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Sexuality, love, and marriage of Chinese women as reflected in Post-Mao era novels by women writers

Usama Mahapasuthanon

Abstract

This paper examines the changing patterns of and attitudes on sexuality, love, and marriage of Chinese women in the Post-Mao era, especially after 1985, as reflected in novels written by renowned Chinese women writers. The study shows that Chinese women in the novels have challenged the Confucian code of conduct for women on the preservation of chastity, open sexuality, and even the intimacy with the same sex, which were also taboos under the Mao regime. Chinese women in this era are aggressive in terms of love. Love is a part of the search for their own identities, for the completion of their self, reflecting a trend towards individualism. Marriage, thus, has become less important in women’s lives than under Confucian or Maoist ideologies. This change is a result of the interaction between China and globalization, in particular, capitalism and consumerism.

Introduction

During the 1980s, after the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese literary circle witnessed a surge of women writers. The tendency was carried on through the 1990s. The subject matters reflected in these women writers’ works are varied. Quite prevalent and conspicuous among them are the themes of sexuality, love and marriage. “Change” is the key word perceived in these issues.

This results from the shift in China’s politics and its economic reform. This tendency challenges the main ideologies of Chinese society, both Confucian and Maoist. This article examines novels of eight women writers of the Post-Mao era through content analysis, to identify the changing patterns of and attitude on sexuality, love,

The female protagonists in these novels are shaped by the ever increasing contact with outside forces—the influx of Western theories, capitalism and consumerism—from the early 1980s when China reformed its economy and opened the country. They see love and marriage in a different light from their predecessors. Moreover, an openness about sexuality pervades these novels. These traits reflect a trend in China toward individualism, one characteristic of modernity (Jancowiak, 1999; Barlow, 1996).

**Traditional views on love and marriage**

Since filial duty in Confucian tradition is deemed to be the highest virtue, failing to ensure descendants of one’s line is the greatest sin committed to one’s ancestors. Marriage and family are, thus, an indispensable part in one’s life. For Confucian scholars, family is the basic and the most important unit of the society. The ideal family in Confucian view is large and complex with several generations living together, as expressed in the concept of *Si dai tong tang* or four generations in the same hall (Ebrey, 2003: ch. 1). To achieve this kind of ideal family, Chinese women must serve two important functions: reproduction as wife and nurture as mother. According to Confucian scholars, if the family sphere is managed well, the outside sphere, society and country, will be prosperous. Women were limited to the inner quarter, and supposed to be good wives and good mothers for the sake of the peaceful and flourishing country.

...if you have virtuous wives, you will end up with *xianmu* (virtuous mothers). Virtuous mothers will ensure virtuous descendants. Civilizing begins in the women’s quarters. Everyone
in the *jia* (family) benefits from female chastity. (Barlow, 1996: 50)

In Confucian texts, to manage a family and subsequently the country well requires a man to act in accordance with his responsibilities in the five most important relationships: rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, older brothers and younger brothers, husbands and wives, friends and friends. Women are mentioned in only one aspect—as wives. Since antiquity, women have been instructed to follow the principle of “three obediences” (*san cong*): when young, obey father; when married, obey husband; and when old and widow, obey sons. Obviously, women’s roles in traditional Chinese society are confined within the family. Family is the universe for every Chinese woman at every stage of her life.

In Liu Xiang’s *Biographies of Chaste Females*, the moral code required of a wife includes “husband rectification” (keeping him on the right track), chastity, and lack of jealousy (Wu, 2009). Chastity is required of women alone, even when they become widows. Men are allowed to have mistresses and good wives are supposed not to be jealous.

In short, for Chinese women “in a society in which one’s identity was ascribed by one’s place in a family” (Jankowiak, 1999: 32), marriage was an inevitable duty to be performed within rather stringent codes on women’s behavior.

