China promising to wait for him forever.

The Cultural Revolution breaks out and Yi Mang is immediately "exposed" as a counter-revolutionary. The university is relocated to Hubei and he is sent to do hard labor in the countryside under supervision. Ten years later Sabine briefly returns to China as an interpreter and searches in vain for Yi Mang. After the dismissal of the "Gang of Four", Yi Mang is rehabilitated and permitted once again to teach as a lecturer for French at the university. Soon afterwards he is sent to Paris for two months as an interpreter for the UNO. However, no opportunity presents itself for him to establish contact with Sabine because in accordance with the "iron discipline" of such delegations no member is allowed to go out alone. During his second training visit to Paris he rings up Sabine and

they see each other again after almost twenty years. Sabine has kept her promise and has remained unmarried. But Yi Mang becomes anxious and Sabine falls into grief. Together they go to the sea, to Dieppe, and do not return.

The first encounter between Yi Mang and Sabine takes place in the lecturer's office at the French faculty, where he, sunk in concentration, is correcting homework. She greets him in Chinese with a strong European accent. Despite the prevailing political conditions, this encounter is one between a man and a woman, even if orchestrated by massive cultural projections: "The lines of the Greek nose showed a natural nobility, something the Chinese do not normally have. She had both the celestial nature of the Freedom goddess of the French Revolution as well as the dignity of Marianne. As she pokes fun at him, calling him a cricket in winter, she showed in turn the wild passion and lack of restraint of Carmen. Her name reminds one of Sabine, the ancient beauty on French stamps. Perhaps her charming name stems from here. It gives you an immediately felt wonderful sensation when you hear it. Yi Mang also senses a strong magnetic pull through contact with her; he dare not look at her for long" (p. 10f.).

The views of the French woman surprise Yi Mang again and again. In a conversation over Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" she claims that eroticism is an art. "Something so incredible, and from a young, unmarried woman. A Chinese woman would not think like that, or at least not express herself so in public. Do the Chinese lecturers comment on the word 'érotisme' falsely or does Sabine hold a view widespread in the West? Given the differing cultural backgrounds, there is bound to be divergent, even opposing opinions about concrete things" (p. 15).

In the 1960s China was a totally politicized country. An encounter between a French woman and a Chinese man cannot be viewed as something between individual persons, but is rather an extremely political issue. Sabine invites Yi Mang to visit her in the "Friendship Hotel" and this disquiets him. But first of all Yi Mang must of course consult the party secretary in the faculty and hear his opinion. The affair is then passed on to the Foreign Students Office at the University, which in turn must seek directions from the authorities [or "the leaders"] of the university. Two weeks later the instructions are presented: an excuse shall be found to decline the invitation. If the foreign guest should insist, Yi Mang can go with an escort.

Sabine is now observed up close: "Her beautiful blonde hair shines under the sun, as brilliant as forsythia. A red gleam shimmers in her fair face that surpasses that of magnolia [...] Sabine wears on this day a thin, red silk blouse

with a low neckline that shows the white, soft décolletage. The tips of her breasts jut out and rise and fall with every breath" (p. 20). And with this, the cliché of a European woman is perfect: white, blonde and full bosomed.

It appears to be matter of concern for the narrator to display his broad knowledge of China and Europe, though he is, as far as the West is concerned, mainly well-versed in the France of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rousseau, Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Mérimée and many others populate his universe. Furthermore, he needs to explicitly reflect on and draw differences between what is Chinese and what is Western: "Harmony with heaven, earth and fellow man lead the Chinese to a synthetic way of thinking. If I'm not mistaken, you Westerners are used to analytical thinking" (p. 72). This distinction underlying different modes of thinking is in turn confirmed by a Frenchman present: "In general one can say that the Chinese hold onto monism and Westerners dualism. The way of thinking is very different" (ibid.). Yi Mang continues with examples for his theory: "The harmonic ideas of monism held by the Chinese are reflected in the 'happy end' of its classical literature. Such as the two birds flying next to one another (*biyiniao* 比翼鳥) from the 'Lament' (*changhen'ge* 長恨歌) of Bai Juyi 白居易, the trees with the entwined roots (*lianlishu* 連理樹) from the 'The Peacocks Fly to the Southeast' (*Kongque dongnan fei* 孔雀東南飛) and the literary images in 'Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai' 梁山伯與祝英台, where after their death both of them metamorphoses into butterflies and fly away as a couple. This shows the wish for harmony in the next life as well" (ibid.). He compares Baudelaire with Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 and comes to the conclusion: "Both seek to go beyond the earthly. But the ideas are very different. In this we can see that the cultural character stamped by Eastern Buddhism and Western Christianity is of an identical essence, but has undergone different developments" (p. 73). In Yi Mang's comments Sabine sees "the beauty of the East's sublimation, which is totally distinct from the social life of a West determined by materialism. This exerts a strong attraction on women of Latin origin" (p. 74).

Again and again the novel conveys the impression that Yi Mang is to play the role of cultural mediator. "Eastern beauty resides in restraint. Like smoke and mist, deep and fine. In your French films women are often shown naked, that's not only not beautiful, but frightens us Chinese. We look away as soon as we see such scenes" (p. 90). The cultural mediator appears to be very successful. As Sabine tells a girlfriend about Yi Mang and the love she feels for him, she has already completely taken on his views: "He is a poor scholar and has been repeatedly subjected to oppression, and yet he preserves the traditional virtues

characteristic of ancient China: modesty and obedience. He has a noble mentality, one we Westerners lack. He is good-looking and is intelligent. He radiates calm and refinement, something that delights my heart and is pleasing to the eye. This is really very different to our threatening physical seduction. I find that refinement and calm possess endurance and bestow upon man eternal happiness, whereas sex drives are often violent and short-lived. And afterwards only emptiness remains. In the West arrogant and conceited men are shown on television who are proud of conquering women and see their moral concepts justified in this. In their eyes women are only marionettes, models, sex symbols and even 'sex bombs' [...] That is the extremism of a materialistic civilization, these are the new rules of consumer society. [...] In China society is not yet so reified. At least till now the development has not gone so far. The traditional harmony has yet to disappear entirely" (p. 211).

