

Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo:  
Feminism as Anti-Colonialism in the  
Collected Works of Zhu Ti

ON 18 SEPTEMBER 1931, Japanese army officers based in North-East China launched an unauthorized invasion of the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning that, within months, brought them under Japanese control. The seizure was given political form on 1 March 1932 by the creation of Manchukuo, which replaced Japan's long-standing informal participation in developing the Manchu homeland with a military regime driven by Japanese dreams of empire. Despite the trappings of statehood and the coronation in March 1934 of the Qing dynasty's last Manchu emperor, Henry Aixin-Gioro Puyi (1908-67), Manchukuo was a Japanese colony. For fourteen years, more than thirty million Chinese lived under a Japanese rule that Yamamuro Shin'ichi characterizes as 'an Auschwitz state or a concentration-camp state, more than just a puppet state'.<sup>1</sup> The regime privileged Japanese and subordinated other ethnic groups – even introducing race-based rationing of rice, wheat flour, sugar, milk products, cooking oil, matches, salt, and cotton cloth – in a manner that exacerbated local contempt for the new regime.<sup>2</sup>

For thirty years after the collapse of Manchukuo in 1945, Chinese- and English-language studies recognized only its economic development while regarding it as a cultural wasteland. Most work on the occupation era silences the Chinese majority by relying on Japanese-language sources and by depicting the Chinese as drones of Japan, puppets, or traitors. It dis-

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<sup>1</sup> Yamamuro Shin'ichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. J. A. Fogel (Philadelphia, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> D. D. Buck, 'Railway City and National Capital: Two Faces of the Modern in Changchun', in *Making the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-50*, ed. J. W. Esherick (Honolulu, 2000), pp. 86-7.

misses the very idea of Chinese culture in Manchukuo and the possibility of work by self-conscious and self-respecting Chinese, and ignores the role of women. Even Ronald Suleski's authoritative bibliography of Manchuria,<sup>1</sup> published as recently as 1994, contains few entries on Chinese culture, and not one on the experience of women.

Sino-Japanese relations in Manchukuo were complex. Rana Mitter, who deconstructs the 'Manchurian myth' that the invasion met spontaneous anti-Japanese resistance, argues that the occupation enabled Chinese political activists, by pinpointing Japan as an imperialist aggressor, to fashion a 'nationalism of necessity' for China.<sup>2</sup> They used the occupation as a trope around which nationalist rhetoric fashioned myths designed to propel the masses, and themselves, towards future prosperity. Similarly, Prasenjit Duara challenges the 'facile clarity' of overtly nationalist interpretations of Manchukuo.<sup>3</sup> Through analysis of the notions of Asianism, citizenship, ideal of womanhood, and of native-place literature, Duara links the regime's claims to legitimacy – its depiction of itself as the epitome of a modern multi-ethnic state, blending the best of the West and the East – with the construction of the 'East Asian modern'.<sup>4</sup>

The East Asian modern was premised upon the adoption of a conservative, Confucian, model of womanhood – 'good wife, wise mother' (*xianqi liangmu*) – that idealized women who put family and state ahead of their personal interests. But contrary to received interpretations of life in Manchukuo, popular culture did not necessarily reflect the regime's official aims. Discourses promoted by the most prolific Chinese women writers questioned the ideal of the good wife, wise mother while kindling debate about both the nature of 'woman' and Japan's cultural agenda. Manchukuo education advanced both progressive and conservative ideals of womanhood by teaching girls to read and write, yet advocating their subordinate status within a patriarchal, colonial structure that dismissed Chinese 'women's writings' as inconsequential. The promotion of women's literacy in conjunction with bureaucratic disdain for women's writing laid the foundation for a long-forgotten Chinese feminist literary canon that bonded women writers in North-East China with their counterparts elsewhere, despite the shifting boundaries that accompanied the spread of Japanese imperial power. In the final years of the occupation, Zhu Ti (b. 1923) rose to prominence in Manchukuo's literary world by 'deliberating

1 R. Suleski, *The Modernization of Manchuria: An Annotated Bibliography* (Hong Kong, 1994).

2 R. Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley, 2000), p. 225.

3 P. Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, 2003), p. 59.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

on how [man and woman living together] can finally be made more equitable, and how to improve its structure', for the betterment of Chinese women's lives under Japanese colonial rule.<sup>1</sup>

Zhu's analysis of contemporary gender relations built upon a considerable legacy in North-East China. Xiao Hong (1911-42), who began to publish in the early 1930s, has been credited with being the 'first person to open up Manchukuo women's literature and arts'.<sup>2</sup> In her writings, Xiao linked the subjugation of women with the dominant ideals of patriarchy and nationalism. She achieved a national profile for her work, which was promoted by China's most prominent writer, Lu Xun (1881-1936); local literary critics even defied the colony's regulations prohibiting praise of Republican China to compare favourably Xiao's writings with those of her Chinese peers Bing Xin (1900-99) and Ding Ling (1904-85).<sup>3</sup> Xiao's departure from Manchukuo in 1934, her public disavowal of the Japanese, and her death during wartime invested her life with a patriotic meaning that influenced the reading of her work. By the early 1940s, she had achieved iconic status as a nationalist writer.

Howard Goldblatt shifted the foundation of Xiao's reputation by stressing the 'highly visible' theme of feminism in her work.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Lydia Liu argues that the dominant nationalist reading of Xiao's work 'seeks to erase her ambivalence about nationalism and her subversion of the male appropriation of the female body'.<sup>5</sup> Liu's dissection of Xiao's novel *Sheng si chang* (The Field of Life and Death) reveals how a work usually treated as a 'national allegory' should be read as criticism of patriarchy and nationalism rather than colonialism.<sup>6</sup> Sha Jincheng adds that 'from start to finish, [Xiao] never forgot to express in her writings the themes of sexual equality and women's liberation'.<sup>7</sup> She is increasingly recognized for pioneering the expression of Chinese feminist discourses in North-East China.

