

# China's Literary Cosmopolitans

*Qian Zhongshu, Yang Jiang, and the World of Letters*

*Edited by*

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## The Institutional Mindset: Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang on Marriage and the Academy

*Christopher Rea*

A lecturer is like a maid, a professor is like a wife, and as for an associate professor, he's no more than a concubine. . . . For a maid to become a concubine is quite common . . . but for a concubine to gain legitimate status as a wife goes against all moral principles and obligations. It just can't be done.

—QIAN ZHONGSHU, *Fortress Besieged*<sup>1</sup>

If, for most of us, marriage is supposed to be a “fortress besieged”—a battle of conflicting impulses to conquer and to flee—the same is rarely said of Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, whose marriage lasted sixty-three years, from 1935 until Qian's death in 1998. Since then, Yang has actively managed Qian's literary estate and continued to write about their life together, and, to a lesser extent, with their daughter Qian Yuan, who died in 1997. Qian Zhongshu mostly let his writings speak for themselves; Yang Jiang, in contrast, has made extensive efforts to place her and her husband's within a context different from solo creative and academic labor: quotidian family life. Yang's story of her marriage with Qian is of a harmonious, affectionate, and even romantic intellectual partnership. Her biographical and autobiographical writings could be said to have retroactively domesticated the famous couple, making their private life public, and in doing so dramatically re-shaping public appreciation of them and their works.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Qian, *Fortress Besieged*, 267. Page numbers for subsequent quotations appear in-text. A similar comment appears earlier in the narrative. When Fang Hongjian and his companions reach Sanlü University, they discover that chairmanship of the Department of Chinese Literature, which had been promised to Li Meiting, has been snatched away by an earlier arrival. The narrator comments: “Being a department chairman is just like getting married: ‘The one installed three days earlier becomes the wife.’ The [welcoming] party for Li turned out to be more like the new concubine's First Meeting ceremony than a reception” (196).
  - 2 For a genealogy of women's autobiographical writing and the problematic of gendered subjectivity in twentieth-century China's literary field see especially Wendy Larson's *Women and Writing in Modern China*, Jing Wang's *When “I” Was Born*, Lingzhen Wang's *Personal Matters*,

Marriage and the academy loom large in Qian's and Yang's writings as intertwined institutions. The academy, in a general sense, refers to the workspace of the intellectual, the place of scholarship, research, and teaching. In physical terms, it comprises such socially-acknowledged sources and seats of learning as schools, universities, research institutes, libraries, and archives. But the academy is also an institution in that, like marriage, it operates according to conventions, habits, and expected patterns of behavior. As an institution, each represents both a set of material realities and a theoretical or imaginary construct.

In this chapter I analyze Yang and Qian as a pair, rather than as individual creative forces or auteurs. Biographers have, inevitably, written of the pair as being “inseparable.”<sup>3</sup> Critics have also noted similarities between their works, not least the humorous and satirical skepticism with which they appraise their fellow human beings—intellectuals in particular. Below, I examine how the style and themes of their writings bears upon their claims—both implicit and explicit—of literary values. I identify and analyze a quality endemic to their works that I call an “institutional mindset.” Qian and Yang were both interested in, even obsessed with, how being a member of a marriage or an academic organization impacts the individual. They also wrote much about the *idea* of marriage and the academy as objects of desire, fear, admiration, and loathing; and as institutions of refuge and entrapment. They share a fascination with the problems of these institutions as constructs of human society. This, I argue, represents one way that these two writers avoided falling prey to the “obsession with China” that ensnared so many of their peers.<sup>4</sup> The domesticated intellectual, who struggles with and sometimes succumbs to the twin pressures of these institutions, I further argue, is emblematic of their vision of cosmopolitanism and its limits.

Marriage and the academy are both institutions in that they are governed by societal expectations, or norms. Biographically and literarily, they are perhaps

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and the works of Tani Barlow and Amy D. Dooling. For earlier antecedents, see especially the studies of Ellen Widmer and Grace S. Fong, which are not cited here individually.

3 This claim appears, for example, in the last line of Wu Xuezhao's biography of Yang: Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*. Several joint biographies of the couple also exist.

