Women Sex-spies: Chastity, National Dignity, Legitimate Government and Ding Ling's "When I was in Xia Village"*

Louise Edwards†

Abstract

This article examines 70 years of debate about Ding Ling's 1941 influential short story about a woman spy, "When I was in Xia Village." In the article I show that the re-absorption of "our" female spies into post-conflict solidarity narratives is a fraught process. For national governments, the difficulty lies in asserting the moral legitimacy of their rule in the face of evidence about their deployment of women as sex spies. For national populations, the difficulty lies in the desire to construct reassuring victory stories within which peacetime normalcy can be restored. The diverse exegeses around Ding Ling's "Xia Village" reveal that even decades after the hostilities cease, "our" women sex spies still require an explanation to communities seeking to consolidate or "remember" their national virtue. The evolution of this process of "explaining" reveals the on-going importance of sexual morality to governance in current-day China. Specifically, through the analysis of the critiques of "Xia Village" the article demonstrates that female chastity has been and continues to be an important commodity in establishing and sustaining popular perceptions of the moral virtue of the PRC as a nation, and the CCP as its legitimate government.

Keywords: spies; sex; governance; war; gender; Chinese intellectual history

All military operations require spies to gather and deliver information about enemy activities. Espionage and counter-espionage are central to the war effort and women are regularly involved in all aspects of intelligence work. In China, the Nationalists (Kuomintang, KMT) and the Communist Party (CCP) maintained extensive underground networks of agents and informers working for their intelligence agencies throughout the wars against Japan and each other. Women featured frequently in espionage roles for both parties and deployed a

* I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the Australian Research Council's Discovery Grant program.

† University of Hong Kong. Email: ledwards@hku.hk

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range of information-gathering techniques, including dispensing sexual favours.[1] Frederic Wakeman noted that the KMT's *juntong* 军统 included women as agents and as sex-workers for male agents.[2] In 1940, communist activist Wu Qun 吴群 wrote an article protesting the active recruitment of women into sex-related espionage (by both the CCP and KMT) during the War of Resistance against Japan. Her powerful slogan ran: "Our service is at the very front lines of the struggle and not in the beds of the enemy" (*women de gangwei zai men-zheng de zui qianxian, bushi zai diren de beirushang* 我们的岗位在门争的最前线, 不是在敌人的被褥上).[3] Some women, Wu Qun argued, wanted greater access to direct combat action.

Wu Qun's explicit discussion of the sexualization of women's espionage roles reveals the considerable extent to which, during war, "our" use of women as sex spies is comparatively unproblematic. Her article shows that the existence of women sex spies is a topic that is debated publicly and in a matter-of-fact fashion as a necessary feature of war strategy. But, once the fighting has ceased the woman sex spy's utility also ceases and discussion about her work for "us" becomes problematic. The post-war rewriting of history routinely depicts "our side" as clean fighters and "their side" as the source of "dirty tricks" – with sex spying associated with the latter. This reappraisal of the role of women sex spies occurs because once peace is restored national, social and moral borders need to be reaffirmed. "Our" soldiers were heroic and "our" women chaste, while "theirs" were dastardly and cheap. Memories of the humiliation of enemy invasion of national borders, the forced fragmentation of families and the degradation of the national citizens' bodies are all reframed within the rubric of noble, sustained resistance and ultimate, victorious repulsion. Evidence of the woman sex spy's solicitation of this very same degrading penetration and her duplicity in tricking men – even if they are enemy men – blurs the moral borders that are being actively rebuilt. The incorporation of women sex spies into a history of a glorious and upright national struggle is difficult given the high moral value placed on women's sexual loyalty in most societies, including Chinese society.

This article explores the myriad ways that the re-absorption of "our" female spies into post-conflict solidarity narratives is managed. For national governments, the difficulty lies in asserting the moral legitimacy of their rule in the face of evidence about their deployment of women as sex spies. For national populations, the difficulty lies in the desire to construct reassuring victory stories within which the peacetime normalcy can be restored. In this article I examine 70 years of exegeses around Ding Ling 丁玲's 1941 short story about a woman spy, "When I was in Xia Village" (*Wo zai Xiacun de shihou* 我在霞村的时候), and

1 In the popular consciousness women espionage agents are commonly assumed to use sex as the prime mechanism for their intelligence work. Such women agents often struggle to overturn this misconception about the nature of their contribution, seeking to be recognized as professional, serious and legitimate espionage agents just like their male counterparts. See Proctor 2003.

2 Wakeman 2003, 216. For more on the *Juntong* see Yeh 1989, 545–62.

3 Wu 1940, 18.

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show that decades after the hostilities ceased "our" women sex spies still require "explaining." The evolution of this process of "explaining" reveals the importance of sexual morality to governance in China; despite the many challenges made to "feudal" values during the May Fourth and Socialist years, female chastity remains a powerful legitimizing currency for national leaders and their populations. Specifically, through the analysis of the critiques of "Xia Village" the article shows that female chastity has been and continues to be an important commodity in establishing and sustaining popular perceptions of the moral virtue of the PRC as a nation, and the CCP as its legitimate government.

Restoring Normality and Establishing a New Sexual Morality

In the immediate aftermath of war, women are frequently judged for their sexual activity during the conflict. As Claire Duchen has revealed of France after the Second World War, punishing women's wartime collaborationist misdemeanours and sexualizing their "crimes" partly helped atone for the humiliation experienced by French men during German occupation. Women who had worked in domestic environs with the enemy became scapegoats and faced brutalization in the form of public head-shaving in a ritualized punishment of "deviant female sexuality [that] safeguarded the integrity of the new post-war Republic."[4] At the cessation of hostilities, in the restoration of "normalcy," debates about a woman's wartime sexual virtue or promiscuity become sites through which new versions of community honour and political legitimacy are asserted. Female sex spies are at the front line of this reconfiguration of collective contradictory emotions of guilt, shame, pride and glory in the remembering of war.

