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“A Wretched Idealist”: Tragedy in “Love Must Not Be Forgotten”

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in

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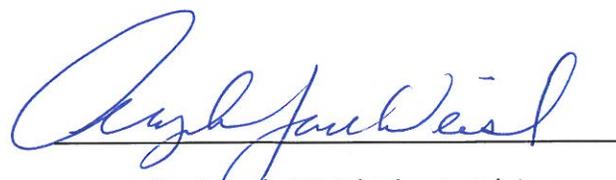
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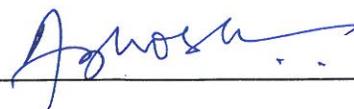
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Angela Weisl', written over a horizontal line.

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Dr. Amrita Ghosh, Third Reader

Abstract

Since its publication in 1979 and the ensuing controversy it evoked about the morality of an extramarital love affair (albeit platonic), Zhang Jie's short story, "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" has continued to captivate readers and literary scholars. While the values of Zhang's story, with its challenges to traditional ethics and its provocation of female consciousness, have been acknowledged by critics and commentators, examination of the aesthetics of the story's tragic effect has thus far remained marginal. "Love" engendered pity and fear in readers, particularly during the time following the Cultural Revolution when the lives of Chinese people were firmly constrained by both established conventions and Communist ideology. It especially resonated with people who were miserable in their loveless marriages as it had provided them with a script of their own stories.

The root of the tragedy in "Love" is multifaceted. While Zhong Yu's unwavering Romantic ideals, the cadre's "*hamartia*" (marrying his wife out of a sense of duty), and the confinement of society's orthodox values all contribute to the tragic affair, chance and destiny also play a pivotal role in the characters' lives. Ultimately, that is the underpinning of their tragedy as fate is more formidable and undefiable than conventional mores. The riddle of how "Love" came to be such a phenomenon and why it provoked such deep emotional reactions be explained by Aristotelian and other Western theories such as Schopenhauer's division of three tragedies and Hegel's concept of tragedy caused by the clash of two justifiable human values. While readers pity the cross-star lovers and fear for their own fate, an analysis of the source of the story's tragic nature can help them understand the deeper meaning of the tragedy: individuals are not in control of their destiny.

“A Wretched Idealist”: Tragedy in “Love Must Not Be Forgotten”

During the post-Mao period, almost no other literary work had engendered as much attention as Zhang Jie’s short story, “Love Must Not Be Forgotten” (hereafter referred to as “Love”). Published in 1979 in the literary journal, *Beijing Literature* (*Beijing wenyi* 北京文艺), the story sparked a vehement debate among literary critics and readers in major newspapers, journals, and magazines. The protracted dispute created a literary phenomenon which made the yet unknown author, Zhang Jie famous.

The debate was centered upon the morality of the extramarital love affair, involving a divorced female writer, Zhong Yu, and a high-ranking cadre, and the loveless marriage between the cadre and his wife. The critics who participated in the debate came from two factions – those who praised the story based from a humanistic point of view, and those who criticized the story based from a conservative and moralistic point of view.

Among Zhang’s supporters, critic Huang Qiuyun was the most representative. He writes, “This story is not the usual love story; what it depicts is the irremediable defects in human emotional lives ... Why had we been carrying so many shackles of morality, juristic, public opinions, and social expectations which so painfully manacled us? Amongst those shackles, how many of them are justifiable and rational? Until when can we arrange our lives according to our personal wish and will?” (H. He 128 my translation). Li Xifan takes an opposite stance and repudiates that the present “morality, juristic, public opinions, and social atmosphere” did not create “shackles” for the protagonists. He criticizes how Zhong Yu indulges in her narrow emotional world instead of transforming her love into a more sublime friendship and comradeship. Li also exhorts literary critics, like Huang Qiuyun to not immerse themselves in

the tragic character's sentiment, and thereby abandon their revolutionary morality (H. He 337-45). Echoing Li, Xiao Lin comments that the story exposes a poor moral quality because it patronizes petty-bourgeois consciousness and beautifies immoral and unhealthy sentiments (H. He 346-51). Dai Qing refutes Xiao's view by claiming that Zhang's investigation of loveless marriages, either from a literary creative viewpoint or sociological standpoint, is a courageous and significant exploration. She remarks that the protagonists' renunciation of their love for the stability of the society is an honorable act (4).

The debate lasted for several years. Along with the rise of feminist studies in China in the 1980s, "Love," following the tradition of the feminist writing of the May Fourth Movement (1915-1921), as the first literary work emphasizing female consciousness in Red China, seized the attention of feminist literary critics. Huang Lin states that "Love" appeared during the ideological emancipation movement (1977-1979) during which Chinese intellectuals appealed for the revival of humanism. She comments that the pursuit and assertion of love as the intrinsic quality of a marriage from the characters of both the mother and daughter signifies the awakening of humanity and female consciousness ("*Nüxing de zijue he juxian*" 女性的自觉和局限 49).

"Love" has also been widely studied in Western countries. Like the debate that took place in China, Western Sino-feminist critics have contradictory views about the story. While many such as Wu Qingyun view the story as a feminist narrative which advocates female autonomy by liberating women from the marriage-bound traditional role, Sylvia Chan proposes the opposite view. Chan notes that the pursuit of true love of the two generations of females in the story is actually their unconscious collaboration with male supremacy, as the cadre holds

double standards by enjoying “the best of both worlds” (95) – sexual love (with his wife) and spiritual love (with the female writer); Zhong Yu willingly accepts his double-standard sexual morality by devoting her love to the cadre.

Chan uses feminist scholar Elaine Showalter’s theory of three phases of feminist literary tradition to conclude that Zhang’s story falls into the first phase, the internalization of the dominant male values. This view has been shared by Amy Tak-yee Lai who discredits Zhong Yu as a liberated woman because she indulges her passion in an illusionary affair. Huang Lin also remarks that although Zhang’s early literary works revolt against the traditional doctrine of femininity, her emphasis on “humanity” and avoidance of “sexuality” demonstrates that her narrative is merely the repetition of the male discourse (*Liangxing duihua: ershi shiji zhongguo nüxing yu wenxue* 两性对话: 二十世纪中国女性与文学 299).