This distinction between "East" and "West" perhaps underlies the tragedy between Yi Mang and Sabine. Yi Mang is in Paris, but he feels all the more so trapped in a prison, perhaps in the prison of the supposed Chinese culture. The longed-for trip to the Le Bourget Lake in the Savoy, where Lamartine met his Julie in love and passion, remains withheld from the reader as a mystery. Perhaps it is only a dream journey and the reality is in truth quite different: "Sabine shows her disappointment again and again, disappointment she no longer seeks to conceal as at the beginning. She calls Yi Mang a 'stranger'. She appears to have slowly grown out of the romanticism of "Eastern mysticism" and admits that in reality she actually does not understand Yi Mang" (p. 319). The problem of food, a classical "cultural issue", is also fully exploited. Yi Mang is too loud when he eats his food, a habit that makes Sabine feel ashamed. On the other hand, Sabine has problems with preserved eggs and the like. Furthermore, Yi Mang's behaviour is conspicuous. He has visited Sabine at the Ministry of Education and Arts during working hours. Sabine cannot stand how he hangs onto her like a child. "With the ever closer contact Yi Mang senses more and more the differences which separate him from Sabine, the European woman, from her essence. He has grown up on Eastern soil, nourished by the ancient culture of his own country. Although he certainly does not wish to attain Tao, he nevertheless bears within himself the thought of retreat from the world. Above all through the many hardships inflicted by society, an inclination assumes form within him, to free himself of shackles, a striving of his soul for 'liberation'. He wishes to continue with this Chinese tradition of 'retreat from the world'. In comparison, Sabine may admire Taoist philosophy of non-being from ancient China and its bewitching aesthetic. But she is made up of cells,

which want to go out into the world. Her starting point lies in the Western view of life stated by Rousseau, 'to go out into nature'. For her it is impossible to attain the horizon of non-action belonging to the descendants of the Yellow Emperor. On the contrary: in everyday life she displays the attitude of the 'timely enjoyment of life' held by the French today. Yi Mang considers this 'banal'" (p. 345). And with that, the breakdown of the love between Yi Mang and Sabine is marked in advance. Yi Mang thinks about returning to China. But perhaps because Yi Mang asserts that the Chinese prefer a "happy end", the narrator, too, cannot be content with a break up of the couple. After a few arguments they travel to Dieppe and vanish there. This conclusion points us once again to the so-called Eastern aesthetic and mysticism: an end as in "Lament", "The Peacocks Fly to the Southeast" or "Liangshanbo and Zhu Yingtai"?! Or is it the victory of the Eastern philosophy of "retreat from the world"?

Nothing could better illustrate the basic attitude of this author (and numerous other members of his generation) as a few passages from the "Phenomenology of Spirit" in which Hegel speaks of a variation of "unhappy consciousness"; Hegel locates here a "devotion" where "thinking [...] is no more than the chaotic jingling of bells, or a mist of warm incense, a musical thinking that does not get as far as the Notion; [...] the movement of an infinite yearning [...]"[15] The cultural wasteland in which this generation had to eke out an existence increasingly generated an alienation from the high-culture tradition of China (the "Great Tradition"), an alienation to which the discoveries of artistic folk art made in the early 1950s could form no genuine counterpart ("low tradition": peasant painting, folk songs and the icons of billowing factory stacks also adopted from Soviet Russia); but also Western high culture, in any case perceived as a rule in a segmented manner limited mostly to one country (for Shen Dali it is France, garnished at most with a pinch of general Russian education – Pushkin! Lermontov!), receded into the distance. Hence, there remained for the members of this generation nothing but the vague, devotional yearning of dispossessed educated classes for a place beyond the present. To the degree that the concrete content of education was dispelled through the verdicts of an intervening state, so were a "China" and a "West" invented whose supposed opposition was to save remnants of Chinese identity amidst the Sovietization of everyday life.

For Shen Dali the West is identical with France, admittedly a France that predominantly stems from the nineteenth century. China's Marxist aesthetic had

15 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford 1977, p. 131.

in any case given little attention to the artistic developments of the twentieth century, and under Soviet auspices bourgeois Romanticism and Classicism were perpetuated – Storm, Raabe, Stendhal, Hugo, Balzac, Tolstoy etc., the most modern being the "humanists" Romain Rolland and Tagore and an already so dubiously frivolous Baudelaire.[16] Already during his first encounter with his beloved, a vast number of precocious *epitheta ornantia* occur to the protagonist, all relevant historically – from La Fontaine to Mérimée, through to Delacroix and Marianne.

The stringing together of countless examples of learning, revealing Shen Dali to be more *doctus* than *poeta*, stylize the lover into a representative of French culture up to the end of the nineteenth century (then even Rimbaud is squeezed in). Alone to conjure the topos of the drowned body, which is probably to point to the dark end of the lovers at Dieppe and in turn maintaining an obscure tie with Lamartine's Le Bourget lake, Shen Dali calls on the following predecessors (in chronological sequence): Rimbaud's "Ophélie", Georges Rodenbach's (1855–1898) "Bruges la morte", which contains a variation of Ophelia; further, Paul Delaroche's (1797–1858) depiction of a martyr in the Tiber from the Louvre; the drowned martyr in Chateaubriand's "Génie du christianisme", an illustration by Delacroix on Hamlet, naturally Shakespeare; and finally, so that a Chinese ingredient is not missing, the island Penglai, which shall indicate a paradise – situated in the sea (!) – of the blessed. And so it goes on through the whole novel, this strenuous and demanding scholarship; but the genuine image of the West is not yet won from this: for this the present has to be engaged, which, as is known, is comprized of naked sex bombs, hedonism, consumerism and materialism in general.