**Maoist view on love and marriage**

Women have always been used as the reason or the excuse to any change in the structure of power. For example, intellectuals in the May Fourth Movement used the liberation of women from feudal tradition as their cause to fight against the government. This was also the case in the Mao regime. Even before the Communist Party established its government in China, Mao declared that women “hold up half of the sky,” implying equality between the two sexes. Whatever man could do, woman could do as well. Under the Maoist ideology, women had the right to choose their own husbands. Arranged marriages, which had been the dominant pattern in traditional Chinese society, were legally prohibited. However, chastity was still considered sacred code but was no
longer required of women alone. Monogamy was stipulated by law for both men and women. The principle of “three obediences” was replaced by a decree of the Communist government. The role of the “virtuous mother,” who nurtures good descendants and thereby lays good foundations for the society, was substituted with that of the “iron woman” who can do whatever man can do. Given the urgent need to boost the economy, women became indispensable for the production and reproduction of the new China. The care of children was assigned to government daycare centers.

Women in this era were required to devote themselves to the mission of constructing a new China and a new society. The issue of romantic love, which had become an important topic and a sign of liberation from old feudal China in the May Fourth era, was set aside for other kinds of love—love for the people, the revolution, and the new China. Love as an intimate feeling between men and women became a symbol of the bourgeois class—a danger that had to be eradicated for the sake of the new regime.

Especially during the Cultural Revolution, sex became a taboo subject that no one even wanted to mention in the public domain for fear of being stigmatized or even punished. Under a regime of political correctness, marriage, choice of spouse, and divorce were sensitive issues which might affect one’s status and well-being.

**Changed view on love and marriage in the Post-Mao era**

After the Cultural Revolution ended (1976), a shift in attitude on sexuality and patterns of love and marriage took place, and this shift has been reflected in writings, especially those of women writers. Many factors contributed to the change including China’s economic reforms, the “Open Door” policy of the 1980s, the rapid growth of women’s studies in Chinese academic circles from the late 1980s, the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) held in Beijing in 1995, and the entry of China into the World Trade Organization. The reopening of universities stimulated a resurgence among Chinese intellectuals, eager to compensate for what they had lost during the Cultural Revolution, to catch up with Western counterparts and to modernize China, the awakening giant. The influx of Western ideologies, foreign contacts, and
foreign investments quickened the pace to a gallop in the 1990s when China embraced capitalism and consumerism, especially in urban areas among middle-class and high-class intellectuals. These foreign influences affected the ways of life, attitudes, and beliefs in many areas including sexuality, love, and marriage of Chinese women. These issues are clearly reflected in the writings of women writers.

From the novels selected for this study, the remarkable features are: openness about sexuality in public discourse and women’s aggressiveness in this area; changing attitudes on “love”; the declining status of marriage; and intimacy with the same sex

**Openness about sexuality and women’s aggressiveness in public discourse**

Right after the Cultural Revolution, as a means to defy the strict control on people’s social and personal life in the Maoist era, novels openly touched on sexuality issues, and this trend quickened from the mid-1980s onward. Surprisingly, some of these novels were written by women, the sex traditionally supposed to be silent on the subject. Wang Anyi pioneered the subject with three novellas, renowned as the Love Trilogy: *Love on a Barren Mountain* (1986), *Love in a Small Town* (1986), and *Love in a Brocade Valley* (1987), which made her the subject of criticism nationwide. She shocked the public by describing women’s sexual feelings, and by writing about an extramarital affair, a forbidden conduct in both Confucian and Maoist ideology, in *Love on a Barren Mountain*. Wang Anyi portrayed the carnal pleasure of the affair:

> They forgot everything—shame, degradation. They rolled under the bushes and embraced passionately... the great happiness of rebellion.\(^9\) (p. 121)

More shocking is that this affair is initiated by the heroine, who commits adultery in order to fulfill her own ideals of love. When she can no longer continue the affair, she takes her lover, another woman’s husband, with her to a tragic end together to glorify her love:
Besides, the other woman was so determined and so strong. They had never met, but they could sense each other’s presence, that they were in silent combat. They were fighting for a weak, cowardly man, a man who was in fact not worthy of their love. (p. 133)