Since the debate, “Love” has been re-examined by literary scholars and students alike. While their studies have contributed to this literary classic of the Post-Mao era, they are generally either from a moralistic and humanistic point of view, as illustrated by the debate, or from a feminist perspective. The views of moralists, humanists, and feminists reflect the cultural politics of the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. While they have captured the contentious essentials of the story, they have overlooked the story’s tragic effect. Unlike the elements of cultural politics, the aesthetics of tragedy can transcend time and cultures. Thus, an analysis of the story through Western theoretical perspectives of tragedy would fill in the gap of the story’s tragic effect and provide readers with insights into the depth and complexity of the story.

Throughout the history of literature, writers have examined the genre of tragedy to express their insights on the human experience. The dean of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun (1881-1936), once remarked that tragedy reveals what is invaluable in life by destroying it (*Fen* 坟 159). Because the love in the story is incomplete and unrequited, it is remarkably haunting. The aim of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the spectators, who by experiencing catharsis of these emotions, would leave the theater feeling purified and uplifted. “Love” engendered pity and fear in readers, particularly during the time following the Cultural Revolution when the lives of Chinese people were firmly constrained by both established conventions and Communist ideology. The riddle of how “Love” came to be such a phenomenon and why it provoked such deep emotional reactions in critics and readers and spurred a spirited debate can be explained by Aristotelian and other Western theories of tragedy.

“Love” is told by the narrator, Zhong Yu’s daughter, Shanshan. The thirty-year old woman ponders her own dilemma of whether she should accept a marriage proposal from a suitor who she finds physically attractive but intellectually insipid. Her search for answers leads her to explore her late mother’s life, and she consequently uncovers Zhong Yu’s love story. For over twenty years, Zhong Yu was passionately in love with a married man who reciprocated her love from a distance. Shanshan’s parents were divorced when she was a young girl; she was raised by Zhong Yu, whom Shanshan loved not only as a mother, but also as her “closest friend” (2). “It is when the sufferings of others are close to us that they excite our pity” (78), Aristotle says in *Rhetoric*. Shanshan’s deep bond with her mother intensifies her feelings of pity for Zhong Yu. In the beginning of the story, Shanshan recalls her late conversation with her dying

mother in which she asks why Zhong Yu never remarried. After giving a short account of her parents' separation, Shanshan goes on saying "I was really sorry that she hadn't remarried. She was such a fascinating character; if she'd married a man she loved, what a happy household ours would surely have been" (4). After her divorce, Zhong Yu remained single. Shanshan feels sad that a remarkable woman like her mother could not have a fulfilled love life. She also feels sorry for herself for missing out on "a happy household" because of her mother's misfortune with love and marriage.

When Shanshan realizes that the entries of Zhong Yu's diary are more than raw material for her writing, she says, "This was no lifeless manuscript I was holding, but an anguished, loving heart. For over twenty years one man had occupied her heart, but he was not for her. She used these diaries as a substitute for him, a means of pouring out her feelings to him, day after day, year after year" (5). After finally piecing together her mother's love affair with the cadre, Shanshan laments, "How wretched Mother must have been, deprived of the man to whom she was devoted!" (8). In these poignant monologues, Shanshan conveys her sorrow for her mother's ill-fated love as if she had experienced it herself.

Shanshan also comes to pity the old cadre. She perceives him as a steadfast man with firm political convictions and extraordinary revolutionary experiences. In her eyes, the old cadre was an unsentimental man who could not easily be swayed by romance: "The cold glint of his flashing eyes reminded me of lightning or swordplay. Only ardent love for a woman really deserving his love could fill cold eyes like those with tenderness" (6). But the resolute and unsentimental cadre falls deeply in love with Zhong Yu. Shanshan is moved by the nature of the cadre's love and says, "Maybe this man, who didn't believe in love, realized by the time his hair

was white that in his heart was something which could be called love” (8). Shanshan continues, “His duty had always been clear to him, even in the most difficult times. But now confronted by this love he became a weakling, quite helpless. At his age it was laughable. Why should life play this trick on him?” (8). Here, by revealing that the unsentimental old cadre is deeply shaken by the love he hopelessly cherishes, the author provokes pity in her readers.

The tragic drama of Zhong Yu and the cadre is replayed as Shanshan reads through Zhong Yu’s diary. As her pity for their ill-omened tale grows, she begins to fear for herself, “Each time I read that diary “Love Must Not Be Forgotten” I cannot hold back my tears. I often weep bitterly, as if I myself experienced their ill-fated love. If not a tragedy it was too laughable. No matter how beautiful or moving I find it, I have no wish to follow suit!” (13). Tragedy and comedy both deal with the extremes of human experience. One person’s misfortune might appear ridiculously laughable unless the observer empathizes with the unfortunate’s adversity, and then it becomes tragedy. A skilled writer can manipulate the reader’s emotions. Some readers were deeply moved by the romance of Zhong Yu and the cadre, while others believed that the love story was absurd. Fully aware of how others might perceive her mother’s love affair, Shanshan wants to avoid both pity and ridicule. Nonetheless, facing her own quandary of whether she should marry her pursuer, Shanshan finds herself in the same situation that confronted her mother thirty years earlier: Zhong Yu married Shanshan’s father, not for love, but for his handsome appearance which resulted in a short-lived marriage. Shanshan fears that she will repeat her mother’s tragic error. Fear, Aristotle says, is aroused “by the misfortune of a man like ourselves” (*Poetics* 23); and “we feel pity when the danger is near ourselves” (*Rhetoric* 78). As in Greek tragedies where the audience identifies with the Aristotelian’s hero, Shanshan

identifies with Zhong Yu. The affinity triggers Shanshan's fear that she will follow her mother's unfortunate path.

Shanhan's emotions evoked by the tragedy establishes a model which guides how the reader feels about the romance of Zhong Yu and the cadre. This is illustrated by the reactions of many literary critics who sympathized with the characters. He Zi pleases, "Read 'Love Must Not Be Forgotten!' Listen to the outcry (*huhuan* 呼唤) from the hearts of the characters" (52 my translation). Sheng Ying says that the love letters Zhong Yu writes to the cadre send quivers through the hearts of readers (H. He 162). Wen Xiaoyu states, "Because there is a noble element in the love story, the pain endured by the protagonists shook us deeply" (H. He 186 my translation). Even many years from now, Zhang's story will still make readers shed tears, Li Guiren predicts. Wu Daiying notes the aesthetic pleasure and emotional purification Zhang's works have on her readers: through the destruction of goodness and nobility, readers undergo an emotional catharsis and spiritual sublimation (H. He 172).