Xiao's work is a prominent example of the 'progressive Chinese feminism' that Tani Barlow links with the international quest 'to put sexual difference and gendered inequality at the center of social theory'.<sup>8</sup> Barlow

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, 'Xu' (Preface), *Ying* (Xinjing, 1945), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Wu Ying, 'Manzhou nixing wenxue de ren yu zuopin', *Qingnian wenhua* (1944), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Wu, 'Manzhou', p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> H. Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung* (Boston, 1976), p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> L. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity: China, 1900-37* (Stanford, 1995), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> L. Liu, 'The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*', in *Body, Subject, and Power*, ed. A. Zito and T. E. Barlow (Chicago, 1994), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Sha Jincheng, 'Xiao Hong yu *Yeshao*', in *Wei Man Wenhua*, ed. Liu Yunzhao (Changchun, 1993), p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> T. E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (London, 2004), p. 14.

argues that early twentieth-century Chinese conceptualizations of gender imbricated with discourses of colonialism and modernity. In Manchukuo, writers such as Xiao strove to articulate their feminist goals as officials claimed to be creating the most modern, Japan-inspired, social order in Asia, while denying its colonial character. ‘New women’, like Xiao, were among the leading symbols, and sources for criticism, of the modernity that officials advocated for Manchukuo society. But the colonial genesis of the anti-patriarchal texts the women writers produced hindered their acceptance following liberation. Owing to what Barlow terms the ‘discontinuous accumulation of feminist enlightenment in China’, the legacies of the region’s progressive women writers were forgotten throughout the Maoist era (1949-76).<sup>1</sup>

Xiao’s departure from Manchukuo triggered a second wave of feminist writings.<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1930s, Chinese-language literary production began to recover from the shock of Japanese invasion and the departure of most of the region’s best-known Chinese writers. By the late 1930s, Manchukuo was the site of a rejuvenated Chinese-language literary world, albeit one closely regulated. From 1935, Mei Niang (b. 1920) and Wu Ying (1915-61), both of whom regarded themselves as Xiao’s intellectual heirs, published anti-patriarchal critiques of life in Manchukuo.<sup>3</sup> They were founding members of a literary faction based in Xinjing (present-day Changchun), the Literary Collective (*Wencong*), a group that encouraged writers to ‘describe the reality’ (*miaoxie zhenshi*) and to ‘expose the reality’ (*baolü zhenshi*) of Manchukuo life.<sup>4</sup> In 1939, the Literary Collective published a selection of Wu’s short fiction, *Liang ji* (Two Extremes), that is consistently ranked as one of Manchukuo’s most important works for its analysis of traditional and modern constructs of womanhood; representative titles of stories include *Nü pantu* (Woman Rebel) and *Xin kundao* (New Female Path).<sup>5</sup> The following year, 1940, the Literary Collective published Mei’s second volume of collected works, *Di’er dai* (The Second Generation), which was lauded by Chinese critics for introducing ‘liberalism’ (*ziyou*

1 Barlow, *Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, p. 1.

2 N. Smith, ‘Disrupting Narratives: Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese Cultural Agenda in Manchuria, 1936-45’, *Modern China*, iii (2004), 295-325.

3 N. Smith, ‘“Only Women Can Change This World into Heaven”: Mei Niang, Male Chauvinist Society, and the Japanese Cultural Agenda in North China, 1939-41’, *Modern Asian Studies*, xl (2006), 81-107; N. Smith, ‘Regulating Chinese Women’s Sexuality during the Japanese Occupation of Manchuria: Between the Lines of Wu Ying’s “Yu” (Lust) and Yang Xu’s *Wo de Riji* (My Diary)’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xiii (2004), 49-70.

4 *Zhongguo lunxianqu wenxue daxi: Shiliao juan*, ed. Qian Liqun (Nanling, Guangxi, 2000), pp. 557-67.

5 Xu Naixiang and Huang Wanhua, *Zhongguo kangzhan shiqi lunxianqu wenxue shi* (Fuzhou, 1995), pp. 284-5.

zhuyi) to Manchukuo's literary world.<sup>1</sup> Mei and Wu are considered among Manchukuo's most accomplished writers of fiction.

In the early 1940s, the careers of Mei and Wu took new directions. From 1940, Wu worked as an editor, first at the official Chinese-language newspaper in Xinjing, *Datong bao* (Great Unity Herald), and then at the Japanese-owned, Chinese-language journal *Xin Manzhou* (New Manchukuo); by the end of 1943, she had stopped writing fiction altogether. In 1940, Mei moved with her husband, Liu Longguang (1920-49), to Japan, where he became editor of the prestigious *Daban Huawen meiri* (Chinese Osaka Daily), which was sold throughout the Japanese empire. In 1942, the couple moved to Beijing, then under Japanese control, where Mei increased her reputation with the publication of a popular anti-patriarchal novella *Yu* (Fish); it was reprinted eight times within six months.<sup>2</sup> In the fall of 1943, Mei's fame was commemorated in the catch-phrase 'Nan Ling, Bei Mei' (The south has Zhang Ailing, the north has Mei Niang).<sup>3</sup> From outside Manchukuo, Mei continued to correspond with colleagues who remained in the colony. In a published letter to Wu, she acknowledges the special difficulties facing women, and their potential to instigate social change: 'women in this society experience a great deal of suffering and pain that men can't imagine ... Only women can change this world into heaven.'<sup>4</sup> Mei and Wu, echoing Xiao, linked women's suffering and pain with the structure of 'male chauvinist society' (*nanquan shehui*).<sup>5</sup> Thus, Zhu Ti embarked on her career as a writer in an environment with an established tradition of feminist literature, but also subject to heavy official censorship; by the time she was becoming known, Mei, Wu, and Xiao had already altered their career paths.

The discourses that dominate Zhu's volume of collected works, *Ying* (Cherry), not only emulate her famed predecessors' condemnation of the subjugation of women in Manchukuo, but also exemplify a long-forgotten Chinese feminist critique of the highly gendered Japanese colonial model of modernity. Published in the final months of Japanese rule in 1945, under the full weight of the colony's literary censorship, *Ying* has the dubious distinction of being the last Chinese-language book of short works of fiction to be published in Manchukuo. *Ying* provides a unique vantage point from which to assess cultural constructs of womanhood and the

<sup>1</sup> Han Hu, 'Di'er dai lun' (Xinjing, 1943; rpt. in *Dongbei xiandai wenxue daxi, 1919-49: Sanwen juan*, ed. Zhang Yumao (Shenyang, 1996), pp. 456-7.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Quan, 'Mei Niang: Ta de lijing he ta de zuopin', in *Mei Niang xiaoshuo sanwen ji*, ed. Zhang Quan (Beijing, 1997), p. 620.