As far as we know, there is no documentation on mass physical humiliations of Chinese women charged with "sexual treason" after the War against Japan or the Civil War. But there is clear evidence that women of "dubious" morals, including sex spies, were useful for the post-war PRC government's assertion of its moral and political legitimacy – for example, through the well-publicized campaigns to eradicate prostitution through the reform and re-education of sex-workers. From these campaigns, ordinary people learned of their new government's upright views on matters of sexual propriety. The CCP's desire to confirm the sexed nature of their moral legitimacy is not new for China's moments of political transition. Matthew Sommer's work has discussed the longstanding tradition wherein China's imperial rulers asserted their good governance skills through the promotion of a secure sexual order.[5]

4 Duchen 2000, 236–37. The women were known as *les femmes tondues* (shorn women). Duchen points out that sexual "crimes" are most commonly represented in these post-war cleanups because they are regarded as the most taboo.

5 Sommer 2000, chapter one. For example, he notes that illicit sex (*jian*) was linguistically linked to the "treacherous ministers" *jianchen* or "treacherous factions" *jiandang*. Disruptions to gender chastity norms through female to male cross-dressing do not generate the anxiety because they mostly reinforce existing social and political orders. See my discussion of exegeses on Hua Mulan stories, plays and films in Edwards 2010.

Unlike its imperial predecessors the PRC government sought to achieve a fundamental and on-going shift on its new citizenry's thought patterns. It aimed to teach all citizens about the "correct" way to view history and appraise their current world through an interactive process of teaching and learning that revolved around the privileging of "reality" through socialist realist aesthetics. Literary works and critiques of these works, such as those circulating around "Xia Village" were elevated to new heights of importance as texts through which the "correct reality" was created. In the new regime, producers of historical texts or creative works were charged with the duty of recreating a "truth" in which facts and ideal meet in a form of aesthetic synthesis. At the same time all consumers of these texts were charged with the responsibility of "actively viewing" them in a process in which audiences, viewers or readers become participants in the on-going recreation of "reality." This task places responsibility for correctly appraising given texts on each individual citizen.[6]

In this new environment the Party became the teacher of "reality," intellectuals, artists and writers (as the producers of texts) disseminated correct knowledge about "reality" and ordinary people became active students in a three-way process of perpetual interaction. The reconfiguration of wartime memories, along with myriad other social and political phenomena, could be managed within this evolving didactic process of critiquing representations (such as film, literature, art) as if they were reality. The current examination of the "teaching and learning" that circulated around "Xia Village" shows us the complex ways in which female chastity operates in the PRC governance system. Ding Ling clearly wanted to call readers' attention to matters of sexual virtue and its connection to broader military or governance roles because her sex-spy protagonist's name, Zhenzhen 贞贞, literally means "Chastity."[7] She probably did not anticipate that it would become a text upon which national yearnings for community virtue and the CCP leadership group's aspirations for legitimacy would be manifest 70 years later.

"Xia Village": The Original Story

"Xia Village" is China's most famous story of a female spy of the Second Sino-Japanese War and one of the most famous from the entire 20th century.[8] Published in June 1941 in a Yan'an journal, *Zhongguo wenhua* (中国文化, *China's Culture*), it was written in 1940 and tells of 17-year-old Zhenzhen, who is abducted from Xia village by the invading Japanese. She returns home a year later to reveal that she has been raped, forced into sexual servitude,

6 I am grateful to Yeewan Koon, The University of Hong Kong for this insight.

7 Bill Jenner's translation of "Xia Village" translates Zhenzhen's name as "Purity" in order to alert the English reading audience to its significance. See Ding 1985, 236–61. For discussion of how Ding Ling changed the way "the woman problem" was conceived in communist thought, see Barlow 2004.

8 Ding 1941a, 24–31. This journal was published by Xinhua shudian and retailed for 3 *mao*. For another English translation see: Ding 1989b, 299–315.

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"married" to a Japanese officer and become riddled with venereal disease. The people in Xia village variously regard her with horror, disdain, awe and sympathy. Some say she is a disgrace for returning home in her despoiled state, others pity her fate and respect her resilience and courage. Zhenzhen herself seeks neither their sympathy nor appears to care about their disdain. She is managing her illness and fragile psychological state with plans for the future and faith in the imminent cure for her diseased body. The horror of her experience in Japanese hands is mitigated by her participation in the Communist Party's espionage work. She describes how her fear of the Japanese soldiers diminished once she "made contact with our people (the communist forces)."[9] During her year away from Xia village she learns to speak Japanese and engages in three important missions for the Communists. She describes her three missions back into the heart of enemy territory with a clear sense of personal agency. These were actions she chose to undertake in her desire for vengeance on her Japanese attackers and the consequences of her actions were hers alone to commiserate and celebrate. She tells the story's narrator (a CCP cadre) that the Party is arranging her medical treatment and that she plans to go to Yan'an to start a new life free from illiteracy and the gossip of the village. The Party had used Zhenzhen's sexuality and it would now help in rehabilitating her physically, psychologically and intellectually.

Yi-tsi Feuerwerker described the story as showing the "resiliency of her [Zhenzhen's] spirit."[10] Ding Ling would no doubt concur with this view, because at the time of its writing she was enthusiastic about revealing the "dark sides" of life in Yan'an – while also showing that there was hope for improvement in the future. For Ding Ling, resilience was a key quality in reaching that improved China. Her description of Zhenzhen's determination to move onwards to a new life partly absolves the CCP for their use of her body – only through personal sacrifices is a new life won. The villagers' prejudices about unchaste women meant that there was no scope for her successful reintegration in Xia village life. Only the Party gives her hope for restored health and fresh life opportunities.