Some Chinese literary critics also recognized the fearful effect in readers. Zhang Xiaodan comments that the piteous reaction toward the missed opportunity of the protagonists would help young readers avoid the same regret years later (H. He 262). Both journalist Sun Wusan and critic Chen Liao reported some readers' response on the story. Sun notes that while Zhang's story "has caused harm for some people," and it "has rescued others" (qtd. in H. He 69 my translation). The statement infers that while the story had broken up some marriages, it had also saved some people from loveless marriages. Chen states that the story prompted an overwhelming reaction in readers – both married and unmarried. He gives an example of a young woman who said, "After reading the story, I completely changed my idea about

marriage. Before I only cared about the number of the material advantages [the other person can offer] except love” (H. He 361 my translation). Chen also reports that he has heard from some older readers who expressed their regret for the way they had handled their marriages (H. He 361). Maurice Valency recounts how Aristotle defines pity as, “a species of anxiety, analogous to fear, aroused by the undeserved misfortune of another, which we may expect shortly to share. In identifying sympathetically with another’s misery, we are really fearing for ourselves” (60). The reports of these readers’ reactions demonstrate that the story had provoked a certain degree of anxiety and fear in them which, in turn, helped them reexamine their motives and make changes in their lives.

Regarding the story’s effect on its readers, Meng Fanhua keenly observes that it was an era of enlightenment during which Zhang recreated the myth that love transcends all. For the millions who had tasted the loveless fruits, “Love” was a “self-rescuing gospel,” because every reader could recognize him or herself in Zhong Yu’s misfortune (10 my translation). However, Meng says that it was the “Last Supper” for those who were unfortunate in love but find no place to voice their pain (10). Fred Alford describes tragedy as a sacrifice on behalf of human suffering allowing the observer to project his or her own pain into the story. Any agony, he suggests, can be withstood when it is convincingly depicted in the character and situation of another who suffers a similar fate (159). As the spectators of Greek tragedies project their own pain into the Aristotelian’s hero, they experience the catharsis which enables them to face their lives again once they leave the theater. Analogously, as Zhang’s readers identify with Zhong Yu, they are also purified and uplifted by the cathartic experience.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle indicates that pity and fear are inspired by three elements, one of which focuses on the suffering of the hero. As an example, Zhong Yu expresses her unceasing pain in her diary:

At the end of every day, I feel as if I've forgotten something important. I may wake with a start from my dreams wondering what has happened. But nothing has happened. Nothing. Then it comes home to me that you are missing! So everything seems lacking, incomplete, and there is nothing to fill up the blank. We are nearing the end of our lives, why should life submit people to such ordeals then unfold before you your lifelong dream? (9)

In discussing Greek drama, Richard Sewall points out that the distinguishing quality of a tragic hero "is in the peculiar nature of his suffering, and in his capacity for suffering and appropriating his suffering" (177). He illustrates this distinctive quality by comparing the tragic hero with the hero in comedy, epic, lyric, and hagiography. While the comic hero defines himself by thinking, the epic hero by conquering, the lyric hero by sensibility, and the religious man by believing, the tragic hero is distinguished by suffering, though he may possess all the qualities of the characters in the other genres.

Another segment of her diary reveals how Zhong Yu's attempt to forget her hopeless love failed, but her strength to endure the suffering prevails:

We agreed to forget each other, but I deceived you. I have never forgotten. I don't think you've forgotten either. We're just deceiving each other, hiding our misery. I haven't deceived you deliberately though; I did my best to carry out our

agreement ... My love is like a tree the roots of which strike deeper year after year –
I have no way to uproot it. (9)

In describing Greek tragedy, Edith Hamilton says that “Tragedy’s one essential is a soul that can feel greatly. Given such a one and any catastrophe may be tragic” (176). Because of the very strength of her passion, Zhong Yu demands readers’ pity.

If the essence of a tragic hero’s nature is his capacity for suffering, what then is the cause of his suffering? In defining the tragic hero, Aristotle claims that he must be a good character. He also specifies that the portrayal of such a character should follow the technique of good portrait-painters who make their portraits distinctively original and yet more ideal than real life (*Poetics* 29). In the story, the heroine Zhong Yu is described as “Though not beautiful, she had the simple charm of an ink landscape” (4). The succinct description of Zhong Yu’s appearance paints a unique portrait of a woman of refined disposition and exceptional intellect. Zhong Yu is an accomplished writer whose enchanted writing style, as her writer friend remarks, would make anyone fall in love with her (4). The tragic hero is not perfectly virtuous, but, Aristotle proposes, “possesses certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought” (*Poetics* 11). Zhong Yu, who calls herself “A wretched idealist” (4), has the unique quality of idealism which – derived from an individualistic and romantic sense – is her motif that distinguishes her from the ordinary, ultimately causes her suffering, and renders her a tragic heroine.

Zhong Yu succinctly characterizes herself as “A wretched idealist.” She tells Shanshan, “Those content with their lot will always be happy, they say, but I shall never enjoy that happiness” (4). As an idealist, she holds herself to high standards. Abashed for her short-lived

marriage to a man she does not love, she confesses to Shanshan, “When I can’t sleep at night, I force myself to sober up by recalling all those stupid blunders I made. Of course it’s so distasteful that I often hide my face in the sheet for shame, as if there were eyes watching me in the dark. But distasteful as it is, I take some pleasure in this form of atonement” (4). Unable to forgive herself, she often punishes herself for “having judged by appearances” (4). The inclination of being tough on herself gives a glimpse of the sorrowful life of “A wretched idealist.” In the same article, critic Huang Qiuyuan expresses his concern for Zhang’s use of the term, “A wretched idealist.” He states that a wretched idealist is a pure individual, but whose life is destined to be tragic in any era (H. He 128).