<sup>3</sup> Shangguan Yin, 'Wo suo zhidao de Mei Niang', in Shangguan Yin, *Shu hua* (Changchun, 2001), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Mei Niang, 'Ji Wu Ying shu', *Qingnian wenhua*, i (1943), 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

feminist discourses that linked women writers and their readers in North-East China with their counterparts elsewhere. The analysis of the subordinate status of women in society offers important contemporary reflection on Japanese colonial rule.

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ZHU TI is the most popular pen-name of Zhang Xingjuan, who was born in Beijing on 16 March 1923, in the wake of the May Fourth movement (c.1917-23), which swept across the Chinese cultural landscape, revolutionizing concepts of self and, especially, ideals of womanhood. Social activists, who deployed the subjugation of women as a powerful metaphor for Chinese national weakness, decried Confucian idealization of ‘good wives, wise mothers’ for ‘enchain[ing] women through the requirements of chastity’, which distinguished women from men and deprived them of freedoms activists identified with personhood.<sup>1</sup> ‘New women’ challenged conservative ideals by pursuing careers outside the home and by choosing their own husbands. A lively debate occurred over the nature of ideal womanhood: ‘the description – or rather, the prescription – of the new woman was radically different from that of a filial daughter, good wife, and virtuous mother in the Confucian system.’<sup>2</sup> Japan, which Chinese and Japanese reformers had identified as a model of modernity in the first decade of the twentieth century, was attacked by May Fourth activists as a ‘pernicious influence’ for perpetuating outdated ideals.<sup>3</sup>

Zhu’s life at the epicentre of the May Fourth movement was short-lived, but the movement’s influence on her ideas about women was long-lasting. In 1925, when she was two years old, her merchant father, attracted to North-East China’s booming economy, moved with his wife and three children to Jilin, on the banks of the Songhua river. There, Zhu grew up in a stable, loving household, with parents who encouraged her to join in outdoor activities and to study. As a child, according to her recollections, she was known for her studious and formidable (*lihai*) character, and for her refusal to be bullied by either her elder brother or her younger sister.<sup>4</sup> In 1929, she began her primary school education, which was briefly interrupted by the Japanese invasion in 1931 that forced the closure of most schools until the spring of 1932.

When Japan inaugurated the state of Manchukuo, it began to propagate

<sup>1</sup> V. Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley, 1999), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Wang, *Chinese Enlightenment*, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Ti, interview with author, Shenyang, 14 Feb. 2001.

its political and cultural aspirations in the Confucian concept of *Wangdao* (the Way of the Benevolent Ruler).<sup>1</sup> The avowed *raison d'être* of the Japanese colonial regime, *Wangdao* was promoted as an alternative to the 'imported' ideals of Nationalism and Republicanism, and was aimed at the Republic of China's 'Three People's Principles': nationalism, democracy, and 'people's livelihood'. A 'return to [Confucian] tradition' was to vanquish warlord rule and create a 'golden mean between the Fascism and Bolshevism' that the colonial government portrayed as threatening to overrun Asia.<sup>2</sup> Although the government of Manchukuo failed clearly to articulate a political ideology, its officials bolstered their gendered social and cultural ideals with citations from the classic Confucian text *Li ji* (The Book of Rites). State propaganda expounded in unequivocal terms a conservative model of modernity in which 'men will have their rights and the women their home.'<sup>3</sup> Duara argues that this 'tradition within modernity' model of womanhood was designed to legitimize 'the regime's sovereignty claims'.<sup>4</sup>

As officials trumpeted their ambitions for the colony, education emerged as a lynchpin of the Japanese cultural agenda. Zhu went back into a school system about to change significantly: within the first two years of the occupation, at least one-third of Manchukuo's teachers were cashiered, often to be replaced by teachers from Japan.<sup>5</sup> Japanese texts, meanwhile, supplanted Chinese texts that praised the Republic of China, in an attempt to promote Japanese ideals and to establish Manchukuo's 'independence'. Liberal arts programmes that focused on Chinese history and international literature (thought suited to elites rather than workers) were dismantled to make room for increased primary and vocational education, and young women were prompted to train for work deemed specially suited to them: nursing, secretarial work, and teaching. Zhu chose the last.

Critics of Manchukuo's education system castigated the emphasis on vocational courses, which officials touted as a symbol of their progressive rule, as likely to create a Chinese working class subservient to the Japanese colonial elite; in a novella *Wo he wo de haizimen* (Me and My Children), published in 1945, Zhu denounces education in Manchukuo on the grounds that, 'in today's environment, [young Chinese] have lost all opportunities for advanced studies.'<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the colonial education

1 *An Outline of the Manchoukuo Empire, 1939*, ed. Bureau of Information, Hsinking (Dairen, 1939), pp. 22-4.

2 A. Fulton, *Through Earthquake, Wind, and Fire* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 19.

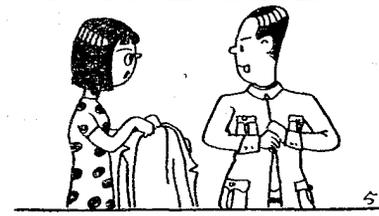
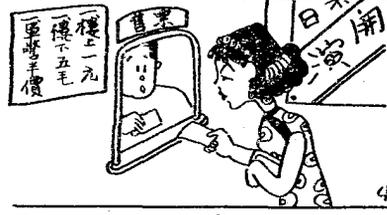
3 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

4 Duara, *Sovereignty*, p. 147.

5 *Dongbei luxian shisunian jiaoyunshi*, ed. Wang Yeping (Changchun, 1989), pp. 23-9.

6 Zhu Ti, *Wo he wo de haizimen*, and Zhu, *Ying*, p. 76.

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'Butong de nüxing' (Different Women): Xin Manzhou, 1940.

system did provide Chinese youth with the tools they needed to articulate their dissatisfaction with what they increasingly perceived to be Manchukuo's regressive social agenda.