Ding Ling's description of Zhenzhen's return trips into Japanese territory, despite the advanced state of her illness and the accompanying crippling pain, show the extent of her dedication. The guerrilla leadership told Zhenzhen that despite the diagnosis that "her insides were rotting away" she had to undertake the mission back into Japanese territory because nobody else knew the locality. She walked alone in the dark for ten miles and "every single step was painful."[11] With these descriptions of extreme sacrifice Ding Ling emphasizes the depth of Zhenzhen's dedication to the Party's anti-Japanese cause, but she also reveals the limits of the Party's compassion for its agent's physical health and safety. Moreover, Zhenzhen appears alone and unsupported in her descriptions of the

9 Ding 1989b, 308.
10 Feuerwerker 1976, 275.
11 Ding 1989b, 308.

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missions, and alone again in her return home to face the vicious scandal and gossip of her neighbours. The Party provides a very distant form of support for a girl who has performed these gruelling tasks on its behalf. In creating the sense of Zhenzhen's isolation, Ding Ling hints at the repugnance women sex spies invoke among the people they serve and also the grudging admiration they garner for the extent of their sacrifice – such women are even prepared to sacrifice their chastity. In this regard, the story provides a grimly realistic vision of the emotional and physical costs for a spy performing sexual service for the CCP in 1940s China. The story resonated positively with her peers in the CCP literary elite for more than a decade and a half after it was published, as the following section reveals.

Zhenzhen: The Noble Resistance Fighter

In her foreword to the English translation of "Xia Village," Tani Barlow wrote that the story "upset literary policy enforcers because it reverted back to Ding Ling's earlier preoccupation with sex and justice."[12] But, the precise timing of the negative appraisal of "Xia Village" is crucial to our understandings of the ways in which chastity fluctuates in political and social value. From its publication in 1941 and throughout the years prior to the 1957 anti-Rightist campaign, the story was not a target of criticism. In Yan'an, Ding Ling had indeed come under attack – but not for "Xia Village." In December of 1941 she was upbraided for her story "In the Hospital" (*Zai yiyuan zhong shi* 在医院中时, published in November 1941), which criticized incompetence and callousness in a Party-run medical facility.[13] She faced criticism again only months later in March 1942 for her essay "Thoughts on March Eighth" (*Sanbajie yougan* 三八节有感) that challenged the Party on its poor treatment of women in Yan'an.[14] As editor of the literary pages of *Jiefang ribao* (解放日报, *Liberation Daily*), she was also criticized between March and July 1942 for encouraging creative works that exposed the darkness and ugliness of Yan'an society. These sessions were central to the Party's larger rectification campaign, which was designed to tighten control of writers and artists and cadres.[15] So, contrary to a common assumption that "Xia Village" was also problematic from the moment it was published,

12 Barlow, 1989, 298. Charles Alber (2002, 146) wrote that "Xia Village" was criticized in 1942 (specifically on March 31) but I failed to find evidence of this criticism. For a discussion of the debates, see Judd 1985, 377–408.

13 Ding 1941b. Gary Bjorge (1977, 127) notes that all original versions of *Grain Rains* have been lost. Bjorge writes that Ding Ling was criticized for "raising problems but not solving them" (133). The criticism of "In the hospital" appeared in Xue 1941, 4. The following year Ding Ling was criticized for "holding stale class prejudices." See Liao 1942, 4. This translation comes from Bjorge 1977, 154.

14 Ding 1942b, 4. For an English translation see, Ding 1989a, 317–21.

15 For discussion of these criticism sessions and their links to the concomitant campaign against Wang Shiwei and his essay "Wild Lilies" that criticized the Party leadership for its arrogance and distance from the masses, see Dai 1994. Ding Ling survived the worst of the attacks by publishing a retraction of her earlier views on literature and art from as early as 12 March. Ding 1942a, 4. Her retractions continued through June when she actively struggled against Wang Shiwei. See Ding 1942c, 4.

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the *Liberation Daily* shows that it escaped direct criticism even during these two years of intense scrutiny of Ding Ling's "ideological problems" in the rectification campaigns.

"Xia Village" was not only free from negative critical attention prior to 1957, but it received positive appraisal from prominent literary cadres like Feng Xuefeng 冯雪峰, Zhou Yang 周扬 and Hu Feng 胡风. It was included in multiple editions of collected works organized by these leading CCP intellectuals. In 1944 Hu Feng edited a collection of Ding Ling's short stories and published them under the collective title of *When I was in Xia Village*, showing that the story was a flagship for her work in general.[16] In Luo Binji 骆宾基's review of the book published in *Kangzhan wenyi* (抗战文艺, *War Literature and Art*) the same year, it is evident that the collection was received as an epic of survival, resistance and hope for a new social structure.[17] This 1944 edition was republished in 1950 and 1951 in Beijing by left-leaning Sanlian shudian 三联书店. The sustained popularity and official Party support for the short story continued in 1947 when it appeared as the lead article in Zhou Yang's collection *Jiefangqu duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* (解放区短篇小说选, *Collected Short Fiction from the Liberated Areas*).[18] In 1948, Feng Xuefeng praised the story for demonstrating human resilience and heralded Zhenzhen's character as showing how people can create new lives in the face of insurmountable odds: "Under the extreme circumstances produced during the rollout of the revolution and despite experiencing extremes of misfortune, the fulsome radiance of greatness shines in the spirit of this young girl from an impoverished remote village."[19]

Even for a few years after the establishment of the PRC, the story remained in circulation and was endorsed at the highest levels. In 1954, "Xia Village" was republished along with the author's postscript by the Party's own People's Literature Publishing House. In the postscript, penned in 1950, Ding Ling expressed her gratitude to Comrade Hu Feng for his encouragement for the story's republication.[20] Again in 1954, it appeared in a volume of her short stories titled *Yan'an ji* (延安集, *The Yan'an Collection*), also published by People's Literature Publishing House. This edition included some extra sentences to explain the value of Zhenzhen's espionage work to the guerrillas and the uniqueness of her local knowledge in undertaking the mission. It also includes Zhenzhen's desire that she will be able to start a new life, free from prejudice, in Yan'an.[21] Neither of the problematic works – "In the Hospital" and "Thoughts on March Eighth" – appeared in the 1944, 1950, 1951, or 1954

16 Ding 1944.
17 Luo 1944, 17–20.
18 Zhou 1947, 3–23.
19 Xue 1948, 4. This essay also appeared as a postscript to *Ding Ling wenji* (*Ding Ling's Collected Works*) published in 1947 and has often been republished in Feng Xuefeng's works under the title "*Ding Ling wenji* houji" ("Postscript to *Ding Ling's Collected Works*").
20 Ding 1954a, 71–87 for the story and 236 for the postscript.
21 See Ding Ling 1954b, 85 and 96.