Nevertheless, once she accepts her “futile choice” (4) of marrying the wrong man, Zhong Yu courageously chooses divorce and lives as a single mother. As she grows older, she learns her true needs. Instead of superficial matters, Zhong Yu has developed her romantic ideals and sought a more spiritual substance in a man. She reveals to Shanshan that unless she worships a man, she cannot love him “even for one day” (7). Not only does she live according to her ideals, she has also passed on her idealism to her daughter. As Shanshan indicates, Zhong Yu has long since taught her about things which are generally not taught to girls. Concerned about Shanshan’s future in her death bed, Zhong Yu blurts out “Shanshan, if you aren’t sure what you want, don’t rush into marriage – better live on your own!” (3). From a Chinese standpoint, this was perverse advice from a mother to a daughter. Zhong Yu’s self-identification as “A wretched idealist” makes Shanshan wonder if she has inherited these same genes that “attracted ill winds” from her mother (4), since she too tends to upset herself over things which have no present impact, and she has troubled herself over the question of whether there is a

“stronger bond” that links a couple together besides “law and morality” (2). Shanshan ponders over what her late mother would say about her uncertainty of marrying her suitor. In the end, the idealism Shanshan inherited from Zhong Yu helps her resolve to remain single until she meets her kindred spirit.

Shortly before her death, Zhong Yu expresses her concern over whether Shanshan could meet the right man in such a big world, a world in which Zhong Yu feels she is lucky since she has met her dreamed man. Idealized, the cadre – note that the author never even gives him a name – is an emblem of spirit and strength that Zhong Yu seeks and admires. Unlike her former husband, the cadre is an older man with rich life experiences. His revolutionary background, especially his underground work experience as a revolutionist turns him into a romanticized European medieval knight in women’s eyes. Although, for the most part, he remains in the background throughout of the story, one of his major appearances taken from Shanshan’s reminiscence paints an ideal portrait of a man of extraordinary character: “Out stepped an elderly man with white hair in a black serge tunic-suit. What a striking shock of white hair? Strict, scrupulous, distinguished, transparently honest –” (7). Not only is he distinguished by his remarkable looks, he is also portrayed as a gentleman. Even though he is a high-ranking bureaucrat equipped with a special car and a chauffeur, he acts graciously. When his driver is reprimanded by a policeman for parking illegally, he apologizes and takes the blame. Notably, he is not the usual clodhopper of the Communist cadre, for he appreciates Zhong Yu’s literary works and shares her love for Chekhov and the oboe. It is his strength of character that wins Zhong Yu’s heart: “That strength came from his firm political convictions, his narrow escapes from death in the revolution, his active brain, his drive at work, his well-cultivated mind” (7). It

is hard to imagine that any man can match such an idealized character! Even the account of how he married his wife adds an aura of glory to his character. In the 1930s, while engaging in underground work for the Community Party in Shanghai, he was shielded by a worker, who as the consequence was killed by the Nationalist government and left his family without means. In order to save the family, he unhesitatingly married the daughter. His act of self-sacrifice out of a sense of duty and gratitude is considered an act of righteousness (*renyi zhijiu* 仁义之举) according to Confucian ethics. The same cause of Zhong Yu's pain also renders him as a saint in her eyes. It is facet of her idealism that she is seeking an idealized man to worship rather than a companion to share her life. This facet leads to her tragedy.

Although confronted by the love for which "he would have given his life" (8), the cadre cannot break his marriage, especially, since he and his wife have lived harmoniously and helped each other through hard times. While the cadre's marriage is firmly protected by law and morality, Zhong Yu is left in a pitiful position of this triangular-relationship. In a certain respect, Zhong Yu's tragedy derives from her complicated personality. She is passionate yet introspective; she longs for individual freedom but adheres to the cultural moral ethics. Although she finds her kindred spirit in the cadre and vice versa, her kind-hearted nature would not allow her to build her happiness upon someone else's pain. R. B. Heilman remarks that the central characteristic of the tragedy lies in the dividedness in its hero who is torn between two moral imperatives each of which is valid in its own way (89). Zhong Yu is the product of both Western Romantic ideals and Chinese traditional ethics. While the former advocates individual freedom over social conventions, passion over reason, and love above all else, the latter stresses family and society over individual happiness, morality and propriety over romantic

sentiment. Torn between these two “imperatives,” Zhong Yu can neither give up her love as many sensible women would do in her situation, nor fight for her happiness, though as an accomplished writer and an independent woman, she possesses more advantages compared to the cadre’s wife. Zhong Yu can only love platonically in her secluded little corner, where she tastes fully the bitter fruit of her unrequited love. Her passion for the cadre bridled by her integrity and altruism places her in an emotional purgatory in which she suffers terribly.

Meng Fanhua notes that Zhang is unlike the notable Romantic authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, George Gordon Byron, and the modern Chinese writers Yu Dafu or Ding Ling (in her early years), for their works promote individual liberation from moral turpitude; they scorn the call of the other world and seek earthly happiness instead. In contrast, Zhang’s heroine serves as a moral model; she sacrifices her happiness for her idealism. Meng points out that although Zhang “realizes her restraints and inhibition, she does not possess the courage to smash the snare” (9 my translation). Therefore, Zhang depicts the love between Zhong Yu and her cadre as platonic, “In spirit they were together day and night, like a devoted married couple. In fact, they spent no more than twenty-four hours together in all” (9) over twenty-year period during which they have never even held their hands. Platonic love is idealistic: while it is pure and sublime, it is only feasible if the individuals involved are emotionally detached. Needless to say, people who are in love want to be with each other, as Zhong Yu carefully calculates the route the cadre takes to work just to catch a glimpse of his head from the rear window of his car, and he, too, tries to get glimpse of her, “straining his eyes to watch the streams of cyclists” (8). However, as much as they long to see each other, when they accidentally run into each other, they are overcome with emotions “each appearing upset” (6).

As the reality is unrequited, Zhong Yu turns to fantasies for her channeled passion and emotions. She “pours out her heart to him, day after day, year after year” in her diary, named “Love Must Not Be Forgotten;” she immerses herself in Chekhov’s melancholy – for over twenty-years, she never misses a day of reading his works from the *Selected Stories of Chekhov*, a gift from her lover, which for her, is authentication of his love. When she is tired of writing, she sits down in front of her bookcase staring intently at the set of Chekhov’s short stories. “Sometimes at dawn” and “sometimes on a moonless, windy evening” (12), she paces along the small asphalt road where she once shared a stroll with the cadre recalling the moment of that he smiled and waved his hands for a good-bye. When coming back from trips, she indulges herself in a moment of imaged happiness in which the cadre is waiting for her on the platform. Zhong Yu’s love is sustained only by fantasies in which can she taste a little sweetness of her love.