Manchukuo's promotion of Japan-inspired conservative ideals of modernity was slowed by the local debate over constructs of womanhood, a process set in motion by the spread of discourses popularized in the May Fourth movement. During the 1920s, new women had become a prominent feature of the north-east's urban culture, but with the establishment of Manchukuo, colonial officials promoted the good wife, wise mother. 'Model' women who personified officially sanctioned ideals were depicted as submissive, hard-working, and, above all, obedient to their families and the state. Those, like new women, who deviated, were ridiculed as lewd, lazy, and selfish. The gulf between these constructs of womanhood is succinctly captured in the cartoon 'Butong de nüxing' (Different Women), which first appeared in 1940 in *Xin Manzhou*.<sup>1</sup>

The new woman depicted in the right-hand column is set against the good wife, wise mother in the left. The new woman is shown applying make-up, playing mah-jong, dancing, going to the theatre, and writing a letter, while the good wife, wise mother is cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and helping her son and husband. Their behaviours are clearly distinguished in the cartoon, which nonetheless allows for multiple interpretations. While colonial officials touted the good wife, wise mother as the model all women should emulate, the pained expression on her face suggests that the illustrator, Xiu Wen, applauded the new woman's lifestyle. The contrast between the two constructs attests to the conflict over gender that permeated Manchukuo society.

Zhu thus grew up in an environment rife with contradictions: she was encouraged to study, but no consensus existed regarding the most profitable use for her education. In 1935, upon completion of primary school, aged 12, Zhu enrolled at Jilin Provincial Women's School, the alma mater of Wu Ying and Mei Niang. Her love for reading, and her predecessors' achievements, prompted her to begin recording her own observations of life; in the preface to *Ying*, she states that writing helped her to overcome her struggle with adolescence.<sup>2</sup> In her second year of middle school, when she was fourteen, she met the boy whom she would marry, Li Zhengzhong (b. 1921), a law student who shared her keen interest in the arts.<sup>3</sup> As his aunt lived in Jilin in the same building as her family, the relationship blossomed during Li's frequent visits. After graduation in 1939, she entered

<sup>1</sup> Xiu Wen, 'Butong de nüxing', *Xin Manzhou*, ii (1940), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, 'Xu', p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu Ti and Li Zhengzhong, interview with author, Victoria, 25 April 2004.

Jilin Provincial Women's Middle Subsidiary Teacher Training School in Xinjing, where she boarded. In 1941, while still attending teacher-training school, Zhu began to publish short articles in Xinjing's daily, state-sponsored newspaper, the *Datong bao*.

In 1942, Zhu graduated and began teaching, at a time of profound change in her personal life. Owing to deepening poverty, exacerbated by inflation and severe shortages of consumer goods arising from the war economy, her parents left Manchukuo for the comparatively freer atmosphere of Japanese-occupied Beijing. To allay her parents' concerns about her staying behind, she and Li announced their engagement; in 1943, after Li graduated, they married. The couple quickly attained a high profile in the literary world: in the next two years, Zhu published her work in a variety of monthly journals including Xinjing's *Xin Chao* (New Tide) and *Xing Ya* (Flourishing Asia), Beijing's *Funü huabao* (Women's Daily), and the Japan-based bi-monthly (until 1944, then monthly) *Daban Huawen meiri*. But they could not live solely on the income from their writing, as few journals paid authors for their work. For as long as she could, Zhu supplemented their income with teaching, while her husband, who worked as a judge in the low-level courts for Chinese subjects, also wrote, edited, and studied calligraphy.<sup>1</sup> Although we cannot know her in-class activities, her published critiques of Manchukuo's cultural agenda, in particular its education system, probably influenced her teaching. In 1944, she gave birth to their first child, a daughter, and resigned her teaching post in order to continue writing and running their household. Despite her criticism of relationships that consigned women to the domestic sphere, Zhu did most of the household chores. Waiting in long queues for ration coupons and necessities, and caring for the baby, took most of her time.

Before Zhu resigned, she had suffered two professional setbacks that illustrate the increasingly oppressive political environment in Manchukuo. In 1944, she wrote two controversial novellas. She submitted the first, *Xiao Yinzi he ta de jiazou* (Little Yinzi and Her Relations), an account of the rape and sale of a young girl, to the journal *Xin Manzhou*, which rejected it. The second, *Ying*, which outlines a woman's futile search for her husband, was accepted by *Xin Chao*, but excised by the censors as being critical of Manchukuo. The fate of the two works illustrates the contradictions typical of life in Manchukuo: Zhu, while employed by the government as a teacher, wrote works that warned their readers of the 'contagious poisons' of contemporary life.<sup>2</sup> Zhu and her husband later argued that Chinese women writers in Manchukuo were empowered by the misogyny of a colonial

<sup>1</sup> Li Zhengzhong, interview with author, Vancouver, 23 Sept. 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, *Haizimen*, p. 80.

regime that, for much of the occupation, dismissed their work as inconsequential: it spared them the close scrutiny that it gave to most male writers.<sup>1</sup> Only in the last years of the occupation were women writers subject to the possibility of investigation. In March 1945, the high point of Zhu's writing career was marked by the publication of her collected works. It is a testament to the low official regard for women's writings that *Ying* was published at all.

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TWO THOUSAND COPIES of *Ying* were published in April 1945. Today, only a handful are known to exist. The work, which contains two poems, nine novellas and short stories, and twelve essays, attests to the perpetuation of May Fourth movement-inspired discourses of women's emancipation throughout Japan's colonial rule in North-East China. Contemporary critics, who lauded the work for 'native-place flavour' (*xiangtu de qiwei*), sited it within an officially favoured genre: the colonial regime promoted native-place flavour to distinguish works written in Manchukuo from works written in the Republic.<sup>2</sup> But in the preface to *Ying*, Zhu notes other influences:

Truthfully, when I wrote these things, besides applying a strong native-place flavour, I also had another little thought. No doubt, readers of this volume will immediately see this kind of thought in the novella *Ying*, where it is more clearly carved on the surface. From start to finish, I feel that it is a huge insult if women must rely on men to provide for them. Naturally, I don't oppose man and woman living together, but I am deliberating on how that lifestyle can finally be made more equitable, and how to improve its structure. Man and woman living together is the singular ever-evolving artery of humankind. However, to be a woman, from start to finish one must have the self-awareness and ambition to be able to live independently, only in this way can one accomplish a woman's true character.<sup>3</sup>

Zhu privileges 'woman' as the focus of her analysis to promote attributes essential to her definition of ideal womanhood: self-awareness, ambition, and independence. Her work critiques inequitable gender constructs that, by subjugating women to men, undermine their ability to achieve 'a woman's true character' (*nüren de benshen*). Zhu states that she 'naturally' does not oppose men and women living together but rather aims to enhance their relationships, to make them more suited to women; literary