Only now can the Chinese trump card be played to full advantage, the "Eastern mysticism": non-action, retreat from the world, sublimation and harmony. To stylise this essence of "Chinese culture" authors are consulted, the latest of whom lived in the eleventh century; those quotations from two younger writers, Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884–1918) and Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), are not aimed at establishing a Chinese essence, thus we must assume that for the author the productive phase in Chinese culture ended in the eleventh century. This is no coincidence: instigated by the state, the alienation from tradition

16 On the quantitatively high proportion of German bourgeois classicism in the Chinese reception of German language literature – mostly undertaken by contemporaries of Shen Dali versed in German Studies, see Wolfgang Bauer, Michael Lackner and Chang Peng, *Das chinesische Deutschland-Bild der Gegenwart. Deutsche Kultur, Politik und Wirtschaft im chinesischen Schrifttum 1970–1984*, (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989).

experienced by this generation of "intellectuals" resulted in an enormous loss of classical education and historical depth; and so the image preserved of the past became more and more abstract. What Shen Dali passes off as the quintessence of "Chinese culture" is in principle only the elements of a defence strategy and survival technique, which he has constructed in his form of unhappy consciousness. Non-action, retreat from the world, sublimation and the need for harmony were indeed possibilities of inward migration amidst the noise, actionism and the overall discordant, civil war-like atmosphere of socialist reconstruction and progress. They had just as much or just as little to do with "China" as the bulldozers and loudspeakers of the communist permanent revolution.

The foreign woman – she, too, by no means a "devil" – thus becomes the catalyst of the Hegelian "yearning". It is thus consistent when the novel ends with the couple vanishing, a vanishing that implies suicide; because, as Hegel put it, "this essence (of yearning) is the unattainable *beyond* which, in being laid hold of, flees, or rather has already flown".[17] A China equally unchanging as it is intangible and oriented, in contrast to the alleged Western "dualism", towards "Eastern" "monism" orchestrates this "beyond". The recourse to digging around in the mothballs of cultural morphology is certainly nothing new: adhering to the motto, "whatever they do, we do the opposite", since the 1920s the most diverse attributes have been ascribed to the "West", out of which then – what a wonder! – China's cultural characteristics are drawn (such as the "form of thought" *sixiang fangshi* 思想方式, particularly popular in the 1980s); analytical versus synthetic consciousness, the turn outward versus the turn inward, philosophy of morality versus moral philosophy, material versus spiritual civilization and, finally, precisely dualism versus monism and whatever other dichotomies there may be.

The encounter with the erotic foreign woman is not depicted here in the sense of a chance for individual emancipation (as with Li Shuang), nor as a demonic power allegedly undermining the cultural substance (as with Wang Anyi); rather it leads to the only solution that the unhappy consciousness, incapable of really grasping either itself or the foreign and thus compelled to a pompous permanent dialogue laced with cultural details – truly *disiecta membra poetae* –, has already: committed suicide; or, to speak again with Hegel:

17 G. W. F. Hegel, op.cit., p. 131.

"Consciousness, therefore, can only find as a present reality the *grave* of its life".[18]

5. Soul and Tool

The youngest of the authors under discussion here is [Zhou] Wei Hui, born in 1973. Numerous interviews, but more so the banning of her novel *Shanghai Baobei* (*Shanghai Baby* or *Shanghai Treasure*)[19] have made her famous.[20] What can a personified foreigner still mean to a generation which no longer perceives a foreigner as a "devil", a generation which has not gone through the degrading poverty and the omnipotence of the political, a generation which experiences foreign goods as expensive but not unattainable status symbols and, finally, a generation which already enjoys many of the liberties Li Shuang still had to fight for? Quite a lot as we will see. Although to understand the role played by the erotic foreigner – perhaps the most erotic of all the works presented here –, we will need to reach far back into the repertory of Chinese engagements with the West.

Shanghai Baby is the work of a young woman writer who would very much like to be a "naughty girl" – and has attained this goal, for finally the novel has been banned, although it circulates underground as a best-seller. It is a partly autobiographical novel whose protagonist Coco is writing a book, and loves a young Chinese man called Tiantian but only finds sexual satisfaction with Mark, a German businessman from Berlin. She met Tiantian, a slim and good-looking young man, in the café where she works as a waitress. She is gripped by the vague beauty of the young man sympathizing with death, a beauty that "stems from his tiredness of life and the longing for love" (p. 2). They move in together and following Tiantian's wish, who is convinced of her literary talent, Coco gives up her job as a waitress to concentrate solely on her writing.

18 Ibid. p. 132.

19 [Zhou] Wei Hui 周衛慧 *Shanghai baobei* 上海寶貝 (Shanghai Baby), (Shenyang: Chunfeng chubanshe, 1999).

20 Newspaper reports spoke of sales numbering between 80,000 and 110,000 copies before its banning in June 2000, that ended with the pulping of the remaining 40,000 copies. In the meantime, circulation amongst readers has probably risen further, cf. Nailene Chou Wiest, "Racy 'Shanghai Baby' Stirs Row", in: *The Times of India*, 3.6. 2000 as well as John Pomfret, "Letter From China", in *The Washington Post*, 27.6.2000.

Unfortunately, it turns out that Tiantian is impotent and medical treatment cannot help. Nevertheless, they love one another deeply. He is her soul, and she grasps first through his kiss that a kiss can also have "soul and colour" (p. 6). His way of satisfying her also lends her wings. But as an admirer of two authorities in the psychophysiology of love life, Henry Miller and Milan Kundera, she must meet Mark, who brings her to the "real" heights. They make love wherever it is possible: in the apartment, in the lady's toilet, in the car etc. The tenderness and closeness between Coco and Tiantian nonetheless remains. Tiantian senses everything that is going on, however, and a crisis overwhelms him. In the end he dies from a drug overdose, Mark returns to Germany and Coco completes the novel.

At a nostalgia party in remembrance of the old Shanghai, Coco sees "a tall Westerner enter the lift with big steps. A whisk of Calvin Klein for men follows" (p. 26). As he shakes her hand, Coco discovers that "his hands, covered with hair, are warm and dry in a pleasant way" (ibid.). Mark invites her to dance while Tiantian appears to have fallen asleep after drinking wine and smoking hash. Mark's eyes especially attract her attention: "His eyes twinkle in the dark, like the eyes of an animal lurking in the bushes. [...] As if these not very tame eyes were the centre of his whole body. All his energy streams out from there. Yes, the eyes of the white race" (p. 28). After dancing they find Tiantian in the toilets. He has fainted. The tension between the strong, self-confident and "sexy" Mark and the sensitive but frail and addicted Tiantian runs like a thread through the entire novel.