Strangely his wife did not really hate her [the heroine] now, though she [his wife] knew he could not have hardened himself to do this had it not been for her [the heroine]. (p. 142)

In *Love in a Small Town*, Wang Anyi portrayed the sexual desire of a young and naïve couple (a girl of seventeen, and a young man of twenty-one):

> Yet it gives so much enjoyment that it is irresistible. When their bodies touch and they become one, all these ideas of crime, sin, right and wrong no longer exist.¹⁰ (p. 41)

The novel shows how Chinese society prevents people from gaining sexual education. The couple experiment and find the way to fulfill desire by themselves. In the process, the heroine discovers her meaning in life, which is to be mother of a child born out of such an act.

In *Love in a Brocade Valley*, readers are led to explore the psychology of a married woman who gets stuck with the staleness of her own marriage and thus commits a brief and mostly psychological affair with a colleague whom she just meets at an overnight conference out of town:

Looking at his hands, she felt a sudden tremor remembering that it was this pair of hands which had embraced her: these hands. These hands were unfamiliar, and because they were unfamiliar she became more conscious that they were a man’s hands. She trembled, filled with an almost ecstatic pleasure; she felt like a virgin in her first contact with the opposite sex. She was a married woman … she was so accustomed to the male that she’d stopped being conscious of sexual difference and the nature of opposites…. She’d so far forgotten this tremor that it had become a stranger to her, and when it now recurred, it felt like first love: he seemed to be her first man. However, he wasn’t, after all, her first man.¹¹ (p. 74)

The three novellas bring the issues of sexuality to Chinese
readers. Thus, the trilogy has been labeled as "sex fiction" (xing'ai xiaoshuo) (Hung, 1991), reflecting the reaction in China at the time. The emergence of these works signaled the sexual re-awakening of China.

Sexual consciousness blossomed fully during the 1990s with the country’s acceleration towards a market economy, preparation for China’s entry into WTO, and the growth of women studies. In 1994, Lin Bai rocked the literary circle with her famous novel, One Person's Battle. This was followed by Chen Ran’s A Private Life in 1995. These two works trace the gradually growing sexual consciousness of two young women: Duomi in One Person's Battle and Ni Niuniu in A Private Life. The novels portray curiosity about sexuality, masturbation, first-time sexual experience, sexual harassment, and intimacy with the same sex. Duomi grows up among piles of artificial reproductive organs because her mother is an obstetrician. She begins masturbation from five or six years old. The act is described through metaphor in both the opening and ending of the book:

She felt as if she was moving in water. Her hands were moving up and down on her body.... She felt as if she herself had become water and her hands had become fish.\(^\text{12}\) (p. 1)

In One Person's Battle, Duomi and a girlfriend play a game imitating sexual intercourse when aged six. Duomi often imagines herself being raped. Later when someone really tries to rape her, without success, she makes friends with the rapist and plans to publish this experience. Duomi recounts her first-time sexual experience in a matter-of-fact tone. Without regret, she has sexual relationship with one man and gets married with another later on.

In A Private Life, Ni Niuniu has her sexual consciousness awakened by a male teacher in class, and he later takes her virginity without her full consent. Niuniu also shows some signs of preferring the same sex, especially He, an older widow living next door. She initiates the sexual relationship with her boyfriend just to have something for both him and her to remember. She even teaches him since this is his first time.