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti and Li Keju, '1942 yu 1945 nian Dongbei wenyijie', in *Dongbei luxian shiqi wenxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, ed. Feng Waiqun, Wang Jianzhong, Li Chunyan, and Li Shuquan (Shenyang, 1992), p. 408.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of the uses of native-place writing, see P. Duara, 'The Poetics and Politics of Native Place in Modern China', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, xcix (2000), 13-45.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu, 'Xu', pp. 2-3.

regulations from 1941, at the latest, forbade the portrayal of homosexuality and constrained writers to idealize married life.<sup>1</sup> Zhu thus reiterates elements of May Fourth-inspired discourses of women's emancipation in terms that do not violate a sacred tenet of Manchukuo's cultural agenda: that the young, single woman should strive to become a good wife, wise mother. Her feminist critiques, owing to their construction without direct reference to the Japanese, were made to seem innocuous to colonial officials. But works that decry her generation's subjugation, 'crushed under the wheel and axle of life', constitute precisely the type of subversive literature that censors sought to eradicate.<sup>2</sup> Zhu's work effectively argues that, as long as the Manchukuo regime did not allow its subjects to achieve their 'true character', its claims to modernity were false.

Every work of fiction included in *Ying* interrogates contemporary relationships between men and women. Three stories, *Xiao Yinzi he ta de jiazou* (Little Yinzi and Her Relations), *Yuantian de liuxing* (A Shooting Star in a Faraway Sky), and *Shengming zhi xiyue* (The Joy of Life), reveal the subjugation of single women who entertain men for a living. In each, the female protagonist is traumatized by an experience that compels her to decisive action to alter or end her life. The inspiration for the first, *Xiao Yinzi he ta de jiazou*, which recounts the rape and sale of a young girl, Yinzi, by her adoptive parents, arose from Zhu's own life: in 1942, she lived near the brothels in Xinjing. As a baby, Yinzi is bought by a couple who raise her to attract men for money by singing, until she is raped by her father. Yinzi's mother, after being told of the rape by her brother-in-law (who also lusts after the girl), is indignant over what she characterizes as the violation of her husband and agrees to sell Yinzi.<sup>3</sup> Sold to her uncle, Yinzi soon afterwards commits suicide. Her death ends a short life characterized by oppression; by the men in her life, who lust after her, and by the women whose actions make them complicit in her abuse. Even the narrator, Yinzi's next-door neighbour, a middle-class woman who is moved by Yinzi's plight, does not help her.

Yinzi recounts her victimization to the neighbour, a middle-aged married woman, who is so upset she cannot even bear to listen to Yinzi recount conversations with her prostitute friends. The narrator, who distances herself from the girl she befriends, explains to herself Yinzi's indignities through a line she has heard in a foreign film, 'men's savagery is limitless' (*nanxing de canbao shi wuxian de*).<sup>4</sup> The distance between the

<sup>1</sup> Yu Lei, 'Ziliao', in *Dongbei*, ed. Feng et al., p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, *Haizimen*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu Ti, *Xiao Yinzi he ta de jiazou*, in Zhu, *Ying*; rpt. in *Changye yinghua*, ed. Liang Shanding (Shenyang, 1986), p. 487.

<sup>4</sup> Neither the name nor national origin of the film are provided: Zhu, *Yinzi*, p. 484.

two characters is established at the beginning of the story, when the narrator, while reading a novel, is interrupted by Yinzi's singing. Despite their markedly different lives, both are subjugated. Yinzi is little more than a slave of the couple who bought her, but the narrator is subject to her husband, who forbids her to intervene when Yinzi is beaten because, he argues, families have a right to discipline their daughters. Hearing Yinzi struggle while being raped, the narrator, cowed by her husband, does nothing. By fulfilling her duty as an obedient wife, she is complicit in the rape, the horror of which is articulated by Yinzi's uncle: 'Ai! This can not be blamed on my elder brother! As a matter of fact, sex is normal, but this sex is the most grievous. Ai, to talk about it, Little Yinzi is entirely wrong! No matter what, incest should not happen! This, this concerns the future bloodlines of the nation!'<sup>1</sup>

Yinzi's 'relations' condemn her for a rape that they have instigated through forcing her to entice men and which the uncle claims has serious ramifications for the nation but not, in their eyes, for the young girl. The story ends with the narrator weeping after learning that the parents have replaced Yinzi with a new girl, perpetuating the cycle of abuse. Zhu's depiction of the narrator's indignant, yet passive, response to Yinzi's rape, sale, and suicide suggests her complicity in Yinzi's subjugation. The narrator's obedience to her husband to fulfil the code of the good wife, wise mother seals the girl's fate.

The vulnerability of young women that led to Yinzi's death also informs *Yuantian de liuxing*, which portrays the fictional singer Madan's fatal search for love. The story begins as Madan's lover breaks off their relationship. Heartbroken, she boards a ship and falls ill. Upon recovery, she imagines herself in love with two men: the doctor who saved her life and the captain. Celebrating her recovery by drinking whisky and dancing, the lounge becomes her 'kingdom' (*wangguo*), where she believes the men are her 'subjects and prisoners of war' (*chenxia he fulu*).<sup>2</sup> Seduced by the captain while her inhibitions are lowered by alcohol, she abandons herself to the 'limitless pleasure' of sex with him.<sup>3</sup> She wakes up in the morning to be wracked with guilt, and humiliated by the doctor's lack of interest in her. She reels from one man to another, and to her death, while the men with whom she is involved do not give her a second thought. Madan is a 'shooting star' whose ebullience is extinguished by her transgression of the ideals of womanhood. Her death is the sad culmination of a woman's quest for personal happiness.

<sup>1</sup> Zhu, *Yinzi*, p. 488.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu Ti, *Yuantian de liuxing*, in Zhu, *Ying*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

Although Madan is destroyed by her quest for the sexual freedom allowed to men, the dancing girl in *Shengming zhi xiyue*, Mala, summons the strength to embark on a new life. The story is set in a dance hall on the night that Mala's lover ends their relationship on the grounds that he cannot afford to keep her. Unbeknownst to him, Mala has already resolved to quit dancing and marry him; she could no longer 'accept people spitting on her, and bear others mocking and toying with her.'<sup>1</sup> Her altered perception of her work is reflected in the depiction of the dance hall. At the beginning of the story, it is awash with 'wild embraces, wild twirling, [and] tempting flesh'.<sup>2</sup> But as Mala awakens to her subjugation, the hall's attraction fades to reveal peeling paint on the walls and air stale with smoke. Absorbing the double impact of her decision to quit dancing and her lover's rejection, she proudly stands up before stepping out of the 'ditch of life'.<sup>3</sup> Forsaking her reliance on men transports her to a 'world at such peace, without pain, without fear, without uneasiness'.<sup>4</sup> Her dancing career, which gave her a wage but denied her dignity, proved incompatible with the emancipation that she sought. While she initially sought her emancipation through marriage, through rejection she learned that she could attain it on her own.