4 The latter phrase refers to C.T. Hsia's famous diagnosis of a common obsession with the fate of the nation shared by many modern Chinese writers of the first half of the twentieth century. While Hsia makes only passing mention of Yang Jiang in his book, *Qian Zhongshu*, along with Eileen Chang, is one of his most notable examples of a writer who bucked this trend.

the two essential institutions linking these two writers. For much of their married life Qian and Yang were either students or academics, and they defined themselves and their work both *by* and *against* the standards of both institutions. Chinese academia in the twentieth century has been partial to “-isms” and theories. Qian flouted this convention in his scholarly essays, in which he favored linking together discrete observations in a jottings (*suibi* 隨筆) style over building toward architectonic comprehensive conclusions (*tonglun* 通論). Yang’s memoirs present their marriage as a relationship that endured and strengthened despite the political pressures on the academy. In their various encounters in the academy, from study abroad though over four decades in a research institute, they “did not fit in with the group” (*bu hequn* 不合群).<sup>5</sup> Despite such protestations, they have become icons of conventional scholarly and matrimonial ideals.

Marital conventions in China changed dramatically in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the late Qing, social progressives called for the outlawing of polygamy, as well as other institutions seen as harmful to women, such as footbinding. “Free marriage” and equality of the sexes, Western-inspired notions introduced during the late Qing period, remained foci of intense public discourse into the Republic, inspiring the full range of reactions from condemnation to reflection to endorsement. Leading writers of the May Fourth generation, such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun, wrote from personal experience about the miseries of arranged marriage. (Lu Xun later took a common law wife.) Mutual affection, or lack thereof, became more of a deciding factor in marital decisions than ever before. Between the 1920s and 1940s, ethical dramas focusing on the family, and particularly marital strife, inspired writers of all political stripes, including, to name a few, Lao She, Zhang Tianyi, Yu Dafu, Eileen Chang, Su Qing, as well as Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang. Yet not until 1950, when the new Communist government enacted the New Marriage Law, did the law catch up with the rhetoric. Divorce, though still socially stigmatized, became easier to obtain—on paper at least—giving a new option to aggrieved or dissatisfied spouses.<sup>6</sup>

The twentieth-century Chinese academy also underwent major changes, from the introduction of Western-style schools in the late Qing; to the widespread establishment of public schools and national universities during the

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5 Yang, *Women sa*, 92.

6 For an overview history of the institution of marriage in modern China and its representation in popular narratives, see: Xiao, *Family Revolution*, esp. 3–26.

Republic;<sup>7</sup> to the expansion of public libraries and research institutions under the People's Republic. As with marriage and courtship norms, changes in the structure of the academy were neither consistent, continuous, nor uniformly progressive. Under the Beiyang government, professors were paid irregularly. During the Anti-Japanese War, entire universities relocated inland and operated in straightened circumstances. As Yang's *Taking a Bath and Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School* (*Ganxiao liu ji* 干校六記, 1981) testify, academics during the Mao era suffered from political campaigns that invaded institutions and disrupted work. Intellectuals with political ideas deemed dangerous or controversial became lightning rods for state-sponsored attacks. For decades, professorial appointments were governed by ideology as much as scholarship. Sinologist Perry Link remembers meeting Qian Zhongshu in 1979 as a member of an academic delegation, and Qian asking him, in the presence of two fellow delegates-cum-minders, "So, have you met any real scholars yet?"<sup>8</sup>

Marriage and the academy frequently intersect in the couple's fiction and stage plays, which are concerned with the manners and ethics of China's educated classes. The relationship between the two realms, moreover, is often causal. In Qian's novel *Fortress Besieged* (*Weicheng* 圍城, serialized 1946–1947), Fang Hongjian "escapes" from three almost-marriages (to a dead fiancée, a pursuer, and a pursuee) into a teaching position at Sanlü University, a dysfunctional academy that he later leaves upon embarking on a dysfunctional marriage with a colleague.<sup>9</sup> Yang's *Taking a Bath* (*Xizao* 洗澡, 1987; translated as *Baptism*) concerns the behavior of intellectuals during the first "thought reform" campaigns of New China, known as the Three-Antis (1951) and Five-Antis (1952). The novel opens several years before the purge with Yu Nan bluffing his way into a job at a research institute after he is jilted by the girlfriend with whom he had planned to flee the country (and his marriage) on the eve of the 1949 communist takeover. The person who suggests that he bluff his way into the new academy, notably, is Yu Nan's long-suffering wife. In *Fortress Besieged*, too, spouses assist in credential fraud.