The open treatment of sexuality by women writers and the aggressiveness of women in this area continued in the late 1990s,
and came to some kind of peak with *Shanghai Baby* by Wei Hui (1999). The book was instantly banned by the Chinese government, making it even more popular among Chinese readers. In the following year, *Candy* by Mianmian came out with a similar plot and similarly sensational reaction. These two novels deal with physical yearning, sexual satisfaction and dissatisfaction, frequent changes of sexual partners, and explicit descriptions of sexual acts and positions:

> When I discovered he was impotent, I was devastated, so much so that I didn’t know if I could stay with him. Ever since college I had seen sex as a basic necessity. (*Shanghai Baby*,¹³ p. 5)

> …and he taught me how to move with the music and give him pleasure with my mouth. (*Candy*,¹⁴ p. 28)

Less sensational than these two novels but still sexually open in the content is *Big-Bath Woman* by Tie Ning (2000). Tie Ning is a renowned woman writer who belongs to Wang Anyi’s generation, a generation older than Wei Hui and Mianmian. In her early works, Tie Ning has never been frank and explicit on sexuality issues. But over time, with China’s changing circumstances, Tie Ning also portrayed love scenes between a female heroine and her lover, and described the feelings of a woman who commits adultery and who uses sex to get what she wants.

At the very end of the twentieth century, nothing within the issues of sexuality was any longer hidden or secret for Chinese middle to upper class women with education. Sex is no longer a secret of the bedchamber for married women alone. Sex has become a necessity which will surely happen between two people of opposite gender. Women have the right to demand a satisfactory sexual life and can be the initiators in sexual encounters. Casual sex is prevalent. For this group of Chinese women, chastity is no more the symbol of women’s virtue.

In the new century, this openness continued, as seen in Anni Baobei’s *The Other Side’s Flower* (2001) and Chi Li’s *The Lingering of Fire and Water* (2002). There is no heroine who holds the traditional virtues. In *The Lingering of Fire and Water*, Zeng Mangmang becomes intimate with her former boyfriend while she is still married. In *The Other Side’s Flower*, Nan Sheng offers her
virginity to a man she dates without love, and flies to see a man she loves even though she fully knows that he already has a kind-of-permanent relationship with another woman. In these novels, sex has become a basic element in life. Adultery can be initiated by both men and women. A woman can have a casual physical relationship with someone she likes with no strings attached. It does not matter whether or not those men are married or have girlfriends. Chastity is no longer an issue for Chinese women in this period.

Changing attitudes on “love”

As mentioned earlier, romantic love had been banished in the Maoist era. Right after the Cultural Revolution, it returned, and played an important role in novels, especially those of women writers. In Zhang Jie’s *Love Must Not be Forgotten* (1979), love is emphasized as an important factor in marriage. Marriage without love, as was common in traditional or Maoist China, is regarded as immoral. Starting from the late 1980s, women in novels find love a part of self-fulfillment, reflecting a tendency towards individualism. The heroine in *Love on a Barren Mountain* is determined to hold on to the man she loves, even though both the pair are married to other people, because she believes that this affair can give her a sense of satisfaction and completeness:

They [the heroine and her lover’s wife] were fighting for a weak, cowardly man, a man who was in fact not worthy of the love. But when a woman loves a man, it is not for himself but for the realization of her own ideals of love. For these ideals, a woman would give everything, she would sacrifice herself. (p. 133)

In *Love in a Small Town*, the heroine turns her teenage love, which is mostly physical desire, into maternal love in order to raise a child born out of the physical relationship. This sustains her will to live on with dignity because it gives her meaning in life:

She has actually survived her scorching desires. She feels that this has been achieved through the help of her two children. (p. 101)

*Love in a Brocade Valley* leads the readers to see that an affair, which mostly takes place in the heroine’s mind, can encourage her
to face the tedious reality of her married life:

It never occurred to him that there’d actually been three people present this evening—not two but three. For a long time afterwards there would be three, not two, of them, living peacefully together. There wouldn’t be any strife or conflict, all strife and conflict would vanish like smoke because of the third person’s unseen presence. (p. 108)

In the novels of the Post-Mao era, love often starts with physical desire or instant attraction and then develops into a relationship which usually fails in the long run. However, along the way, the heroines learn about themselves, become satisfied, struggle to overcome the conflict between their hearts and their minds, and strive towards their ambitions. The ambition that these middle and upper-class educated women want to pursue is no longer to become a “virtuous wife and virtuous mother.” They want to be successful in their career or upgrade themselves from living in small villages to living in big towns or cities. Love is just one aspect of these women’s lives, not the only one. The experience of love might help them understand the ways of life and of the world, thereby enabling them to strive towards the better “self” as portrayed in Candy, Big-Bath Woman, and The Lingering of Fire and Water. Alternatively, love might leave them with desperate, pessimistic, and hopeless feelings like the heroines in One Person’s Battle, A Private Life, and The Other Side’s Flower.