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volumes, indicating that these last two stories were in a different "political" category to "Xia Village."[22]

The positive appraisal of "Xia Village" and Zhenzhen came to a dramatic halt in 1957 with the advent of the anti-Rightist campaign. Ding Ling's adversaries already had considerable evidence of her "bourgeois" tendency to criticize the Party in "Thoughts on March Eighth" and "In the Hospital"; "Xia Village" provided additional ammunition that opened Ding Ling and Zhenzhen to explicit condemnation in terms of sexual chastity, and gave the CCP a chance to reaffirm the moral basis of its rule of China. Attacks on "Xia Village" enabled the new socialist realist critics and readers to construct a vision of the CCP as a champion of a secure sexual order and to posit Ding Ling as a threat to that order. Female chastity became a synecdoche for good governance – social stability had a sexed nature. With socialist realist reading/viewing practices, the CCP emerged as the defender of a sexually secure social and political system. In keeping with the merging of reality and fiction promoted by socialist realism's didactic impulses, Zhenzhen also became a target for commentators' criticism as if she were a real person.

Creating the Barrack Whore

The story's sudden negative appraisal in the anti-Rightist campaign turned Zhenzhen from a noble wartime patriot into a sordid barrack whore – she moved from being a symbol of "fulsome radiance of greatness" to become a slatternly traitor to the Chinese people and nation. In these new appraisals of Zhenzhen we witness critics explicitly defending the new Party-government through indignant declarations that the leadership would never countenance the use of women as sex-spies. In this view, Ding Ling's depiction of the CCP engaging in such immoral tactics was further evidence of her anti-Party thinking, since she had "obviously" tampered with "reality." The re-inscribing of the political and moral significance of "Xia Village" required considerable creativity on the part of critics and readers alike as they participated in the reaffirmation of the CCP's role as defender of social, sexual and political stability. The recreation of "reality" requires a wilful contradiction of a story's written content – texts become unreliable witnesses of their "real" selves. Fiction authors become purveyors of lies and deception as they are presented as deliberately hiding their "true" thoughts behind the surface of their texts. Readers are directly invited to seek the truth behind the false witnesses provided by texts and their authors, and are led in this process by high profile figures from the establishment who publish their court-room like judgments in prominent official newspapers and journals.

22 These editions include essays as well as short fiction, so "Thoughts on March Eighth" was not excluded on grounds of genre.

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As we will see in detail below, during 1957 and 1958 critics denied or ignored Zhenzhen's intelligence work for the Party, they diminished her expressed hatred of the Japanese troops, and passed blithely over her personal resilience in the face of remarkable hardship. No mention was made of her pride in the impact of her intelligence work in securing the communist guerrilla's victory over "the Japanese devils." To the literary critics unpacking an unreliable text, Zhenzhen was nothing more than a collaborating whore who dared to sully the CCP's name by claiming she was working in intelligence. The CCP emerged as a defender of female chastity and purity of patriotic intent. In the anti-Rightist campaign, "Xia Village" became an anti-Party text and it remained so until the political thaw of 1979 – only from the 1980s onwards did "Xia Village" reappeared in collections of Ding Ling's work.

Ding Ling and Zhenzhen lost support from the highest levels during the campaign. For example, Zhou Yang made a spectacular *volte-face* – he was reportedly moved to tears on first reading the story in 1941,[23] but in 1958 described it as the beautification of a camp-following military prostitute.[24] Similarly, leading PRC cultural and political figure Guo Moruo 郭沫若 claimed that he had not liked the story even when he first read it in the 1940s because it was sympathetic to a young girl who, despite having lost her chastity to the enemy, had the vanity to treat the ordinary villagers as if *they* had no sympathy.[25] In keeping with the usual practice for PRC criticism campaigns, the first volleys were fired from less famous individuals but given top-level support through their appearance in prominent official journals.

In 1957, the key literary quarterly *Wenxue yanjiu* (文学研究, *Literary Research*) published Wang Liaoying 王燎荧's lengthy critique of Ding Ling's wartime stories, including "Xia Village," and in so doing showed explicitly the extent of "active viewing" required to consolidate CCP's position as the upholders of sexual-social order.[26] Wang's article, unlike some later ones, does address Zhenzhen's claim to have worked in intelligence for the Communists but argues that it is a completely unrealistic aspect of the story and was fundamentally flawed in conception. Within his socialist realist frame, Ding Ling is accused of fabricating lies about the real CCP in her work of short fiction. Wang presents readers with two tasks: first, readers are asked to respond to a series of direct questions that demands their indignant expression of faith in the uprightness of the CCP; second, readers are actively encouraged to pass judgment on Ding Ling themselves by being invited into the scenario of "hearing" Ding Ling's defence. There is no place for a detached reader in this critique as all participants in the contextualized socialist realist literary process engage with a sexualized didactic impulse. Wang writes:

23 Yang 2006, 47.
24 Zhou, 1958, 2. Taken from a speech he gave in September 1957 to a meeting of the Writers' Association.
25 Guo 1957, 3.
26 Wang 1957, 93–110. *Literary Research* ceased publication at the end of 1959 and was superseded by *Wenxue pinglun* (*Literary Criticism*).