7 On the Chinese education system during the Republican period, see Culp, *Articulating Citizenship* (2007) and Lanza, *Behind the Gate* (2010).

8 Perry Link, personal communication, November 19, 2010.

9 Fang Hongjian's earlier involvements include the deceased Miss Zhou Shuying, his erstwhile fiancée; Miss Su Wenwan, his pursuer; and Miss Tang Xiaofu, the object of his affection. Miss Bao, his earlier lover, has her own fiancé and is never a marital prospect. Hongjian's departure from Sanlü is also sped by the loss of his patron and friend, Zhao Xinmei, who has been caught in a compromising position with a colleague's wife.

In their fictional works, characters' identities as professor, scholar, and student, spouse and lover, are continually in flux, drawing the stability of those very categories into question. Yang's life writings, in contrast, have continually reaffirmed the constancy of her and Qian's intellectual and marital partnership. In them, more is at stake than just documenting facts about what Yang called an "ordinary" family.<sup>10</sup> Like their fiction, these works use marriage and the academy as testing grounds for humanistic ideals of authenticity, independence, and commitment. Coming from a couple that has come to epitomize scholarly achievement and marital fidelity, these value judgments project a compelling vision of what it means to be a modern Chinese intellectual.

### Authenticity

In Qian's and Yang's creative works, the academy is a repository of failures and pretenders, and marriages founder due to spousal insincerity. Those who do inadequate due diligence on potential spouses or colleagues are duly punished. In Yang's play *Forging the Truth* (*Nongzhen chengjia* 弄真成假, 1944), Zhou Dazhang pursues the spoiled daughter of a rich Shanghai businessman by passing himself off as a rich and well-connected young man who has "returned from overseas." Back at the shabby apartment he shares with his mother, however, he reveals to an uncle that after a year and a half of scraping by in Europe on a loan "forget about an M.A. or a Ph.D., I didn't even manage to get a high school diploma out of it."<sup>11</sup> Taken in by his returned-student aura, the businessman's niece, Zhang Yanhua, connives to marry herself to a fraud.

Conversely, a dubious marriage may indicate bogus academic credentials. In *Fortress Besieged*, one of Fang Hongjian's competitors for an English teaching job at Sanlü is the White Russian wife of the History Department chair, Han Xueyu, whom the couple has been trying to pass off as American. Her suitability to teach English are as doubtful as the academic qualifications of her husband, who is a "graduate" of the same paper mill from which Hongjian purchased his bogus Ph.D. degree. When Hongjian is dismissed from Sanlü on a pretext, Han and his wife host an American Independence Day party to celebrate the departure of the man who could expose them both. After all, "if the wife's nationality were real, could the husband's academic credentials then be fake" (277)?

10 Yang, *Women sa*, in *JYWJ*, vol. 3, 175.

11 Yang, *Forging the Truth*, 145.

Even more notable is the case of Zhu Qianli, an elderly scholar at the Literary Research Institute who is a frequent butt of narratorial jokes in *Taking a Bath*. Zhu, who lived for many years in France, is cast as a stereotypical roué: “Chewing on his pipe, with a roguish expression on his face, he often aired a few French phrases while taking liberties.”<sup>12</sup> Said to have previously been married to a French woman, Zhu is now married to a young woman who suspects him of maintaining yet another wife in the countryside. During his public self-criticism he confesses of his “French wife” that: “We were never legally married! It was just a short-term affair. But actually it wasn’t me, it was someone else. I was just jealous” (243). Nor, it turns out, does he have a French doctorate, as he had led his colleagues to believe: “All I said was that I regretted not having a French *doctorat d’état*. I also said I despised the university doctorate. Maybe people heard me say that and jumped to the conclusion that I had a university doctorate and was disappointed with it” (244). He nevertheless claims to have *earned* a Ph.D. by having ghost-written dissertations for other foreign students. Zhu, in short, is a triple fraud as a husband (indeed, one with the virile aura of a polygamist), an academic, and an abettor of other academic pretenders.