In Candy, the heroine picks herself up from the wretched love affair to become a writer. Formerly, she drifted aimlessly and confusingly amid the modernizing trends and market economy of one China’s southern cities. Now she has a direction in life. In Big-Bath Woman, Yin Xiaotiao gets over her doomed affair with the lady-killer movie director and develops herself as a professional editor working at the national and international level. Later on, she turns down a marriage proposal from her old-time admirer, even though they have a quite satisfactory relationship, both physical and spiritual. In The Lingering of Fire and Water, Zeng Mangmang gets married because of the incessant pressure from her family in the belief that marriage can overcome the hardship and problems in her own family. The problems stem from the fact that her husband has lovers, fails to get into a higher education institution, and cannot
succeed in his own career. Meanwhile she progresses in her career path and possesses the courage to follow her heart eventually.

In *One Person’s Battle, A Private Life*, and *The Other Side’s Flower*, failure in love gives the heroines a pessimistic attitude towards life and people, yet they all still try to cope with life and search for life’s meaning.

For Chinese women in the Post-Mao era, love is evidently elusive. None of the relationships leads to a happy marriage. Instead, love brings them enlightenment about their own “self.” No matter how painful love is, they all still search for a love which will fulfill their personal needs, make them understand themselves, and enable them to find a value in life.

After long years in which love could not be discussed openly, love in this period becomes an important element in life which can be discussed and presented in public discourse. However, love is found to be just one process in life helping this group of women to realize their true selves. Consequently, marriage is not the answer in most love stories of this era, in contrast to traditional belief that marriage is the biggest thing in women’s lives.

**The declining status of marriage**

On the evidence of these novels, the importance of marriage has been in decline in the Post-Mao era from women’s point of view. Since 1985, marriage as portrayed by means of exclusion in the novels is problematic. Living together is preferred. Married couples are not painted as happy families. Adultery is prevalent on both sides, as seen in *Love on a Barren Mountain* (1986), *Love in a Brocade Valley* (1987), *One Person’s Battle* (1994), *A Private Life* (1995), *Shanghai Baby* (1999), *Candy* (20000), *Big-Bath Woman* (2000), and *The Lingering of Fire and Water* (2002). For instance, in *The Other Side’s Flower*, marriage seems trivial when Qiao goes out of boredom to register the marriage with Ben, whom she has known and lived with for only one month, and then she wants to get a divorce in the same evening.

In all the novels studied, relationships between married couples are tedious, deadly static, full of conflict, and not smooth. Parents are not role models for their children; they have extramarital affairs,
fail in their careers, do not care enough for their children, have conflicts between each other, act hypocritically, and get divorced. Heroines like Duomi in *One Person's Battle*, Ni Niuniu in *A Private Life*, Coco in *Shanghai Baby*, Hong in *Candy*, Yin Xiaotiao in *Big-Bath Woman*, Zeng Mangmang in *The Lingering of Fire and Water*, and Qiao in *The Other Side's Flower* do not want to live with their parents but rather by themselves as much as possible. This reflects the modernized lifestyle of urban areas worldwide with a kind of autonomy unattainable by daughters in traditional Chinese society. Duomi never goes home during such important festivals as Chinese New Year. Ni Niuniu lives in a separate room from her mother though they live in the same building. Coco insists on living outside her home despite her mother's repeated call for her to move back. Hong starts traveling to "find herself" from the age of eighteen. Yin Xiaotiao has her own place and seldom goes back to her home. Zeng Mangmang lives in the factory's dormitory on working days, and makes excuses not to go back to her parents on Sundays. Qiao neither mentions her family nor settles down in any place. Fathers and mothers have little influence on these heroines who do not take their family into account when making their most important decisions. Duomi, for example, never talks about her family when finally getting abortion or getting married.