Indisputably, Zhong Yu’s tragedy stems from her immutable ideals. While many individuals would retreat from the unattainable and settle for the next best thing, Zhong Yu chooses to be faithful to her love and beloved. Geng Yong remarks that Zhong Yu’s insisting on a love that cannot be materialized is her unconscious revolt against the unrequited reality (H. He 394). Shanshan quotes Tang poet Yuan Zhen’s verse to describe Zhong Yu’s love, “No lake can compare with the ocean, no cloud with those on Mount Wu” (6)¹. Zhong Yu upholds her love until the last minute of her life even after the cadre is persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution, as Shanshan wonders:

¹ Yuan Zhen’s verse in the Chinese text is “*Cengjing canghai nan wei shui, chuque wushan bushi yun* 曾经沧海难为水，除却巫山不是云” (Zhang, *Ta xi de shi dai bohe weier de yan* 008; Tang 959).

I do not know how, on her death bed, Mother could still love so ardently with all her heart. To me it seemed not love but a form of madness, a passion stronger than death. If undying love really exists, she reached its extreme. She obviously died happy, because she had known true love. She had no regrets. (12)

Metaphorically, Meng Fanhua analyzes the character of Zhong Yu as “a solitary flower in love with its own fragrance in her self-developed ‘*tingyuan* 庭院’ [garden or courtyard] of idealism; her elegance also comes from her suffering; the *tingyuan*, however, is still the Chinese courtyard in which high officials, literati, and town people all have lived and experienced the stifling despair, but the only difference distinguishes ‘A wretched idealist’ from the rest is that she casts a breath of elegance” (10 my translation). Meng also notes that the story is a love of utopia, and there is no place in the world that would allow Zhong Yu’s idea of love to grow (10).

Critic Dai Jinhua expresses a more positive view about the story. She notes that Zhang’s works are the last echoes of Romantic ideals; they “are dreams ... and among them, the one that comes with the most elegant and perfect form is ‘Love Must Not Be Forgotten.’ While it is a dream, it is also a belief” (23 my translation). Author Wang Meng was one of first critics to capture the spirit of Zhang’s story. He points out that what the story depicts is human emotions (*ren de gangqing* 人的感情) and human heart (*ren de xinling* 人的心灵). He claims that “the human spirit should gallop freely. True love should be stronger, more sublime, and ideal than the ordinary. A civilized individual should seek and pursue the spiritual state that clearly exists, yet can hardly be fully realized throughout his life; and the meaning of life, after all, is incarnated in the sublimation and breakthrough of such a spirit” (162 my translation).

Wang addressed the cultural issue which heightened the tragic outcome of the story by suggesting that Chinese society, unlike the West, has never regarded romantic love as life's loftiest aspiration. A similar sentiment has been expressed by Chinese novelist Eileen Zhang (1920-1995) who says, "China is a country barren of romantic love" (333). In "Love," Zhang portrays a spiritual longing and a sort of love that reaches a profound depth and intensity. This romantic idealism is incompatible with Chinese culture dominated by the orthodoxy of both Confucianism and Communism. Zhang's heroine is aware of the implication of being an idealist when calling herself "wretched." Nonetheless, idealism is engrained in her soul. Perhaps, for Zhong Yu, it is better to experience ill-fated love that brings her pain and suffering than a life of mediocrity without feelings; perhaps, the latter is a "lightness of being" that, for her, would be intolerable.

While her love cannot be materialized in the real world, Zhong Yu seeks hope in Heaven. Her last words are:

I am a materialist, yet I wish there were a Heaven. For then, I know, I would find you there waiting for me. I am going there to join you, to be together for eternity. We need never be parted again or keep at a distance for fear of spoiling someone else's life. Wait for me, dearest, I am coming – (12)

Near the end of her life, Zhong Yu experiences neither fear for death nor struggle for life. Still her "passion is stronger than death" (12). She takes death as the only means by which her love can be realized. As Zhong Yu embraces her tragic destiny and dies for her dreams, she becomes a martyr of her idealism.

Zhang is known for portraying Chinese intellectuals, many of whom exhibit the analogous characteristics of “A wretched idealist.” In his essay, “Zhang Jie’s Modern Confucian Scholars” (*Zhang Jie bixia de xiandai rusheng* 张洁笔下的现代儒生), Li Tuo gives a great insight into understanding Zhang’s “wretched” intelligentsia from a Confucian cultural perspective. He points out that a major influence on ethics derived from Confucius’ idea of “Restrain the self and return to the rites (*keji fuli* 克己复礼). This is the way to be humane” (*The Analects* 178). Li suggests that the so-called “*keji* 克己” is actually a conscious self-transformation that converts certain social standards into an individual’s inner-morality, a moral cultivation considered as the highest pursuit among Confucian scholars. Li indicates that this moral cultivation was elevated even further by the Neo-Confucian Song philosopher, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) who proposes the idea that in order to preserve the “Principle of Heaven,” human desire must be exterminated (qtd. in Po 182). Li notes that Zhu Xi’s orthodoxy has had detrimental influence on the spiritual development of Chinese intellectuals since Song dynasty (960-1279). This influence is reflected in the struggles of Zhang’s “wretched idealists” who, despite their agony, are unable to break free from Confucian moral restraint, but use the moral cultivation as a way to ease their pain. The impact of moral cultivation on Chinese intellectuals sheds light on why Zhong Yu and the cadre have to relinquish their love; their self-sacrifice comes from the Confucian moral ethics which are an intrinsic part of their makeup.

As Chinese intellectuals were indoctrinated with the notion of moral cultivation, ordinary people were inculcated with social conventions such as the imperative to marry; once married, one should sustain marriage for life. Individuals were obliged to conform these deep-rooted conventions in Chinese society whether it was during the feudal Qing (1644-1912) or the

Communist People's Republic (1949-). The opening statement of the story is from Shanshan, "I am thirty, the same age as our People's Republic. For a republic thirty is still young. But a girl of thirty is virtually on the shelf" (1). The statement reflects her bitter experience living in a Chinese society, where, despite its socialism (allegedly the most "ideologically developed" system on earth), "people still consider marriage the way they did millennia ago, as a means of continuing the race, a form of barter or a business transaction in which love and marriage can be separated" (2). Shanshan laments the social pressure for a woman to marry, "if you choose not to marry, your behavior is considered a direct challenge to these ideas [old-conventions]... In short they will trump up endless vulgar and futile charges to ruin your reputation" (13). Single women are discriminated against: if singlehood is taken as an offense to the social conventions, divorce is a stigma. Although the story gives no direct account of the discrimination Zhong You has encountered, it is not difficult to imagine the hardship she has endured as a divorced woman. Because her heart is full with love, she "had turned a deaf ear to idle talk whether well-meant or malicious," whereas, Shanshan is still rather disturbed by what others have to say about her behind of her back.