> Would our revolutionary intelligence teams really "deploy" their own women comrades one after another to the enemy to be degraded? Would such a thing really happen? Had revolutionary intelligence work already slumped to such a stage that they had to do this? If this really was the case, then where were our army scouts and where were the mass-based intelligence networks that were widespread behind enemy lines – every village with its peasant intelligence workers, every centre's intelligence station, and the Party's extensive underground organization, where had they all gone? And… wouldn't the enemy wonder about a barrack prostitute that "runs away" and then "runs back? Wouldn't the enemy's counter intelligence organs have a part to play in this? Would a girl who had once wanted to become a nun in a Catholic Church be capable of recognizing this type of "important work"?[27] Here was a girl that had served as a barrack prostitute and regarded it as "nothing much" and "so-so," would the Organization's leadership really entrust her with this intelligence work? … We don't need to investigate why the author [Ding Ling] wanted to defile our intelligence work, because it is clear that this fraudulence would prevent her from ever presenting a plausible defence.[28]

Readers of this critique are schooled in correct attitudes about the CCP's position on sexual virtue and their congruence with these attitudes is sought through the "self-evident" nature of the answers they are supposed to deliver to Wang. They learn that sexual chastity is a prerequisite for service to the Party and that unchaste women are anathema to the social and political order of New China. Moreover, this principle is projected backwards to include the Party's military forces that fought to create this new state before 1949.

As further evidence of the Party's position as the defender of a stable (sexualized) social order, Wang invites the readers to consider the likelihood that Zhenzhen was an unwilling participant in sexual liaisons with the Japanese soldiers. He reassures readers that the CCP was able to protect the sexual integrity of respectable Chinese women. Wang describes Zhenzhen as one of a very few Chinese women who were forced into institutional sex-work to "comfort" the Japanese. He notes that the Japanese tricked "good girls" from Korea and Japan and other colonies (an oblique reference to Taiwan) into this work, and also that Chinese prostitutes (flower girls, *hua guniang* 花姑娘) were often used for "temporary 'comfort'" (*zuo linshi de 'wei'an'* 作临時的'慰安'). But he reassures readers "I still haven't heard of any Chinese women becoming 'camp following barrack prostitutes'."[29] His first person declaration emphatically denies that there were any Chinese women who had sex with the enemy that should elicit readers' sympathy. Those engaged in sex service with the enemy were either foreigners or Taiwanese, or the unchaste prostitute who had already reneged on her right to sympathy through her immoral acts. In this version of "reality," Zhenzhen must have willingly participated in the sex work because the Party was able to protect "our" good women from such humiliations.

Wang's querying of the likely presence of a good Chinese woman working unwillingly the "comfort stations" works upon an invitation to readers to actively

27 Zhenzhen tried to escape an arranged marriage by becoming a nun and described her work for the Party as "important."

28 Wang 1957, 101.

29 *Ibid*, 99. Wang does not use the term "comfort woman" (*wei'an fu*) for any of the women and instead calls them "camp following barrack prostitutes" (*suiying jinü*).

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ponder the "evidence" of the case. Zhenzhen and Ding Ling are on trial and Wang encourages readers to consider the "facts" and to make a moral judgment about their sexual virtue. He writes: "There is still uncertainty about the extent to which Ding Ling's Zhenzhen hated these beasts. At the start she was indeed forcibly kidnapped and humiliated, but there is no reason to say that after this [initial instance] that she was [again] forcibly kidnapped and humiliated."[30] Wang leads his readers to conclude that Ding Ling and Zhenzhen were insufficiently thorough in their resistance to Japanese humiliation, and, he surmises, life was probably not that hard as a barrack whore – Zhenzhen was probably enjoying herself.

Later in 1957, China's new socialist realist literary critics extended their active participation in text re-creation by developing entire new scenarios surrounding the story. Critics positioned Ding Ling's text as merely one document amidst a far richer corpus of "facts" that could be actively marshalled to enable readers to learn the truth – in this case the truth about the Party's unimpeachable sexual politics. For example, Lu Yaodong 陆耀东's 1957 critique published in the key Party literary journal of the time, *Wenyi bao* (文艺报, *Literary News*), draws no evidence from the story itself for its argument that Zhenzhen is a "barrack whore." Instead the essay provides readers with new background material to assist them in making their judgment on the virtue of this character and her creator. Lu tells readers that Zhenzhen went willingly with the Japanese, she put up no resistance to them, she let the Japanese fascists humiliate her and had relations with lots of Japanese men until she got venereal disease. Ding Ling, in this reading, was lying to readers about Zhenzhen's life and trying to dupe them into having sympathy with this immoral girl. In this single article, Lu demolishes the story's integrity as a published literary work complete in and of itself. He invites readers to make their own conjectures about its veracity and then provides guidance about the preferred ideological position in relation to this deceitful text. Sexual virtue is central to the political lesson. The story is not a reliable witness to itself and it must be "actively read" to unpack its "real" meaning – the meaning that it is attempting to hide from the readers.

Lu summarizes his perspective on Zhenzhen with the declaration that she had "lost her feminine moral integrity" (*sangshi jiecao* 丧失节操). He distinguishes between the "feudal" interpretation of *jiecao* that focused entirely on sexual chastity, and the "new" type of *jiecao*. The new form included patriotic moral duty, had political ramifications and signified a problem of ideological "standpoint."[31] In this 1957 view, sexual chastity was inextricably linked to loyalty to the nation. Zhenzhen was devoid of both her feminine chastity (*zhenjie* 贞节) and a decent person's patriotic moral integrity (*qijie* 气节) that demanded responsibility to her Chinese race/nation (*minzu* 民族) when faced with enemy attack.[32]

30 *Ibid*, 99.
31 Lu 1957, 4.
32 *Ibid*, 4. Li Chi's 1963 comment that "The traditional Chinese attitude towards the woman who has lost