As shown in these novels, marriage and establishing a family is no longer the most important agenda for urban middle class women in the Post-Mao era. Living together without marriage, or rather having relationship while living separately, is more common in these novels. These cases reflect the tendency toward individualism—an important trait of modernity and one impact of globalization on present-day urban China.

**Intimacy with the same sex**

These novels, especially those published since the 1990s, narrate openly preference towards the same sex. In *One Person's Battle*, Duomi is approached by Nan Dan, a 21-year-old university student, who clearly states her adoration of Duomi. Chen Ran also makes her female heroine, Ni Niuniu in *A Private Life*, incline towards the next-door widow named He since her childhood. Coco
in *Shanghai Baby* also has a quick crush on Shamir, a German female movie director:

> Her moist inviting lip attracted me like an exotic flower, and I felt a sudden carnal pleasure as our tongues intertwined. (p. 211)

Coco comes up with the conclusion that:

> I still don’t understand why it is women—without exception—who best understand other women and can uncover another woman’s most subtle, most secret characteristics. (p. 210)

In *Candy*, Hong also recounts a lesbian couple and their activities. Lastly, in *The Other Side’s Flower*, Anni Baobei lets her heroine, Qiao kiss another woman and say “I love you.” A male character in the novel also turns out to be a homosexual who wants Qiao to marry him in order to cover his true identity from his parents.

The attitude shown in the novels seems neutral. There is no negative feeling, rejection, or any discrimination against such sexual preference:

> In any case, gay or straight, what did it matter, as long as you could love someone? (*Candy*, p. 198)

However, there is an exception in *One Person’s Battle* when Duomi says,

> I am so afraid that I am naturally homosexual. This is the deep-rooted disease in my heart. It is like the darkest shadow following me, separating me from normal people for good. (p. 45)

Duomi does not condemn homosexuality but she is afraid of being discriminated against in society. This reflects the conflict between tradition and the individualism emerging with the stream of modernity, which is the atmosphere of society at that time.

**Conclusion**

These novels reflect forces that are shaping Post-Mao Chinese society. Historical, political, and economic changes in the 1980s and 1990s have remade urban society. The political and economic reforms from 1978 to 1989 exposed Chinese people to the non-
socialist outside world, the world of capitalism and consumerism under the banner of globalization. To break free from the Maoist grip of socialism and to catch up with the rest of the world, to be modernized, both the Chinese government and people were eager to embrace the trend of globalization and cosmopolitanism which has “desire” as its keyword (Rofel, 2007: 3–6).

After the June 4th movement in 1989, further economic reforms and the strong desire of people to catch up with rapid changes sweeping the world have geared China towards consumerism as a means to attain modernity. Consumerism, and individualism, two of the main characteristics of modernity, have become the main shaping forces of Chinese society, driving it to become cosmopolitan in the globalized community. The traits depicted in the novels are brought about by such forces.

Consumerism rests on the desires of people. The ability to express desires is one character of cosmopolitanism. Such desires are stimulated and maintained through various discourses (Rofel, 2007: 115–24). Sexuality is one such discourse that desires work upon, resulting in more openness and more varied views on sexuality in Chinese society. Sex has become more and more a consumed product, and this is reflected in the novels of the era. In the novels selected for this study, heroines examine men’s bodies such as hands, buttocks, or shoulders and then express their satisfaction, or attraction. Men are treated like a kind of goods, or an object of desire. The openness and uncritical acceptance about same-sex preferences are also evidence of an attempt in Chinese society to join the cosmopolitan community and connect to modernity.