As Mark calls and invites her and her boyfriend to an exhibition, she knows exactly why he calls and what he wants. In the night she already hears the "moans of the Northern European" in her bed (p. 41). She goes to the exhibition alone. Mark is already there. Immediately she glimpses his blonde hair. "He stands next to me the whole time. He follows me as I move around the gallery. His whole body has an exotic fragrance. In his relaxed manner something is hidden that disturbs me, as if the hunter were unusually reserved towards its hunted prey" (p. 59). This restraint does not last long however, soon they are in Mark's apartment. For Mark, "Pingtan" (評彈 ballads in Suzhou dialect with a plucked string instrument) is "the right mystical music for making love" (p. 60). She is fascinated by his kiss and the "countless tiny golden hairs covering his whole body, which are like a hundred thousand rays of sunshine" (p. 60). The size of his sexual organ frightens her, hurts her, but the pain soon passes over into abandonment. "I open my eyes wide and look at him half in love, half in hate. His pale naked body with its sunny colour excites me. I imagine how he

would look dressed in the uniform, long boots and leather jacket of the Nazis. This image drives my physical excitement to new heights" (p. 61). With him she feels the joy of "conquest and abuse" (ibid.).

Coco meets Mark again and again, but she loves Tiantian. She mocks prostitutes who only serve "international guests": "Generally they have extremely long hair (so that the foreign devils lie on it, get in the mood for sex and can then be amazed at the bewitching hair of Eastern women)" (p. 72). But after sex with Mark in the lady's toilet she finds that she has fallen even below the prostitutes because she is a split personality. He is however serious as he answers her question "What are we doing here?": "'We're making love.'" He had used an exact word. There's nothing slovenly in his face. On the contrary: I find his blue eyes not indifferent at all, rather there swims in them a soft wave as in the "Swans" from Saint-Saens. You cannot grasp at all, not even in a stinking toilet, how the purely sexual drive can give rise to such closeness and intimacy" (p. 73).

Coco is acutely aware of the difference between the emotional love to Tiantian and the physical to Mark. "Mark is like a tumour that grows out of the weakest point in our emotional life and cannot be so easily removed. Its right to exist lies in the activation of a virus in a specific place in my body. This virus is called 'sexual drive'" (p. 88). Following this logic it is clear to see why she feels no conflict in her soul. On the contrary, she experiences a union of body and soul as she copulates with Mark during a telephone conversation with Tiantian in their shared apartment. Mark is only there to be used for her to attain the fusion of soul and body with Tiantian. Coco explains to her cousin why she is together with Mark: "I highly regard his backside that tilts upwards and his physique of a Nazi. For his part, my Oriental body, smooth and not as hairy as that of a foreign woman, may inspire him. He has a golden colour and radiates a silky mystique. And as well, I have an impotent boyfriend and am a woman who writes. These are the reasons for the mutual attraction" (p. 129).

In order to set the exclusively physical love to the West even further in the foreground, the lesbian love of Shamier for Coco is also recounted. Shamier is a director and responsible for the media section at the German Academic Exchange Service. She admires Coco: "She is a special woman, not only clever but also pretty. She is such a treasure. I am thoroughly convinced that she says everything and can do everything" (p. 210). After returning to Germany Shamier writes to her. Coco has a strange feeling towards these passionate love letters. Coco has deeply imprinted herself in her memory, writes Shamier, she is like an Asian wood engraving in watercolours, soft and unbelievably passionate, and in

a second can set off an indescribable feeling, as a rose in a garden at night that swiftly fades (p. 234).

Coco's parting from Mark is in truth one from Tiantian. Coco spends the last days of Mark's stay in China with him while Tiantian paints the walls in his mother's new restaurant. They are together for every minute and make love till their bodies ache. Mark is not pleased about the promotion to Berlin where his family lives because he would very much like to stay together with Coco. Coco wants to view the whole thing as a game, but she is aware that this is mere self-deception. "I finally understand that I have slipped into the trap of love and desire of this German who was only meant to be my sex partner. He penetrates from my womb into my frail heart and conquers the confused feeling behind my eyes. Feminism can never decode this sexual hypnotic. I find this weak point as a woman in me" (p. 238). After Tiantian's death Coco writes the last pages of the novel, again and again overwhelmed by a sense of his presence.

Letters from Shamier and Mark in Germany come constantly. Mark's letters are very long and he tells her in great detail about his everyday life, his work and the conflicts with his wife. Shamier invites Coco to visit her. Coco accepts the invitation and goes to Germany.

It may appear at first as if this passion for a foreigner is like the one Wang Anyi depicted as a "dominating, consuming power": "a tumour that grows out of the weakest point in our emotional life and cannot be so easily removed. Its right to exist lies in the activation of a virus in a specific place in my body. This virus is called 'sexual drive'". In contrast to the heroine of Wang Anyi's novella, Coco admittedly does not have one but two lovers and thus has the chance of not feeling completely at the mercy of this virile power. But wherein resides her defence against the seduction of the foreigner? In an impotent, drug-addicted Chinese inclined to fainting fits and whose aura is characterized by a rotting stream of air. In him are warmth, understanding and emotional ties. The protagonist is indeed far removed from the radical loss of identity Wang Anyi's A San had to suffer; a simple segmentation makes survival easier.

There is no mention of "Chinese culture" in this novel (nor of politics, after all, the Party has attained its goal of creating a politically free sphere). Wei Hui's figures hedonistically enjoy Western consumer goods – Yi Mang, who in Shen Dali's work had preached the spiritual value of Eastern mysticism against Western materialism, would turn in his cool grave – and the literary references also lie in the West; it may appear as if Chinese culture has finally exhaled its soul. But precisely in this moment, as basically every Chinese must be

interchangeable with a foreigner (and vice versa), what is Chinese finds its constellation in a weak, frail person who embodies the opposite of the force represented by the foreigner. The Chinese essence, which materially and intellectually, squeezed between Calvin Klein and Chanel, between Henry Miller and Milan Kundera is no longer existent, becomes an emotional value. This is the point where the aforementioned recourse into the past must begin.