These three stories probe the struggles of single women employed in the entertainment business. Zhu portrays the protagonists as sympathetic victims of sexual double standards that affix value to women's bodies but condemn them for perceived violations of the ideal of chastity, which are not applied to men. Here, the men enter and exit relationships as they please: the lovers of Madan and Mala discard them with impunity, while Yinzi, raped by her father, is bartered to her uncle. In their personal and professional lives, the women are treated as the disposable property of unworthy, self-centred men. The novellas critique gender ideals that subjugate women to men who do not appear beholden to any moral standard, and to women whose actions perpetuate the cycles of patriarchal abuse.

Zhu examines the impact of marriage on women's lives in the three stories *Meng yu qingchun* (Dreams and Youth), *Da Heilongjiang de youyu*, and *Ying*, the story previously banned by the censors. In the preface to the book, Zhu suggests that these works form a trilogy through which she develops her critique of contemporary relationships.<sup>5</sup> They are characterized by an increasingly dark depiction of women's lives: in *Meng yu qingchun*, Shaxia suffers depression over what she perceives to be a failed

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, *Shengming zhi xiyue*, in Zhu, *Ying*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, *Shengming*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Zhu, 'Xu', p. 3.

marriage; in *Da Heilongjiang de youyu*, the dying Yana is tormented by her past; in *Ying*, a mother is raped, robbed, and exiled. Despite the challenges facing the female protagonists, each takes decisive action to change her life. Unlike the lovers of the discarded single women, the husbands of these married women seek reconciliation, only to be rejected.

*Meng yu qingchun* opens and concludes with the same scene: a woman, Shaxia, is chased by a man through the doorway of a house.<sup>1</sup> Her husband, Jia, frantic with worry for his wife, tries to stop her from running away. Through flashback, the reader learns that the twenty-four-year-old, green-eyed Shaxia had eloped with Jia six years before. Over the course of their marriage, Shaxia is consumed by depression, as she is buffeted between memories of a happy courtship and an undefined lack of fulfilment in her marriage. In despair, and filled with remorse for abandoning her family to live with a man whom she now believes does not reciprocate her feelings, she bewails a life that has become ‘a kind of threatening, a kind of hateful existence’.<sup>2</sup> Despite her husband’s efforts to appease her by providing her material needs, even buying her a bread-making machine, Shaxia forsakes him, arguing that she has no choice: ‘it is the same as with a family, if the love is lost, how can it be held together?’<sup>3</sup> Shaxia suspects that her feelings are a natural, if unexpected, corollary of marriage, an institution that she avers must be rooted in love, and not in duty, as the ideal of the good wife, wise mother insists. Unable to endure living with a man whom she believes does not love her, she flees in search of the dreams and youth that she fears are passing her by, like the river flowing in front of her house. The story lauds Shaxia for her refusal to overlook the difference between her youthful dreams and the reality of an unfulfilling marriage.

Zhu’s most acclaimed novella, *Da Heilongjiang de youyu*, builds upon several themes of *Meng yu qingchun*: the protagonist is a Caucasian woman, the tubercular Yana, who reflects on her life as she travels up the Black Dragon river with her daughter, Luli, from Manchukuo to her home town in Russia. Her return to Russia is driven by her desire to arrange her daughter’s marriage before her own death, and by the realization that Luli has no future in Manchukuo. On the boat, they chance to encounter Yana’s husband, Mo Tuofu: a flashback reveals that fifteen years earlier, while he was away on business, Yana fell in love with a Chinese man and left her husband to move with her lover to Manchukuo. There, Yana realized that she was pregnant: she and her lover raised Luli, until he died at work. Only on the boat does Luli learn that the lover was not her father.

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, *Meng yu qingchun* and *Ying*, pp. 29, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, *Meng*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

While she struggles with this revelation, the dying Yana obsesses over her past, regretting her 'rash and crude' elopement on a night when the 'river's waters were dark and deep with terror as if dead'.<sup>1</sup> Unwilling to be reconciled with her husband, Yana explains to him that for a woman to live with a man she does not love is the 'biggest insult a woman can give a man' (*niiren gei nanren de jue da de wuru*).<sup>2</sup> At the end of the voyage, she leaves Luli with her husband on Russian soil while, unbeknownst to them, she reboards the boat to leave them forever. As it pulls into the distance, she drops into the river an embroidered handkerchief on which is written a note from Mo Tuofu: 'our love is eternal, our youth will never die.'<sup>3</sup> As Yana gazes into the river, the water flows past, swallowing the handkerchief in its wake and expressing the toll that Manchukuo took on her life.

The natural environment features prominently in *Da Heilongjiang de youyu*. Yana's heartfelt memories of Russia and the 'simple' inhabitants there are contrasted with the 'millions of hectares of cultivated land, with a rich bourgeoisie' that Yana's Chinese lover alleges to exist across the river in Manchukuo.<sup>4</sup> His idealization of life in Manchukuo is shown to be illusory. Yana learns to despise Manchukuo, its political system, the 'cities covered with a layer of opium smoke', its wretched food, and unattainable rice.<sup>5</sup> Even Harbin, with its sizeable Russian population, holds no attraction for her, as the people there treat mother and daughter with disdain. Yana asserts that Manchukuo's only redeeming feature is the stress on chastity among widows, which would enable her to live the rest of her life independently, not out of respect for her husband, but for her own self-fulfilment, an observation that makes a mockery of assertions that women needed marriage in order to survive. Throughout the novella, Yana maintains a love-hate relationship with the Black Dragon river, which stirs memories that incapacitate her. Gazing into the water, she sees her past or hears whispers from it; the sounds of the waves lapping against the side of the boat summon fond memories of Western dances like the Charleston and the song 'Spanish Nights'.<sup>6</sup> She recalls listening in her youth to the peaceful river waters, lulling her into a dreamworld where her whole body was 'bathed with warmth'.<sup>7</sup> The timeless, evocative nature of the river, the green fields and mountains that the travellers pass but cannot enjoy

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, *Da Heilongjiang de youyu*, in *Funiu huabao* (1943); rpt. in *Changye*, ed. Liang, p. 463.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu, *Heilongjiang*, p. 468.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

because of their personal agonies, and Yana's mourning for the past, all foment the melancholy of the Black Dragon river.