In his short story, "The Madman's Diary" (1918), one of the most influential works of the New Cultural Movement (the mid-1910s and 1920s), Lun Xun criticizes the repressive nature of Confucian teaching and points out that the Chinese feudal history over the past four thousand years was a history of cannibalism (10). The long history of Chinese feudal culture was marked by innumerable tragic lives who were consumed by the confining doctrine of Confucianism. He Manzi remarks that Zhong Yu's wretched love is an indirect expression of the abysmal suffering that Chinese people endured from the previous eras (H. He 388).

Modern and contemporary critics tend to point out society's contribution to the tragedies of individuals, whereas Aristotle emphasizes the role of human frailty and destiny. The cause of a hero's misfortune, according to his *Poetics*, is *hamartia*, which is as an error. The Greek word used by Aristotle was associated with archery and referred to an errant shot which missed the mark. D. W. Lucas interprets *hamartia* as a mistake based upon the ignorance of essential knowledge despite its well-meant intent (302). For instance, in Sophocles' *Oedipus, The King*, Oedipus commits fatal sins by killing his father and marrying his mother without knowing his own identity. In "Love," the *hamartia* is not found in Zhong Yu, though she blames herself for starting "off blindly" and taking "the wrong turning" (9), she corrects her mistake by divorcing. The *hamartia* actually lies in the character of the cadre, for he erroneously marries out of a sense of duty – a way to pay his debt to his dead revolutionary comrade. His Confucian ethics and revolutionary zeal cloud his judgment before he came to understand the meaning of love in a marriage. Unfortunately, it is when "he no longer had the right to love, he made a tragic discovery of this love for which he would have given his life" (8). His misfortune begins the moment he marries his wife because this commitment for him is irrevocable. Even though it was a common practice after the Communist victory for Communist cadres to abandon their country wives and marry educated young women from the cities, Zhong Yu's cadre is not one of them. If his noble character compels him to marry the hopeless worker's daughter (his wife), the same character will not allow him to desert her for another woman. Gratitude and morality can only abide honorable individuals.

"Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids" (*Poetics* 13), Aristotle says. He also suggests that in order to produce a tragic

effect, the poet must satisfy moral sense (*Poetic* 36). Imagine if Zhong Yu does not demonstrate self-restraint and let her passion take over her actions; if the cadre abandons his wife and runs off with Zhong Yu, would the story have touched so many readers? Would it have provoked such sympathy and response? As William McCollom notes, “The moral order recognized by the hero is substantially that recognized by the audience. Where there is no approach to uniformity of ethical standards, tragedy cannot flourish” (29). Critics Tang Xiaodu and Wang Guangming comment that whereas the belief in patriarchal dependence remains strong in the society, the cadre’s marriage to his wife has some rationality, and certainly, the way the cadre is constrained by traditional ethics embodies a tragic element; it is a complex state of the contradiction. They point out that while the two characters bury the pain in their hearts and maintain a great deal of self-restraint in their actions, it demonstrates that the author has certain respect for the predicament which, in turn, has intensified the tragic effect of the story (H. He 287).

The love affair between Zhong Yu and the cadre and the marriage between the cadre and his wife are two different forms of relationships. The former embodies Western idea of love and the latter represents the Chinese idea of *qing* 情. Chan-Fai Cheung compares the two concepts and notes that the notion of love in the Western tradition, originating with the courtly love in the twelfth-century and magnified in the Romantic period in the nineteenth-century, is characterized by passion, struggle, and transgression, with obstacles and conflicts serving as a fuel for the undying passion (479). Cheng recounts the traditional Chinese concept of *qing* by citing *A Brief Classification of Stories about Qing* (*Qingshi leilue* 情史类略) by Feng Menglong (1574-1646), a late Ming literary author. Feng spoke of *qing* as a cosmic order or a thread that

holds all relationships together; while *qing* binds two lovers for eternity, it also connects sons to their fathers and ministers to their emperors (qtd. in Cheng 477).

Zhong Yu's love for the cadre is romantic in nature exemplified by her passion, yearning, and suffering. Like Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, her passion, though bridled, only intensifies as it clashes with the unrequited reality, and in the end it survives not only suffering, but also death. Although there is no romantic affinity in the relationship of the cadre and his wife, *qing* still surfaces in their marriage. He marries her not only out of a sense of duty and gratitude, but also out of "deep class feeling" (*jieji qingyi* 阶级感情). Initially, this *qing* is derived from the fact that they are both from the same revolutionary camp. The *qing* further develops during the course of their marriage, in which they have stood by each other through tough times. That aspect of *qing* is in accordance with the Chinese tradition as defined by Feng. However, the *qing* that is the basis of the marriage of the cadre and his wife is at odds with Zhong Yu's romantic passion for the cadre. Tragedy stems from the clash of two human values, G. W. F. Hegel claims, both of which are justifiable in their own way, though the individuals who clung to their values are either destroyed or forced to renounce their beliefs in order to restore harmony (179-80). As the two values – Western love and Chinese *qing* – cannot coexist in the stringently rule-bound Chinese society, so Zhong Yu and the cadre choose to relinquish their happiness. In so doing, they render themselves as the true heroine and hero of the tragedy. Conversely, selfish individuals who only care about their own happiness can never be tragic heroes even if their situation turns tragic.

Zhang has clarified her stance on loveless marriages. She says that "Love" is her reflection on Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in a literary form

(H. He 70). In his book, Engels ratifies the significance of love in a marriage when he proclaims that “only the marriage based on love is moral,” and so is “the marriage in which love continues” (73). With Engels as her theoretical support – this is especially crucial since the entire ideology of the Communist China is built upon the theories of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao – Zhang is able to assert her position against the social conformity that has forced millions into loveless marriages. Zhang’s assertion is reflected in Zhong Yu’s and Shanshan’s courageous battle against the patriarchal confinement of female individuality.