In 1898, three years after the defeat by Japan, which was more painful than the previous defeats at the hands of the Western powers, it appeared obvious to radical minds in China that both the old system as well as all attempts to reform it were hopelessly condemned to failure. The modernity intruding upon China through Western – and henceforth also Japanese – technology and science was too powerful for the country to resist without a revolution and a break with tradition. Many of the newly forming revolutionaries believed that neither the classical education system with its *cursus honorum* to political power could be maintained, nor should the old state and social institutions – foremost the imperial family, increasingly viewed as "alien" – survive. This attitude led to the birth of Chinese nationalism and, further, prepared the way for the iconoclastic parting from China's cultural tradition that reached its provisional culmination with the "May Fourth Movement" in 1919 and the "closing of the Confucius shop" it strove for.

Nevertheless, there were several scholars who still set their faith in the status classical education had once conveyed; helped by a new interpretation of the canonical content of this education, they hoped to show that precisely in the classics genuine Chinese modernization traditions were also located. Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) endeavoured from the turn of the century to provide a Confucius exegesis that would let him appear as a reformer avant la lettre[21]; others attempted to present the new Western sciences as a perfected continuation of Chinese traditions. The powerful politician Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837–1909) believed to have found the harmonious balance between a Chinese essence and Western technology: in his 1898 published "Exhortation to Study" (*Quanxue pian* 勸學篇)[22] he stood up for maintaining "Chinese teachings as the core (literally "body", M.L./Y.X.), Western teachings in contrast are to be deployed for practical use" (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*

21 Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and a New World. K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.

22 For a recent edition see Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, *Quanxue pian* 勸學篇, (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998).

中學為體西學為用). While this formulation was new, the thought behind it was not. It had been more or less clearly expressed beforehand: The China, that embodied the "true way" (*dao* 道) over the world of forms, must make use of Western "tools" (*qi* 器) which cling to the world of forms.

The formula is still in circulation in China even today; critics of Deng Xiaoping's so-called policy of openness reproached him for proceeding according to this maxim in wanting to preserve communism while merging it with Western economic efficiency. This reproach was even more justified as many critics suspected, then in fact at the end of the 1970s China was as far removed from a consensus about what constitutes socialism as it was in the 1890s about "Chinese teachings" and the "Chinese" essence. Both had been long hollowed out the moment proposals were thought up through these respective "external appearances" for its redemption. Zhang Zhidong could certainly imagine what "Western teachings" were (namely machines and railways), but for the "Chinese teachings" he found, just as Deng Xiaoping later did for socialism, merely total abstract definitions; nothing else occurred to anybody for the intellectual and material determination of what had once been so powerful – the Chinese tradition had become an emotional value.

For the "Shanghai Baby" as well, China has become an emotional value, and a highly-personal and personalized one at that (but precisely one hollowed out and impotent); the West, itself in turn portrayed in a personalized figure, is admired as a soulless sexual technology, as a "tool" for "practical use". The "skilfulness" already ascribed to Westerners in the later imperial age, which also frequently evoked "cunning", characterizes the German Mark (and perhaps the association to the currency of the "German mark" is not so far-fetched).

It is remarkable that despite of – or precisely because of? – all the naturalness, *Shanghai Baby* displays in the dealings with foreigners and what is foreign that it once more turns its foreigner into a barbarian, basically even into an animal – in contrast to the other works discussed here. The relationship to the businessman is unthinkable without calling in the sadomasochism repertoire; and thankfully the man is also a German, and so the "Nazi" is not far away. We can only assume that the enormous charging of one's very own, of the frail and of the impotent with feelings of warmth, understanding and intimacy provokes the extreme rendering of its opposite, the brutality of the "tool". This brutality will also, so it is feared, once again bring about the economic and psychological superiority of the West.

Not only feelings, but also using tools is addictive: what would China be without railways and cars, television sets and computers, washing machines and

air-conditioners! And so Coco also slips into the trap of sexual hypnoticism, because quite obviously the sphere of everyday "use" cannot be kept strictly apart from the soul permanently. Perhaps in the end the incompatibility resolves itself into a compromise, one that, after the death of the Chinese beloved and the disappearance of the foreign lover, sees Coco herself leave for abroad on the invitation of a lesbian.

6. The Other Morality

"Pippi" is the pseudonym – currently fashionable in China due to the enthusiasm for Astrid Lindgren's "Pippi Longstocking" – assumed by a woman writer in her mid-thirties who, besides two novels, has also published a volume of short stories and two translations of children's books by Janosch. *Kewang jiqing* (*Passionate Yearning*) is her debut novel.[23] With Wei Hui she shares, presumably awarded by the elder statesmen of Chinese literary criticism, membership in the group of "beautiful woman writers", a characterisation that is probably used to suggest that the secret of their success lies more in their beauty than in talent.

Passionate Yearning tells the story of a marriage crisis set off by the partners each finding a lover. Yi Chushi, a professional photographer, is married to Wang Yi, a university lecturer; they have a daughter called Xiao Yue. But then he meets Xiao Qiao, a television journalist. After hesitating at first, he falls passionately in love with her.

Wang Yi is given the job of teaching foreign students Chinese. At the first pre-class discussion meeting she meets Kang Xun (his English name is "Morris"), who comes from Australia and works as an English teacher in the economics faculty. He attends Wang Yi's lessons because he is about to write his dissertation on onomatopoetic words in Chinese and wishes her assistance. Kang Xun comes from a family of cattle breeders. He loves nature and above all the land. His childhood and youth were extremely unhappy. He quickly falls in love with Wang Yi. She gets pregnant, but does not want to keep the child, a decision that makes him very sad. She returns home and tries to overcome the psychological and physical wounds.