Readers are reminded by Lu that Ding Ling aimed to deceive readers about Zhenzhen's sexual virtue and her loyalty to China and the Chinese people. Without Lu's tutoring, reading "Xia Village" becomes a dangerous act for ordinary folk since it may lead them to unwittingly sympathize with a traitor. He warns that Ding Ling had romanticized a prostitute who was serving in enemy barracks. In creating such a character, Ding Ling exposed her own innate immorality and treachery – the author was writing from her own personal experience. She is accused of attempting to transform Zhenzhen, a woman who was devoid of feminine chastity (*shijie de nüren* 失节的女人), into a hero and in so doing was wilfully seeking to trick readers into following along this immoral path.[33] The first-person narrator, "I," is not safe from Lu's attacks, either. Lu describes "I" as remaining distant from the villagers and only having interest in this immoral woman. He argues that the three individuals: the real Ding Ling, and her two fictional characters, "I" and "Zhenzhen," stand as evidence of each other's guilt. Through the character "I," Ding Ling had revealed her own thinking: "I" and "Zhenzhen" were completely in the same frame (*yiqie shifen hepai* 一切十分合拍). Ding Ling had tried to eulogize both characters in order to explain (*bianjie* 辩解) her own guilt.

The attacks on Ding Ling continued into 1958 with an article by editor of *Wenyi bao*, Zhang Guangnian 张光年, writing under his penname, Hua Fu 华夫. Titled "Critiquing Ding Ling's 'avenging goddess'" (*fuchou de nüshen* 复仇的女神), Hua argues that Zhenzhen, who Ding Ling described as appearing raging like "an avenging goddess," was actually seeking revenge against the villagers rather than against the Japanese.[34] To Hua, Zhenzhen had no hatred for the Japanese, but rather maintained a clear distance between herself and the Party and herself and the villagers. Readers learn the importance of personal pronouns when referring to the CCP and the now-infallible rural masses. In Hua's reading, Zhenzhen's repeated reference to the Party as "them" reflected her (and Ding Ling's own) separateness from, rather than proximity to, the Party.[35] Zhenzhen had betrayed her country, the Party and the ordinary villagers of China.

The CCP, through its literary critics, was consolidating the legitimacy of its rule and its moral standing as guardians of the people. It emerged as the upholder of an ordered, well-defined sexually moral society. The disciplining of Ding Ling and Zhenzhen provided a succinct lesson to readers of literary journals on sexual

footnote continued

her chastity, whether voluntarily or otherwise, has always been contempt or pity, and that attitude has proved, among all the deeply embedded false attitudes, the hardest for the Chinese to discard" appears to be upheld in Lu's attitudes. Li 1963, 150.

33 Lu 1957, 4.

34 The Barlow-Bjorge translation has a typographical error for this term and used "evening goddess" instead of "avenging goddess." Ding Ling 1989, 311.

35 Hua 1958, 22–25.

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virtue, loyalty, and the importance of keeping political boundaries clear in the new China. Zhenzhen was duly transformed into a traitorous enemy prostitute and Ding Ling into a bourgeois reactionary of dubious virtue.

Rehabilitation through National Victimhood

Reclaiming one's sexual virtue after such a thorough and well-orchestrated smear campaign is not a simple task – even for a pliable fictional character like Zhenzhen. Ding Ling, herself, was rehabilitated in 1978 and many of her previously problematic works began to reappear in print. But in the socialist realist practice of "active viewing," the rehabilitation had to be a process of being "engaged" in this transformational exegesis. It was not enough to simply declare "rehabilitation" – readers and viewers had also to participate in it. While the more liberal political atmosphere that prevailed from 1978 onwards permitted a greater diversity of views to appear in print, there was a continued enthusiasm to engage audiences and readers as agents of transformation and actors in the creation of a rehabilitation process. Socialist realist rhetoric had diversified, but the didactic impulse remained. The nature of the rehabilitation process in the case of both Zhenzhen and Ding Ling reveals the continued utility of female chastity in the creation of national morality and the Party's virtue. The participatory rehabilitation process since 1978 evolved to recreate Zhenzhen as a victim of foreign abuse and readers; viewers and critics were drawn into active identification with her victimhood. Zhenzhen, the one-time barrack whore emerged in the late-20th and early-21st centuries as a troubled patriot and as China's first fictional comfort woman who defended her honour with her life. The agency and strategizing inherent in the woman spy was diminished and along with it recognition of the Party's deployment of women's sexuality for espionage. Not only was the Party's position as defender of the correct social-sexual order reasserted, but also China's population was coached to identify themselves as morally pure victims of foreign sexual abuse.[36]

The process of Zhenzhen's transformation reflects the shifting political concerns of the years but throughout we see the didactic impulse played out in its sexualized form. The first signs of her rehabilitation came in the form of a 1981 essay. Liu Jie 刘絜's article moves point by point through the 1957–58 critiques of Zhenzhen's morality, political position and motivations, and discredits each in turn. To Liu, Zhenzhen's story shows how Chinese women rose up and overcame the wartime foe and repressive feudal attitudes to chastity. Readers are directed to understand the earlier critics' erroneous appraisals as evidence of the extreme Leftists' influence and their complete lack of objectivity.[37] Liu then asks readers, "Why do these critics hate Zhenzhen so much?" and answers saying that they "either consciously or unconsciously" revealed their feudal

36 Jing 2006, 2.
37 Liu 1981, 52.

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literati standpoint by using traditional feudal thinking about female chastity to criticize a story from the 1940s.[38] Readers learn that times have changed and attitudes to female sexuality are key markers of that change. Liu continues by directly reassuring readers about this dramatic shift by saying, "At first glance this may seem a bit bizarre, but it actually really is the case." He then comments that while many other literary works had faced the same problem from critics writing in the 1950s, "Xia Village" had been one of the most extreme instances.[39] Readers and critics are reminded of their "serious responsibility to thoroughly eradicate the poisonous influences of feudal thinking and feudal morality." Liu frames his/her article around this individual personal responsibility for the mission and amplifies the urgency of the campaign by reminding readers of the untold misery and suffering of women in the old society as they laboured under the weight of the "three huge mountains" (feudalism, bureaucratic-capitalism, imperialism).[40]