However, Meng Fanhua seems to hold a pessimistic view about the life and standard that the mother and the daughter of “Love” have chosen. He states, “With her misfortune, Zhong Yu gains desolate beauty on the cross of love ... Zhong Yu and Shanshan firmly entrench in their philosophy of love and have conquered what they believe as vulgar marriage, but, in so doing, they might have also gambled their lives away” (9 my translation). Singlehood is not the perfect resolution in life as human beings are programmed to gravitate toward love. For many individuals, singlehood is the result of life presenting them with no alternative, just as Zhong Yu tells Shanshan that she had no choice. The existence of human life offers such a struggle: while love gives a significant meaning to life, it is difficult to obtain, even when one finds it, she might have to bury it in her heart if she finds it either too early or too late. In regard to relationships, timing is essential, but timing, like chance, fate or destiny is, by in large, not within the grasp of human hands.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer divides tragedies into three types: those caused by the evil deeds of exceptionally wicked characters such as in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*; those derived from the blind fate – chance and error – such as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*;

and those brought about not by evildoers or blind fate but by characters of ordinary morality whose positions compel them to do each other harm even when they are not solely responsible. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a perfect example of Schopenhauer's third type of tragedy which he believes is the most powerful since it results from the actions of ordinary individuals (Shapshay 10-11). Inspired by Schopenhauer's theory of tragedies, early twentieth-century Chinese scholar, Wang Guowei, points out in his "Critical Essay on *Dream of the Red Chamber*" (*Honglou meng pinglun* 红楼梦评论), the first literary criticism applying a Western theory of aesthetics to Chinese literature, that *Dream of the Red Chamber* is "the most tragic of all tragedies" (215-16 my translation). Wang argues that the tragedies depicted in the novel fall into Schopenhauer's third type of tragedy as they are caused not by evil characters or blind fate, but by the positions and complex relationships among the characters. Like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the tragic love story of Zhong Yu and the cadre is not a result of evil deeds of malicious characters (even the cadre's wife, who is in the position to tear the lovers apart remains voiceless in the background of the story); nor does it exclusively fall into either the second or the third type of Schopenhauer's tragedy. It exhibits the characteristics of both types. The tragic love story between the protagonists, Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as Wang Guowei indicates, is caused by "ordinary moral dictates, ordinary human inclinations, and ordinary circumstances" (215 my translation). Similarly, the tragic love affair of Zhong Yu and the cadre is the consequence of common moral principles, the dispositions of the characters, and their circumstances.

Although "Love" is a short story with a few characters and simple plot, the root of the tragedy is rather multifaceted. While cultural environment constrains the characters from

embracing their love, the personal elements also played a role in creating the tragedy such as Zhong Yu's insistence on an unattainable love and the cadre's irreversible mistake of marrying his wife. In addition to the cultural and personal causes, there is the role of chance at work simply because Zhong Yu and the cadre did not meet each other when they were both available. Destiny is alluded to in Schopenhauer's second type of tragedy. Meng Fanhua sums up Zhong Yu's misfortune as "What she had [her marriage] was not love; what she loves she cannot have" (9 my translation).

"I regret that we did not meet before I was unwed" (*Hen bu xiangfeng wei jia shi* 恨不相逢未嫁时) (Tang 758 my translation) is a line from Tang poet, Zhang Ji's poem, "The Chant of A Chaste Woman" (*Jie fu yin* 节妇吟). The poem tells a story of a married woman who declines the love expressed by a man. This line has been used by Chinese people to express their regret and helplessness when meeting someone they truly cared for after they had already married someone else. Geng Yong comments that the tragic love story of Zhong Yu and the cadre is the modern form of old Chinese love stories (H. He 393). What makes this kind of situation tragic is that Chinese culture does not bear Western beliefs that once love fades, it is better for the couple to part as shown in Engels' book.

In the story, Shanshan attributes the cause of the tragedy of Zhong Yu and the cadre to the fact that they did not wait for their "missing counterpart" (13). This fault claimed by Shanshan largely lies in the cadre's *hamartia* which implies that he did not wait for the love to call upon him. Again, *hamartia* is an error of judgment based on inadequate knowledge of particular circumstances (Braam 269). When the cadre makes a commitment to marry his wife, he does not understand what love or a "counterpart" means, nor does he foresee that decades

down the road, he would encounter a “love for which he would have given up his life” (8). Realistically, it is unlikely that he would have waited for his “missing counterpart.” If the cadre did not marry his wife, the chances are he would have married someone else. It is part of human frailty that very few people can endure the loneliness waiting for someone that might never appear.

To a large extent, human lives are at mercy of chance since human beings are inadequate to deal with the cosmic order and the role played by fate. The best interpretation of Aristotle’s *hamartia* thus far is by P. van Braam and D. W. Lucas. Braam defines *hamartia* as “the insufficiency of the human mind to cope with the mysterious complex of the world” (271), and Lucas describes it as “the blindness which is part of the human condition” (307). “The tragic effect,” Maurice Valency says, “in his [Aristotle’s] opinion is not designed to satisfy our sense of the rightness of things, but to arouse our sense of the perilous nature of the human situation” (75). In the end of the story, to assert her position, Zhang invokes a message through Shanshan’s voice, “Let us wait patiently for our counterparts. Even waiting in vain is better than loveless marriage. To live single is not such a fearful disaster. I believe it may be a sign of step forward in culture, education and the quality of life” (13). Zhang, however, also realizes the tragic nature of human condition as evidenced when she has Shanshan quote Thomas Hardy’s line implying that kindred spirits seldom find each other. The quotation is from Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Hardy’s passage takes place when his heroine, Tess first encounters the libertine Alec Urbervilles who is about to rob her innocence and set her on the path of ruin:

In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things, the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving ... We

may wonder whether at the acme and summit of the human progress these anachronisms will be corrected by a finer intuition, a closer interaction of the social machinery than that which now jolts us round and along; but such completeness is not to be prophesied or even conceived as possible. Enough that in the present case, as in millions, it was not the two halves of perfect whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies. (31)

Although Zhang does not quote the entire passage, she must be familiar with the text since she quotes the most important line in her story, “the call seldom produces the comer, the man to love rarely coincides with the hour for loving” (13). Zhang is fully aware of that if one insists on waiting for one’s counterpart, he or she might likely have to face the unendurable condition described by Hardy. The desolation of one human being waiting for his or her counterpart in vain is almost impossible to bear. This despair of the human condition as portrayed by Hardy is more formidable and undefiable than the conventional mores that confine Zhong Yu and the cadre, and it is the underpinning of their tragic tale. Perhaps later on, Zhang is more affected by the role that fate played in life,² perhaps her own experience of misfortune³ has thwarted her

² In an interview, Zhang Jie says, “When I was young, I thought that many things could be changed through self-striving. But as I got older, I finally realized that fate is not within the grasped of our own hands” (Gan my translation).