In the meantime Yi Chushi and Xiao Qiao are living together; time and again there are problems because, on the hand, Xiao Qiao's passion develops

23 Pipi 皮皮 *Kewang jiqing* 渴望激情 (Passionate Yearning), (Shenyang: Chunfeng chubanshe, 1997).

almost into obsession with Yi Chushi, while on the other she is extremely sensitive. She seeks to console herself by visiting her former boyfriend Li Xiaochun, thus putting a strain on her relationship with Yi Chushi. As Yi Chushi comes home once, he finds out coincidentally that Wang Yi has just had an abortion. Out of pity he wants to stay at home to help her, which in turn arouses misconceptions in his girlfriend Xiao Qiao. In her agitation she leaves behind a farewell letter for Yi Chushi, only to then be run over by a car and die. Shortly afterwards her father also dies of grief. Yi Chushi suffers a breakdown.

Kang Xun must now return to Australia because his work contract as an English teacher has come to an end. He has asked Wang Yi to marry him and wants her to accompany him. At first she had said yes, but began to hesitate as she found out that her daughter Xiao Yue had left school and entered a cloister because she could not cope with the separation of her parents. And as she then found out that her husband Yi Chushi was in crisis, her sense of duty supersedes love. She stays in China.

The novel ends with two different versions: in the first version Yi Chushi and Wang Yi try to live together again. As Yi Chushi's mother lies on her deathbed, she asks her son whether he loves his wife. He says merely that he respects her. In the second version Yi Chushi has quit his job and leaves home because he no longer wants to live with "corpses". He vanishes without a trace. Wang Yi cannot though stir up the courage to re-establish contact to Kang Xun because she feels herself to have aged too much in going through the crises.

At the beginning of the novel, Wang Yi goes to the talks at the university's office for foreign students. These have already begun, and as Wang Yi sits down she nods politely to the blue-eyed man next to her. As a joke is made she notices that he "laughs like a child" (p. 12). He speaks fluent Chinese and also has a Chinese name, Kang Xun. He introduces himself first with his Chinese name and then adds his English one, as if he were Chinese. He asks for her help in writing his dissertation on onomatopoetic words in Chinese. Kang Xun attends Wang Yi's lessons and proves himself to be very attentive. As Wang Yi gives him back the illustrated book, he shows her the land owned by his family where he grew up. He speaks of his mother who was always beaten by her husband (he refuses to call him father). Already as a child he was forced into protecting his mother. Aged nineteen he was sent to prison because he injured his father after intervening in an argument between his parents. But he was able to learn Chinese there. This conversation reduces the distance between them and arouses a certain maternal instinct in Wang Yi. As Kang Xun then asks her about her idea of happiness, she says: "I've been married for 13 years, life is very calm.

And that's it, not bad" (p. 43). He tries to explain to her that he would never want his wife or girlfriend to ever say anything similar. He has also smuggled a small card with his name and telephone number into her handbag. As he leaves he wants to lend her an umbrella because it looks as if it's about to rain: "I'm not going anywhere today. Take the umbrella. It will certainly start to rain on your way home. When it rains you can walk through the park with the umbrella. The park smells lovely when it rains" (p. 45).

Later Kang Xun calls her. She immediately recognizes his foreign accent. But he does not want to ask her about any onomatopoetic words, but rather tells her that the husband of his mother has died and that he is thus extremely sad. He is not able to express his love for her, cries his heart out and wants to see her.

He writes her a love letter: "[...] I'm not Chinese and can't understand many things in China as well as the Chinese. I fear, or I am afraid that my feelings for you could never bring you perfect happiness. What I least hope for and could not bear would be that you would have to suffer because of this. But I am in fact in love with you, and was from the first moment I saw you. [...] I know that you reject me. This thought is one I – in sleep and when awake – cannot drive away. You can reject me with without even giving any explanation. I understand this. But don't try and find me too quickly to tell me that it won't work. Give me a little time. Give me time for a crossing. Let my imagination linger a little longer on this: you like me. That you don't answer is because you hesitate. You are no longer a naive girl [...]" (p. 64–65).

Wang Yi, who has never before received a love letter because she has never had a relationship with any other man except her husband and they lived in the same city as they met, is greatly moved. "She is like a schoolgirl, for the first time with a ship on the sea, drunk with joy and unable to control herself" (p. 66). She goes to his flat, but he is not there. She walks through the park on her way back home and catches herself thinking that she would really want to run into him: "His smile generates a warm feeling. Perhaps it started with the smile that she liked him. His eyes, oh no, she'd prefer to pass over them because they are blue. Is his nose of the Greek kind? Maybe his forefathers are of Greek descent. His nose is straight and runs downwards, when standing opposite him you can't see the nostrils, absolutely perfect, is it not? Yes, the nose is not very large. His mouth is wide and has thin lips; it is wonderfully suitable for smiling with closed lips. His hair is chestnut; he's not very tall. He is powerfully built, everyone must believe in his strength. If there were a flood, he would haul the old woman hanging in the tree into the boat. If there were an earthquake, he would carry three children on his back to rescue them from the danger zone. If he ran into a

nasty person on the street, he would not dodge out of the way because of fear. He is very good-natured. You don't need to know him for long to realize that" (p. 70–71).

Kang Xun tells her in Chinese, in English, in French, in German and in Spanish that he loves her. She also confesses her love. Wang Yi is time and again amazed that she totally forgets that he is a foreigner, perhaps because there is no language barrier between them. Kang Xun does not want her to tell her husband immediately of their love because he fears that she could be put under great pressure. "I have nothing to fear. You don't understand me yet. Perhaps you understand a person who was in prison. He's been faced with difficulties in life, as soon as he leaves prison, no matter in which country. In my country I would never be able to find a reasonable job although I can speak Chinese. Do you understand? I don't possess much, which means that I have no need to fear anything. But I must think for you. Your husband, your neighbours, your friends and even colleagues will exert enormous pressure on you because I'm not Chinese. I know that you don't have enough strength yet to face all these things. I don't want something to die before we even begin" (p. 150).