A year later, Yang Guixin 杨桂欣 provided readers with yet another way of understanding the controversy around the story and its evolution to a new didactic purpose, while making comprehensible the attacks of the late 1950s. Yang reminds readers that from the point of view of the villagers, Zhenzhen's morality was problematic. They, quite understandingly, doubted her story: "Would the Party really send a prostitute camp follower of the Japanese invaders in to perform such a sacred and noble task [espionage]? This despicable Zhenzhen is so audacious she dares to profane our glorious, great and correct Party!"[41] But Yang goes on to explain, invoking Mao Zedong in the process, that art should reflect life and should help readers understand how to push history forward through the depiction of all kinds of people. And, during the war, Zhenzhen's tragic experience of been trampled by Japanese troops was not unique. The lesson readers of Yang's article learn is one of collective suffering, and collective suffering with a sex-specific significance: "This was a humiliation for our race-nation (*minzu* 民族) and, even more was a humiliation for the men of China. Even today, when we think about it, it is an extremely sad and shameful matter."[42]

The rehabilitation via the race-nation shame narrative also extends to Ding Ling as author for not depicting Zhenzhen as a chastity martyr (*lienü* 烈女). Yang praises her for instead for creating a "non-chastity martyr" (*bu lienü* 不烈女) – a woman with a new consciousness. In so doing Ding Ling "manifests the lofty sense of revolutionary responsibility of Communist Party members and writers and their extraordinary courage and insight."[43] Yang concludes with a lengthy quote from Lu Xun's 1918 essay "On Chastity" that queried the traditional

38 *Ibid*, 53.
39 *Ibid*, 53.
40 *Ibid*, 55.
41 Yang 1982, 63.
42 *Ibid*, 64. See Louie 2002 for discussion on Chinese men's anxiety about their masculinity on a global stage in the early open-door period.
43 Yang 1982, 65.

morality of forcing women victims of sexual assaults to their deaths. By crafting a vision of backward rural dwellers steeped in traditional ways of thinking about female chastity, Yang is also implying that the critics of the 1950s who called for Zhenzhen's further humiliation were equally "backward." Readers learn instead about the courage and insight of Party's members and their close understanding of the vicissitudes of wartime life that ordinary people endured.

By 1993, the "comfort woman" histories that were gaining recognition around Asia had reached well into literary circles and this feature, in conjunction with the concomitant unleashing of race-nationalism, would irrevocably change the way Zhenzhen was appraised. Zhenzhen's institutionalized sexual abuse stood as a powerful trope for the abuse of every Chinese person. Initially, the discussion of Zhenzhen as a "comfort woman" continued to be a vehicle for training the readers in their collective victimhood – and the helplessness of women in the face of this systematic abuse by the Japanese military. The desperate situation of China's womenfolk signified the weak state of the nation in the 1990s just as it had in the first decades of the 20th century.[44] Moreover, the didactic impulses of socialist realism continued into the liberalized decades of the end of this same century.

Zhang Mu 张目's 1993 article in *Wenyi zhengming* (文艺争鸣, *Literary and Art Debates*) is among the earliest Chinese language critiques to engage with the narrative of Zhenzhen as "comfort woman."[45] Zhang explains that despite the terrible circumstances she found herself in, Zhenzhen maintained a rebellious spirit and bravely sought to repel the devastating impacts of foreign imperialism and feudal morality on her future. Her sexual acts with the Japanese enemy are framed within the notion of a helpless woman trapped by circumstance and there is no mention of her conscious participation in information gathering for the CCP.[46] The readers' attention is drawn to the suffering, the "blood and tears" and the sex – while the spying and strategy is occluded. Sexual abuse becomes a shroud to cover a core aspect of Zhenzhen's agency as described in Ding Ling's story: the willingness to serve as a sex-spy for the Communist forces and their willingness to use her for this purpose. Instead, readers learn of Zhenzhen's personal courage as a woman who overcomes the devastating humiliation of rape. For Zhang, Zhenzhen's fictional struggle to overcome hardship stands as encouragement to readers – she is a model for others to follow.

The Creation of a Modern Day *Lienü*

By the start of the 21st century, literary criticism had become less important as a social engineering tool. Intellectuals were perceived to be less of a threat to the

44 See Larson 1998.

45 Zhang 1993, 39–43. Zhang's essay is also among the first to explicitly describe Zhenzhen as being "raped" (*qiang jian*), rather than euphemistically "humiliated" or "degraded."

46 The first description of Zhenzhen as a "comfort woman" came in a critique by Japanese scholar Midori Nakajima, but the idea was not adopted in China until the early to mid-1990s when public awareness of the history had developed. See Nakajima 1982, 548.

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political *status quo* and literature was less important as a platform for idea dissemination. The story, its author and its protagonist, along with the literary critics that wrote about them, were relieved of the burden to adhere explicitly to the current political concerns. Critics could distance themselves from the story's characters and authors could focus instead on conversations with their peers rather than with political players. An important article that signalled this shift is Liu Zhuanxia 刘传霞's 2004 essay. Liu adopts a self-reflexive position and explains to readers that the appraisal of a piece of literature is always affected by the context in which the critique is written – variations are to be expected as political trends change. Liu's implicit position is that "there is no single correct reading" of a particular text. Her explanation of the 1957–58 critiques is instructive. In these anti-Rightist critiques, Liu tells her readers, the key logic was to link Ding Ling with anti-Party, immoral behaviour. And to achieve this goal Ding Ling, the story's first person narrator and Zhenzhen merged into one form. Ding Ling became the barrack whore and her story was written as an attempt to eulogize her own immorality and hide its anti-CCP nature. Once this link was "proven," Ding Ling and her works were banished.[47]

Liu's article shows the increasing liberalization of the academic scene in the PRC and its integration with international literary critical norms, but it also marks a trend in which academic literary criticism is no longer the prime vehicle for the manifestation of the didactic impulse. Intellectuals are not the key targets of Party discipline in the 21st century – as they were during the anti-Rightist campaign – but this does not mean there is no teaching of other groups through other methods proceeding. Film and television now take prime position.