Both *Meng yu qingchun* and *Da Heilongjiang de youyu* highlight the rending of family life caused by the female protagonist's mental anguish. In both stories, young women are driven to abandon their established lives *twice*, first rejecting their families for men of their own choosing, and then forsaking their partners. Each woman mourns misbegotten relationships, and memories of youthful happiness are triggered by flowing river waters. The husbands are incapable of maintaining the ties of affection that won them their wives; they are oblivious of the shortcomings of their marriages, which end as their wives embark on new, independent lives.

The trilogy concludes with Zhu's longest novella, which has the same title as the book, *Ying*.<sup>1</sup> It is the most transgressive of Zhu's works, owing to its depiction of the disasters that befall the female protagonist, an unnamed mother, in Manchukuo: her seduction by the physical beauty of Manchukuo is contrasted with the destructive nature of its 'strange' society.<sup>2</sup> The mother leaves her native Shandong with her son in search of her husband, who had left five years earlier to find work in Manchukuo. The narrator notes that even though the mother's 'love for her native soil is not less than others', she cannot face the rest of her life without her husband.<sup>3</sup> But from the moment she arrives at the pier to board a ship for Manchukuo, she is abused by men: 'for the first time in her life, she was measured up by a stranger.'<sup>4</sup> When she tries to buy tickets to cross the Bohai Sea, she is told that women are not allowed to enter Manchukuo without an adult male escort. In her desperation, she hires the ticket-seller's assistant who rapes her en route as the boat becomes her 'prison on the sea' (*haishang de qiuyu*).<sup>5</sup> Her departure from China is marked by her rape; her arrival in Manchukuo by theft. When the boat docks, customs officials seize her remaining silver money while the rapist steals her belongings, leaving her almost penniless. Life in Manchukuo is then marked out by a sequence of rapes and robberies.

Once in Manchukuo, mother and son board a train for an unknown future; their dejected state contrasting with the majesty of the north-east's plains and mountains. The mother fears that her life has reached its nadir: 'perhaps her and the child's predetermined fate has been to starve to death

<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, the first two-thirds were published under the title *Du Bohai*; the middle section has also separately appeared as *Zao*. The final chapter has only recently been relocated and to date remains to be republished.

<sup>2</sup> Zhu Ti, *Du Bohai*; rpt. in *Changye*, ed. Liang, p. 493.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu, *Bohai*, p. 493.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 494.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 497-8.

on this piece of land east of the pass.<sup>1</sup> Penniless and acutely hungry, the mother is sustained by the hope that she will find her husband. At his last-known address, ironically Babao (Fort of Hope), the mother finds temporary work, only to be raped by her Chinese boss. After he is found seriously injured and she is jailed, she refuses to answer the charges against her. In her cell, awaiting sentence, she ‘thinks of the humiliation of Bohai, the mainland’s famine, and savagery and rape’ (*xiangqi le chiru de Bohai, jijin de dalu, he canbao yu yinnüe*).<sup>2</sup> Her misery is explicitly linked with the hardships facing the mainland.

The final chapter of *Ying* depicts the exile of mother and son to a farm, where the mother regains her sense of self. She overcomes her victimization through devotion to the land, building a new life for herself and her son: ‘she is like a completely different person.’<sup>3</sup> The story climaxes with her realization that she can survive on her own, through transformative hard labour, which she argues could reform even the ‘wicked educated class’.<sup>4</sup> A chance encounter with her husband, as he staggers past to his own exile, gives the mother the opportunity to affirm her new-found independence by rejecting his proposal of a reunion for a night. In exile, the mother discovers that the key to self-fulfilment lies in harvesting the fruits of her own labour for herself and her son, not in a self-identification reliant upon her husband.

*Ying* extols rural life, a key theme of Manchukuo propaganda, while repudiating the patriarchal subjugation of women. From the moment the mother prepares to leave the Republic of China, she is subjugated. Rape, robbery, and exile teach her that she has no need to rely for her livelihood on a man. Embarrassed the first time a strange man looks at her, and inert when raped on the Bohai Sea, in Manchukuo she responds to subjugation by nearly killing her rapist. Her survival of the humiliating experiences during the search for her husband raises her awareness of strengths of character she could have claimed in Shandong had she not believed women to be reliant upon their husbands.

The trilogy charts Zhu Ti’s progressively harsh criticism of women’s relationships with men in Manchukuo. Readers are compelled to sympathize with the female protagonists whose sad lives cast critical light not only on the marriages they end but also on contemporary society. Each story notes how the north-east’s majestic environment alternately inspires and incapacitates the women, who share a profound bond with nature that compels them to re-examine their subjugated social status in Manchukuo.

<sup>1</sup> Zhu, *Bohai*, p. 501.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>3</sup> Zhu Ti, *Ying*, in Zhu, *Ying*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu, *Ying*, p. 154.

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WITH THE PUBLICATION of *Ying* in 1945, Zhu reached the pinnacle of her writing career just as Japanese colonial rule in Manchukuo collapsed. The triumph of liberation, however, was marred by the Soviet Union's theft of much of the region's industrial infrastructure, which was dismantled and shipped to Eastern Europe, depriving the north-east of a tangible economic asset that could have mitigated the harsh legacy of Manchukuo. During the political upheaval of 1945 and 1946, Zhu focused on household needs, while her husband edited the monthly journal *Dongbei wenxue* (North-East Literature). In April 1946, the Communists imprisoned Li for his work in Manchukuo as a civil servant and as a writer; the following year, as a condition of his release, he left for Harbin to join the Eighth Route Army. Zhu remained in Changchun, taking care of their daughter, until, in 1948, she enlisted as a soldier in the Communist forces and joined her husband in Harbin as the civil war drew to its climax.