Kang Xun assures her of his eternal love, no matter which situation they may end up in. Wang Yi believes she is too old to change her life again. Kang Xun replies that he is also prepared to live in China as long as Wang Yi needs him. Wang Yi feels that Kang Xun is spoiling her a great deal: in the morning she wakes up and encounters immediately Kang Xun's deep gaze and his kiss; he brings her breakfast in bed and goes to shower first so that the unheated bathroom becomes warmer for her; he cooks for her, pork loin cooked in soy sauce and vegetable cream soup. Since she's been together with him, she notices for the first time, at the age of forty, that she is an attractive woman. Her husband has never given her such self-confidence. She begins to buy new shoes and clothes for herself.

Wang Yi's encounter with Kang Xun is not explicitly exotic. Kang Xun is simply in love with Wang Yi: "Since I've fallen in love with you, I've reverence for God because He ties my deepest love to a woman who fits to me best. For this reason I believe that there is a God. It is not my goal to marry you. I want to become old with you and approach together the death awaiting us at the end" (p. 208). Also the Chinese name, Kang Xun, contributes to the fact that the reader is not explicitly reminded of his foreignness. But in the argument between Kang Xun and Yi Chushi, Wang Yi's husband, the conflicts are often articulated in this direction: "That's right. If I were to lose face here, then the standing of the foreigner increases" (p.187). Or after Yi Chushi has thrown an inkwell onto the

floor and stained Wang Yi's new skirt, he says: "I'm really sorry, such a beautiful skirt. Buy yourself a new one tomorrow. I've heard that all the foreigners have money. A skirt won't make any difference to him" (p. 187). Yi Chushi admits that as far as he's concerned Wang Yi can fall in love with anyone – but not with a foreigner (p. 197). In particular, he had an uncomfortable feeling as he saw the "hairy arm", one "that made him think of evolution" (p. 317).

When Wang Yi and Kang Xun spoke about a child, they still thought that this was a distant issue. Kang Xun unfolds his fantasy about a "half-caste": "Its skin is neither white nor yellow. Can you imagine this in-between colour? Such a skin colour is certain to have a strong sensual effect. Its face will be like yours. It shall be a boy. Boys look like their mothers, don't they? His eyes will be as large and bright as yours, and they'll also be black. They must be as deep-set as mine." In reply to the question why the eyes must be so deep-set, Kang Xun says: "So that they won't be injured in a fight. His nose is so straight like ours, but not so pointed as mine. It must have a little of the curve from yours. His hair will be brown, but black would be all right as well, but it's got to be as soft as mine [...] Don't you want to imagine him? He'd be a wonderful boy" (p. 209). Wang Yi is now pregnant and does not want to keep this child because she does not know what her further journey through life looks like. Kang Xun's work contract is to come to an end soon. She does not know whether a forty-year-old woman can still rely upon love. Kang Xun is very pleased about Wang Yi's pregnancy and is deeply hurt that she does not want to keep the child.

> 'You intend to kill this child?'
> 'Please don't use the word 'kill'. Westerners are absolutely ridiculous in this question. It is only an embryo.'
> 'But every child comes from an embryo.'
> 'In China it's different. It is very widespread that women terminate pregnancy. Some have had many abortions.'
> 'That's your politics, that's got nothing to do with me. But these politics are not to affect my child as well.'

While Wang Yi stays at home after the abortion, for she does not want Kang Xun to know of her suffering, Yi Chushi visits Kang Xun. He wants to get to know the lover of his wife to see whether he is trustworthy, because his wife seems to be determined to go with him to Australia. Although the visit begins full of tension, it ends with both men feeling sympathy for one another.

Wang Yi would have probably really gone to Australia with Kang Xun if her daughter had not entered the cloister, if Xiao Qiao had not died and if Yi Chushi had not suffered a breakdown. But now she feels obliged to stay with Yi Chushi. Kang Xun knows, far more clearly as Wang Yi, that they have lost one another forever. "I know that you'll no longer come back to me if you go home now. You are kind-hearted woman and your husband is not a bad man. The true face of life is so: you can choose, but you can't have everything" (p. 411). But as his last word to her Kang Xun says that she can always count on his help. "No matter what difficulties you run into, no matter how great they are, you can always write to me or call me. I'll always help you, with all my strength. Please don't ever doubt that as long as I live" (p. 412).

At first glance it appears as if this is a classical tragic love story in which the protagonist, caught between duty and love, decides for the former. As we already saw in the case of Li Shuang, it is more those surrounding her who raise objections to the foreigner. This occurs in part with clearly racist undertones, such as when Wang Yi's husband is compelled to think of evolution when he glimpses the hairy arm of the foreigner, a topic that recalls Chinese variations of the racial theories circulating in the 1920s and 1930s where the Chinese lack of hair is presented as the "result of thousands of years of civilized living in dwellings".[24] As in all the other works, perhaps with the exception of that by Wang Anyi, the physique of Morris/Kang admittedly provides for an erotic exoticism that oscillates between attraction and a feeling of being repelled: great physical power (yes!), blue eyes (better not even think of them) and a nose whose nostrils are not to be seen (beautiful). But, so it appears, apart from the physical fascination, the novel could even manage without a foreigner, then duty and love are not necessarily distributed according to national criteria.

Morris/Kang Xun is also not exactly the epitome of success, otherwise so readily connected with the "strong and rich" Western countries; as a former prison inmate without great career prospects he is more of a "loser" type, certainly no winner.

Morris spoils Wang Yi and makes her forget her age; with him she experiences one premiere after another: the first love letter, the first breakfast in bed, consideration in renting an apartment. In contrast to a widespread cliché, according to which true attachment to nature is to only be found in the East, it is

24 Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1992), p. 141 (quotes Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, 1935).

the Australian who thinks of the countryside in his homeland. Above all, Morris is the opposite of her husband: whoever knows the usual tone of communication in marriages in China, even amongst persons who are otherwise so differentiated in their manners, a tone that strikes Western ears as factual, raw, frequently almost business-like and basically unloving, they will understand why the author, who has obviously come across no exception to this in China, has given the foreigner the part of a considerate and polite lover attached to nature and respecting the life of an unborn child. One may object by calling upon the "Confucian" argument (in a Western context one would have to speak of a "Protestant"), whereby affection and love are not tied to external forms of expression; but these are precisely what fascinate Wang Yi.