³ Zhang Jie was born in 1937, the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). She was brought up by her mother alone as her father abandoned his family three months after her birth. Under the harsh wartime conditions and abject poverty, the mother and daughter forged an unbreakable bond which later became a source of strength in Zhang’s life. Zhang’s mother passed away in 1990, and her second marriage to the former vice minister of the First Ministry of Machine Industry, a love affair which was prototype of her short story, ended in divorce in 1995. These two unfortunate events have deeply changed Zhang’s view about life and love.

Romantic zest; in a later collection of her stories published in 2011,⁴ Zhang excised Shanshan's closing appeal for people to wait for their kindred spirits.

Life is full of affliction. In the very beginning of his essay, Wang Guowei points out this human condition by quoting Lao Zi's saying that humans are subject to misfortune because they have desire (*Ren zhi dahuan zaiyu you shen* 人之大患在于有身). All human desire, as Schopenhauer states, "springs from need, and thus from lack, and thus from suffering," and the ultimate approach to extricate oneself from suffering is through the complete negation of the will (*The World as Will and Representation* 219). Human suffering comes in various forms; however, the gravest, Wang believes, is derived from unsatisfied love between a man and a woman. He indicates that the true value of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is not only that it depicts life's suffering, it also provides a state of great enlightenment and deliverance from suffering. He views the departure of novel's hero, Jia Baoyu from the secular world as liberation from human affliction (211).

In his book, *Reflection on Dream of the Red Chamber*, Liu Zaifu comments that all tragedies encompass the despair of feelings which stem from human relationships (149). In "Love," Zhong Yu's impassioned and anguished emotions emerge as the soul of this tragic story. This parallels how Aristotle characterized Pathetic tragedy in which emotions and passion drive the play (*Poetics* 34). Like the female characters of Lin Daiyu, Qing Keqing, Skybright, and Faithful in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Zhong Yu's life is also entangled in the web of human relationships and ends tragically. Unable to defy the social constraints, the author can only sustain hope for her protagonists in Heaven:

⁴ *Ta xi de shi dai bohe wei er de yan* 她吸的是带薄荷味儿的烟 [*She Smokes Cigarette with a Tinge of Mint*]

Now these old people's ashes have mingled with the elements. But I know that no matter what form they may take, they still love each other. Though not bound together by earthly laws or morality, though they never once clasped hands, each possessed the other completely. Nothing could part them. Centuries to come, if one white cloud trails another, two grasses grown side by side, one wave splashes another, a breeze follows another ... believe me that will be them. (12)

Although the passage provides a fairly bright tail to the story, and its poetic expression of two souls following one another is the author's grand gesture of Romanticism, it is utopian. While this ending may please its readers, Zhang does not offer her heroine a way to extricate herself from suffering.

Liu Zaifu comments that *Dream of the Red Chamber* reflects the philosophical thoughts of Buddhism and Daoism. Buddhism stresses that life is suffering which results from the attachment of desire (this is akin to Schopenhauer's idea of suffering though Schopenhauer was influenced by Buddhism). Daoism, on the other hand, accentuates *wuwei* 无为. The idea of *wuwei* actually involves the absence of strife and coercive action that interferes with the principle of the nature. Zhang's early point of view about love is influenced by Romanticism from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western Literature, which glorifies love and treats it as the "highest expression of spiritual longings" (Quinn). "Love" resonates with the Romantic philosophy and reflects Zhang's Romantic idealism. However, entering the 1990s, Zhang's idealistic stance began to change. One can observe her philosophical transformation toward Daoism in her late works. In her recent novel, *Zhi zai* 知在 (2005) and *Linghun shi yong lai liulang de* 灵魂是用来流浪的 (2009), Zhang searches to understand human existence; she exudes a sense

of uncertainty and perplexity and acceptance of fate and incompleteness. In these two novels – unlike Zhong Yu who gives her life to passion and Romantic ideals – the characters convey a sense of detachment from desire to free themselves from human affliction. Interestingly, Zhang has arrived at the same resolution identified by Schopenhauer and Wang Guowei for her characters three decades after the debut of “Love.”

The publication of Zhang’s short story in 1979 was a seminal event in Post-Cultural Revolution Chinese literature. While most writers of this genre focused on the pain inflicted by the political turmoil, often called “scar literature,” Zhang broadened the debate on suffering to include the spiritual anguish of loveless marriages. The story’s message, love cannot be forgotten, awakened millions who had been oppressed by the social constraint that prevented them from following their hearts and finding meaningful relationships. It especially resonated with people who were miserable in their loveless marriages as “Love” had provided the readers with a script of their own stories.

The characters live in a tragic cultural environment where individuals’ desire and happiness are overruled by social conformity. Zhong Yu’s wretched love affair arises from the clash of her Romantic ideals and Confucian ethics. The notion of Western Romantic love and the Chinese traditional values such as one’s duty and the idea of *qing* come into conflict, though each is justifiable in its own respect. In the end, individual desire and yearnings for love have to be sacrificed. As Zhong Yu and the cadre relinquish their love for the sake of Confucian obligations of duty and morality, they condemn themselves to their eternal tragic lot.

A good literary work can be read and understood from various theoretical and philosophical perspectives. Although the values of Zhang’s story with its challenges to

traditional ethics and awakening of the female consciousness have been acknowledged by literary critics, examination of its tragic effect has been marginal. While the controversy over its morality and feminist perspective made the story a classic of the Post-Mao era, the suffering of the protagonists in their emotional purgatory has rendered the story unforgettable. Thus, an analysis of the story's tragic effect enriches the conversation of this literary classic, helps decode the riddle of why this story became such a literary phenomenon, and provides readers with insights into the depth and complexity of the story. While readers pity the cross-star lovers and fear for their own fate, this analysis can assist them to understand the deeper meaning of the tragedy: individuals are not in control of their destiny.

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