Individualism, another prominent character of modernity, has also played a crucial role in Chinese people’s lives. In these novels, there is no detailed description of the heroines’ boyfriends, husbands, or lovers. The male subjectivities are intentionally left out. The men are portrayed as just agents of opposite sex, who satisfy the heroines’ physical desires or certain inner needs. Men are positioned as just a part of life’s process. Readers are treated only to female subjectivities. Women are the main agents who contemplate, confirm, negate, and negotiate with outside forces. Love and marriage is not as important for these heroines as their self achievement. Boyfriends, husbands, and lovers are all characterized
as weak and cowardly and in some cases opportunists or losers.

In short, the novels portray the political, economic, and historical specificity of China in the Post-Mao era. They reflect society’s responses to the government’s attempt to modernize China. They show China’s negotiation with modernizing discourses. At the same time, these texts are also shaping and modifying the readers’ sense of social reality and the notion of women’s identity as well (Mills, 2004: 13–41).

Notes

1 Wang Anyi (王安忆 1954–) is a prolific woman writer whose works have won many literary awards including the Mao Dun Literary Award and Lu Xun Literary award. She was born in Nanjing but has spent most of her life in Shanghai, the scene of most of her novels. She joined a commune in Anhui in 1970 before starting her writing career in 1978. She was president of the Shanghai Writer Association in 2001. Currently, she is vice president of the Chinese Writers Association.

2 Lin Bai (林白 1958–) was born in Guangxi and graduated from Wuhan University in 1982. She began writing in 1989. One Person’s Battle created such a sensation in the Chinese literary world in 1994 that Lin Bai was noted as a representative of a “personal writing” group of women writers in the 1990s.

3 Chen Ran (陈染 1962–) was born in Beijing and gained a degree in Chinese literature from Beijing Normal University. She started writing in 1982. Most of her important novels came out in the latter half of the 1990s. Her novels were translated into foreign languages and sold all over the world.

4 Wei Hui (卫慧 1973–) was born in Zhejiang and graduated from the prestigious Fudan University in 1995. She is considered part of the “Beautiful Woman Writers” group (美女作家) and “New Human Being” group (新人类). Shanghai Baby was translated into more than thirty foreign languages and made into movie in 2007.

5 Mianmian (棉棉 1970–) is a Shanghai writer who wandered to many Chinese cities during her adolescent years. She stared her writing in 1997. Candy is her most notable work which has been translated into at least seven foreign languages and sold in over ten countries.

6 Tie Ning (铁凝 1957–) is a Peking writer who joined a commune in Hebei province in 1975. She also started writing in the same year. Her works have won such national literary awards as the Lu Xun Literary Award, Lao She Literary Award, and Bing Xin Prose Award. Tie Ning has been president of the Chinese Writers Association since 2006. She has been acclaimed as one of the most successful woman writers in China.
Anni Baobei (安妮宝贝 1974—) was born in Ningbo, a city near Shanghai. She has been well-known from her online novels since 1998 and thus belongs to the group of online literature writers (网络文学). Her works have always been among the top ten bestsellers in China.

Chi Li (池莉1957—) was born in Hubei. She also experienced commune life before graduating in medical science in 1979, and gaining another degree in Chinese from Wuhan University in 1987. She shifted to work in the literary field since then. Chi Li was elected to be vice president of the Hubei Federation of Literary and Arts Circles in 2007. Her works have won many national literary awards including the Lu Xun Literary Award.

This and other quotations from Love on a Barren Mountain are taken from the translation by Eva Hung, published by Renditions Paperback in Hong Kong in 1992.

This and other quotations from Love in a Small Town are taken from the translation by Eva Hung, published by Renditions Paperback in Hong Kong in 1990.

This and other quotations from Love in a Brocade Valley are taken from the translation by Bonnie S. McDougall and Chen Maiping, published by New Directions in New York in 1992.

The quotations from One Person’s Battle are my own translation.

This and other quotations from Shanghai Baby are taken from the translation by Bruce Humes, published by Washington Square Press in New York in 2002.

This and other quotations from Candy are taken from the translation by Andrea Lingenfelter, published by Little Brown in New York in 2003.

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