The emancipation which Li Shuang attained fails here because the feeling of duty triumphs. The lover remains, in both versions of the finale, an episode, even if we may assume that the protagonist will henceforth spend a lifetime remembering this love.

There is also in this novel no mention of "cultural" differences; nevertheless differences implicitly become the central theme. Not the high culture, not the aesthetic and not the notion of being able to degrade the other to a tool for hedonist pleasure make the foreigner here to a topos. In this novel the concern is with differences in everyday behaviour, differences that many anthropologists and "intercultural psychologists", their epigonic followers, have declared to be "culture". We certainly have no need to engage in detail with the murky depths of a concept of culture to be able to say that the foreigner here stands for a new dimension in the expressive forms of emotion. In contrast to another widespread cliché, it is the foreigner who unwaveringly stands by his lover while around them highly complicated webs of relationships run their course. He likes life in China and speaks like a Chinese, so that the protagonist could almost forget that he is a foreigner. Almost, except for one important detail: who would have thought that one day a foreigner would embody morality in a Chinese novel!

7. Conclusion

Except for a possible relationship between Li Shuang's biography and Wang Anyi's novella, the five texts under consideration do not seem connected by any causal link. Wang Anyi, who has always been a keen observer – and a follower –

of fashionable currents and events, most probably heard about the story of Li Shuang. This would account for her protagonist being a painter, and it would also explain the topos of the labour camp. However, whereas falling in love with a foreigner means emancipation and liberation to Li Shuang, the acquired freedom, in Wang Anyi's text, turns into a loss of "resources", and the foreigner is seen as a demonic and devouring power.

The idea that the same topos may be used for radically different purposes helps us to perceive the similarities between our five texts: all of them provide answers to the question of Chinese national identity challenged by a foreigner. But these answers differ considerably. For Li Shuang, the foreigner represents the possibility of self-realisation, which meant, first of all, an escape from the mental and physical prison-house that China was at her time. Chinese national identity was not yet very much at stake at the time when she left China; however, if one had to put her answer into an explicit expression, Li Shuang's message would probably be that it is only abroad that a Chinese painter can realise her Chineseness. The fact that less than a decade after, Chinese identity had become a fervently debated issue is demonstrated by Wang Anyi's rather xenophobic and conservative use of Li Shuang's life. Wang Anyi's understanding of Chinese dignity seems to have been strongly challenged by Li Shuang. Her novel suggests that indulging into love affairs with foreigners engenders self-abandonment rather than self-realisation. Chinese identity, as vaguely as it may be defined in her story, consists predominantly in resistance to foreign seductions. Wang Anyi's depictions of Chinese identity somehow remind the reader of Ruth Benedict's famous words: "Whatever they do, we do the opposite". However, as a close reading of the five novellas shows us, there are more possible answers to the question of how to define Chineseness.

Shen Dali's case is perhaps the most pessimistic one: the challenge of the foreigner becomes a threat to which he is finally not able to resist by other means than suicide. His story, sentimental and over-loaded as it is by his erudition in 19th century French literature, offers the only solution that is adequate to the protagonist's "unhappy conscience". Chinese national identity, in Shen Dali's view, is the same as "Chinese culture"; this culture, however, has apparently ended its productive phase by the 11th century, although Shen Dali seems not to be very conscious about the periods from which his evocations of "Chinese culture" stem. The more abstract, vague, and reductive a concept of culture is, the more it is prone to become a tool for dichotomization. Shen Dali indulges in juxtaposing cultural essentials, and he apparently never gets tired of culturalising even the most trivial aspects of every day life. In Shen Dali's

depiction, "Chinese culture" has an almost feminine touch of clement and yielding wisdom.

Weakness, as portrayed in the Chinese lover of the "Shanghai Baby", is also a characteristic of Zhou Weihui's representation of Chineseness. No explicit concept of Chinese culture plays any serious role in her account, and yet it is love and pity, which relate her to the Chinese man, whereas mere sexual attraction is the tie between her and the foreigner. Thus, China still remains the "essence" (*ti*), while the foreigner is treated as a "tool" (*yong*). "China", in this novel, is being reduced to an emotional value. This value is highly personalized, nor is it accompanied by any kind of theorizing about "China" and the "West".

Passionate Yearning makes use of the age-old topos of the noble foreigner who illustrates, by his virtue, the decline of the moral standards of one's own native place. According to the author of this novel, present-day Chinese people are stricken with extreme coldness in their marital relationships. The desire to escape from the business-like conventions of marriage leads to chaotic scenarios of adultery and betrayal. The foreign protagonist is the only person who not only seduces by his courteous attitude, but who also maintains the standards of an impeccable moral conduct. China's weakness, in this novel, is not a melancholically beloved one, as it was the case for *Shanghai Baby*, it is rather castigated through the rough diamond of an innocent foreigner.

We have thus found five different answers to one and the same question. To some extent, these differences may be due to the different generations and the respective experiences the authors represent; it is worthwhile noting that present-day China allows divergence, even in the field of defining Chinese identity. It is clear that, in order to describe the status of the "Own", the illustration of the "Other" has to submit to a certain amount of literary conventions. The more (stereo-)typical the foreigner is described in terms of physical features (e.g. blue eyes, blond hair, large bosom etc.), the more typical the reader can expect the Chinese to be. The erotic foreigner himself/herself, however, remains a topos, which enables writers to address problems of Chinese identity in terms of detour, of contrast, and in a seemingly detached attitude. The ambiguities involved in the image of the erotic foreigner in China today certainly reflect the enlarged and differentiated spectrum of the attitudes of an increasingly pluralistic society towards the manifold definitions of being Chinese. But it is also quite evident that the "real" foreigner who seemingly comes so close to us, who affects us very directly, is not the focus of interest: once again, he/she serves as a tool for defining the "Own". As the definitions of the "Own" differ considerably, the

descriptions of the psychological features of the foreigner have to differ, too. We have as many types of foreigners as we have types of understandings of Chinese identity. Since the process of nation building in China is not yet accomplished, it is to be expected that the erotic foreigner will become a literary convention in its own right.