In 2003 the first mass media version of the story appeared in China and it signalled the most dramatic transformation of Zhenzhen's story.[48] Simply titled *Zhenzhen*, director Qiao Liang 乔梁 opens his film with a credit line declaring that it is based on Ding Ling's "Xia Village." But, the movie bears little resemblance to the original story and Zhenzhen has been "modernized" back to the Qing dynasty with a celebration of female suicide as a signal marker of a woman's determination to prove her chastity. The movie has a greater debt to contemporaneous literature and film that either amplified national victimhood and humiliation through the trope of the raped Chinese woman or promoted the romance of suicide as a personal absolution of shame and noble vengeance. *Zhenzhen* denies Ding Ling's protagonist any agency whatsoever and becomes a celebration of female suicide: Zhenzhen watches a fellow-escapee from the Japanese "comfort stations" drown herself in a well rather than return home to bring shame to her son (who would never find a wife if it was known that his mother had been a "whore" for the Japanese), and Zhenzhen blows herself up in these same barracks when she realizes that there is no hope for her future as a disgraced, unchaste woman. No mention is made of her espionage work, her

47 Liu 2004, 52.
48 *Zhenzhen* 2003.

survival, her determination and service on behalf of the Party. Rather she progresses through the film as a lost soul vulnerable to social prejudices about a "dirty" woman. Ultimately she becomes a classically chaste *lienü* defending her sexual honour in a dramatic suicide.

The changes to the plot are significant, but equally important are the ways that the audience is drawn into an active participatory role in her experiences. Viewers experience Zhenzhen's multiple rapes through repeated flashbacks in which the camera position is that of Zhenzhen's eyes. The audience sees the rapes just as Zhenzhen did when they were occurring, with the camera angled up from the ground as men, one after another, walk through the door and lean over to block the lens as the rape commences. Traumatic and uncontrollable memories invade Zhenzhen's dreams and waking hours, and again the camera positions itself from Zhenzhen's vision point. Whirling and spinning rapidly in blurred images of violence and terror, the audience participates in Zhenzhen's horror. The sounds of her multiple rapes invade her consciousness and provide the soundtrack, so the viewers experience her memories as well. We participate in her fear, madness and terror, rather than in the resilience, strategic determination and optimistic plans of Ding Ling's character.

The first person narrator Party cadre, "I," from Ding Ling's original story has disappeared in Qiao Liang's movie and with it the Party's supervisory eye. Zhenzhen is horribly alone throughout the movie. Her contact with the Party comes only at the very end when she returns to Xia village on an intelligence-gathering mission for the bandits with whom she has sought refuge. Zhenzhen's spying is now undertaken for the bandits who want her to find out if they would be welcome to join the Communists. On arriving at the village she is greeted by the sister-in-law who had previously spurned her, and is welcomed with open arms by women cadres who have heard of her story and longed to meet her. Under the cadres' guidance the village is a friendly and orderly place. The CCP's teacher-ly role is explicitly presented to the viewers. It has established a women's literacy school and a community choir where women learn communist ideology on their path to liberation from feudal values. In Ding Ling's original tale, reunification with the Party was a distant goal and Zhenzhen had to travel far to find their promised medical and educational attention; in this 2003 version, the CCP's school has penetrated the village and the teachers have arrived on the doorstep.

Qiao Liang's dynamic, bright and orderly CCP women's school, with its beautiful young cadres teaching the importance of unity against the Japanese invaders, inspires Zhenzhen and she heads enthusiastically back to the bandit hideout to relate her good news. But, Zhenzhen's tragic life continues as she discovers her bandit friends and her common-law husband, the bandit leader, slaughtered. Rather than return to the safety of Xia village and the promise of new life with the CCP, Zhenzhen resolves to exact a gruesome and suicidal revenge on the Japanese. She returns to her previous "comfort station" and kills herself along with some Japanese soldiers in a massive explosion. The Zhenzhen in

Qiao Liang's 2003 film reassures viewers through her suicide that the PRC's social, sexual, moral, racial and political order is secure more than half a century into its existence.

Since the New Culture movement, Chinese radicals and reformers have pointed to "female chastity" and the "double-standards of chastity" as a key problem for China's modernization. As Sommer has analysed, women's sexual virtue played a role in community honour and the legitimacy of imperial governance during the Qing dynasty, but this phenomenon faced serious challenges during the first decades of the 20th century.[49] Advocates of political reform undermined the longstanding connection between female sexual virtue and political virtue by promoting gender equality in all aspects of family life, law and politics.[50] By advocating equal access for women in politics, wages, inheritance and employment, China's modernizers sought to delink female chastity from its broader ideological roles in public narratives of social stability and government legitimacy.

Despite their efforts, as we can see from the myriad PRC reworkings of Ding Ling's "When I was in Xia Village" over the course of 70 years, female chastity has been integral to the reaffirmation of a sexual/political order that legitimizes CCP rule. The repeated enthusiasm with which critics, readers, film-makers and politicians alike have engaged with a story of sex, spying, chastity and national integrity in the face of foreign invasions underlines the point that female chastity continued to have currency as a marker of good governance and national dignity in the PRC, just as it had in earlier times. This continued utility of discourses about female chastity in political, academic and commercial cultural products alerts us to the resilience of a patriarchal gender order in China's social and political systems.

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49 Sommer 2000.

50 See the conclusion in Edwards 2008.

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