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Zhu and Li returned to teaching to support their growing family: a second daughter was born in 1952 and a son in 1955. Zhu taught in a military unit in Shenyang and in the North-East National Minorities Association. In 1953, she transferred to the Liaoning Provincial Science Materials Company. Through the early 1950s, Li remained with the army, producing educational materials and teaching. In 1955, he began teaching in a factory but, in 1961, was demoted to the factory floor. At the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), he was condemned as an 'anti-revolutionary' and 'traitor to China' for his career in Manchukuo. When Li was expelled from Shenyang in 1969 for 'rehabilitation' in rural Liaoning, Zhu and their three children accompanied him. As she had not been convicted of any crime, she, unlike him, received a wage for her work: it supported the family of five for ten years.<sup>1</sup>

After the Communist Party reversed in 1978 the political verdict that had condemned the 'literature of the enemy occupation' (*lunxian wenxue*), Zhu and Li were allowed, in 1979, to return to Shenyang and resume teaching careers. Both retired in 1983 just as interest in regional literature began to revive, leading to the republication in China of many of their works in anthologies of twentieth-century Chinese literature. In 1986, Zhu's work was featured in a volume of collected short fiction by Manchukuo's women writers, *Changye yinghuo* (Fireflies of the Long Night). Today, Zhu and her husband Li live in Shenyang, where Li is celebrated as one of the north-east's pre-eminent calligraphers. Given the treatment

<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, interview with author, Oxford, 31 Oct. 2004.

dealt to most of her peers in Manchukuo, Zhu did not suffer greatly for her colonial career, perhaps because she had begun to write in the twilight of Japanese rule, two of her works were deemed unpublishable, and none depict Manchukuo favourably.

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ZHU TI'S WRITING career, however short, illustrates the complex nexus of personal ambition, gender debates, and Japanese colonial rule that structured Chinese life in Manchukuo. Eight years old when the occupation began, Zhu was encouraged in the colonial education system to improve her reading and writing, and to aim for a career in writing and teaching; in China during the 1930s and 1940s, these fields constituted progressive opportunities for women. Zhu used the popular medium of politically charged short fiction to deliberate on women's disempowerment by the conservative Manchukuo cultural agenda. The feminist discourses that dominate her work challenge the construct of good wife, wise mother by undermining the premise upon which it was based: that women should treat family and state interests as more important than their own. The interests of Zhu's female protagonists were not served by adherence to men or the Manchukuo state, nor by women who subscribed to the conservative ideals promoted by officialdom. Despite the subjugated state of the female protagonists of Zhu's fiction, each engages in decisive action, by asserting her spiritual or economic independence, by responding with violence to an oppressor, or by committing suicide. Through her writings, Zhu sought to raise awareness of inequitable gender ideals, that she condemned as a defining element of Manchukuo society, by promoting May Fourth movement-inspired discourses of women's emancipation in a Japanese colonial context.

In doing so, Zhu followed the advice of China's leading literary light, Lu Xun, who believed that 'grim realism' in native-place writing had the potential to inspire social and cultural reform.<sup>1</sup> Two of Zhu's works featured such grim reflection on men and Manchukuo society that they were refused publication. In Manchukuo, officials idealized submissive good wives, wise mothers in the hope of inspiring women to produce and reproduce, nurture, and legitimize family and state institutions. Zhu, however, portrays assertive women who emancipate themselves from the inequities of patriarchal society; she explicitly criticizes the hypocrisy of society's sanctions against 'unchaste' women that drive them to their death, while men engage in casual sex with impunity. Lydia Liu demonstrates

<sup>1</sup> Duara, *Sovereignty*, p. 219.

how Xiao Hong manipulates sexuality and violence, in *Sheng si chang*, to subvert nationalist discourses – both Chinese and Japanese – that she believed to be inherently disempowering for women. Zhu similarly employs rape to signify the subjugation of women in the colonial order.

The Japanese do not feature in any of the works collected in *Ying*. They are neither praised nor criticized in Zhu's fiction: they are simply left out. Their absence is remarkable, not only on account of their status in the colony but also because stories such as *Da Heilongjiang de youyu* and *Meng yu qingchun* feature protagonists who are Caucasian, a group whose significance in Manchukuo paled by comparison with the Japanese but who, like the Chinese, held a subordinate place in the colonial order. How should the absence be explained? Throughout the Maoist era, such literature was condemned *pro forma* as evidence of a presumed pro-Japanese stance. Since the 1980s, though, the absence of the Japanese has more often been attributed to the fascist character of Japanese colonial rule; grave punishments were meted out to writers who criticized Japan. Duara asks whether Liang Shanding's novel *Lüse de gu* (The Green Valley), published in 1942, warrants its post-Mao resurrection as an anti-colonialist work given that it is not explicitly critical of the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> What Liang (arguably the most famous Chinese writer resident in Manchukuo) could not have known when he wrote *Lüse de gu*, but Zhu did know, was the price he would pay for his novel: self-exile, the persecution of his family, and the destruction of their home in Xinjing. Zhu's writings must be evaluated in light of Liang's persecution, as she published her major works in the wake of his high-profile flight from Manchukuo. Only by treating Manchukuo as if uninhabited by Japanese did Zhu obtain the freedom to forge Chinese feminist discourses within a Japanese colonial order.

The sudden collapse of the Japanese empire, the civil war in China, and the local population's desire to consign an ambiguous colonial history to the past all empowered narratives that condemned the Chinese in Manchukuo for not resisting Japanese colonial rule with violence. But previous to the Japanese occupation, the north-east, homeland of the Manchus, although inhabited by millions of immigrant Chinese, had only known tentative Chinese rule. The establishment of Chinese socialist dominion in the late 1940s, and the accompanying nationalist fervour, erased Manchukuo's complexities and silenced the anti-patriarchal discourses that had enlivened local culture from the 1930s. In 1945, Zhu celebrated the publication of *Ying* with the poem 'Ziji de geling, ziji de ganqing' (My Song, My Feelings), averring, 'I am only a little river on the cliff of mother earth, I am

<sup>1</sup> Duara, *Sovereignty*, pp. 227-8.

only a little grass among the bushes.<sup>1</sup> Her modesty, which may have been meant to lull the censors into paying little attention to her work, helped to delegitimize the discourses that she sought to popularize, by downplaying the political potential of feminist texts in Manchukuo. Ironically, the Chinese feminist discourses that emerged from within the Japanese colony denigrated a regime that credited women writers with little agency, to be followed by a revolution that, holding high the banner of women's liberation, condemned Manchukuo and its feminist critics as one and the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Ti, 'Ziji de geling, ziji de ganqing', in Zhu, *Ying*, p. 1.