The few characters who succeed in the treacherous world of academia are those who remain true to themselves. The young librarian Yao Mi, is a formidable autodidact. Prevented by family circumstances from studying for a degree, she overawes the credentialed faculty member Xu Yancheng with her self-learning. Like Yang Jiang herself, Yao Mi is “by nature a modest and retiring person,”<sup>13</sup> yet one who is self-confident and comfortable in her own skin. She conceals her beauty in modest dress and is content in obscurity among books. Though her talents are eventually recognized and she is appointed a researcher, she prefers her own private home library, far from the politics of the Institute. Yao is also a woman of genuine feeling who offers to become Xu Yancheng’s lover, defying societal norms, to prove her love.<sup>14</sup>

Yang and Qian measure authenticity through not only emplotment but also a bookish style involving what might be called textual authentication. This

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12 Yang, *Baptism*, 54. Page numbers for subsequent direct quotations appear in-text.

13 Howard Goldblatt makes this appraisal of Yang in “About the Author,” in Yang, *Six Chapters*, ix. In the epilogue of *Taking a Bath*, Yao Mi considers working in translation, the same unobtrusive field of individual labor to which Yang Jiang devoted much of the Mao years.

14 Xu Yancheng receives the news that she is willing to be his lover as being “more sincere than if she had pulled it out of her own heart” (177). When a colleague later discovers their love letters, Yao Mi responds by asserting her principles: “a woman ought to have as much backbone as a man and take the consequences of her actions” (200).

can be seen in the dialectic of speech versus the written word. *Taking a Bath*, for example, expresses skepticism about the reliability of the spoken word. Before the first meeting of the newly established Literary Research Institute, the narrator comments that whereas in the past one's moral character was judged by one's calligraphy, "In New China, the equivalent is public speaking. When you give a speech, those who listen decide what you are worth" (27).<sup>15</sup> Xu Yancheng, a sympathetic if naïve character, echoes this sentiment at the end of the novel, when he complains to his wife Du Lilin, "I just don't approve of empty words. . . . Everyone is judged on speechmaking and appearances" (270). The courtship between Yancheng and Yao Mi intensifies when it becomes a written exchange. Unable to speak in person, they reveal their true thoughts and feelings through notes left in books in Mi's secret home study. Even if lovers' confessions cannot be taken at face value, in this story they represent a text-based form of emotional authenticity amidst a world of self-serving verbal performance.

Texts are also Qian's touchstones in conveying truths, truisms, and stereotypes about marital and scholarly norms. Chapter two of *Fortress Besieged*, for example, offers a satirical take on a merchant family's vulgar and pragmatic approach to courtship and marriage. Fang Hongjian, the prospective son-in-law of the bourgeois comprador Jimmy Zhang, is amused to find the title *How to Gain a Husband and Keep Him* on the family bookshelf, and laughs to himself that "Husbands are women's careers." His mahjong winnings that evening enable him to buy a fur coat he had had his eyes on, and a literary quip crosses Hongjian's mind at his moment of triumph: "A wife is like a suit of clothes" (45–47)—an object of comfort that can be changed at will.

Such literary musings are characteristic of Menippean satire, a mode in which an author ridicules characters using his or her superior scholarly knowledge. Hongjian's reinterpretation of the line from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* mocks the Zhangs with their self-help book sensibilities. The incident also typifies a double standard in the novel's narration. Hongjian's

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15 In one scene in *Forging the Truth*, Feng Guangzu, a university student pursuing Zhang Yanhua, outlines his intentions in bullet-point format, leading Yanhua to complain that she is listening to "Professor Feng's Marriage Proposal Method!" Feng protests that he is at least being sincere in *not* wooing by the book "with all that nauseating talk" (154). After their shotgun wedding, the smooth-talking and insincere Dazhang advises Yanhua, disingenuously, that, "Nothing that comes out of the mouth is dependable, so from now on we must watch out, since the world belongs to us!" (177) Fang Hongjian reflects that a Ph.D. diploma is an intellectual "fig leaf," but it is at least a falsifiable piece of evidence.

triumphs exalting in his superior intellect tend to be illusory or otherwise short-lived. Unwilling to be Miss Zhang's "rice bowl," Hongjian ends up with a wife whose career is more stable and lucrative than his, which becomes a cause of marital tension. But Qian's omniscient third-person narrator, who makes similar judgments as Hongjian from outside the frame of the story, is immune to retaliation. Qian's narrator also uses the Menippean mode to evaluate, for example, the self-styled intellectual "in terms of [his] occupational approach to life as distinct from [his] social behavior."<sup>16</sup> We learn of the pseudo-philosopher Zhu Shengming, whom Fang Hongjiang meets at a dinner party that:

Though he loathed women and could smell them three doors away, he desired them, which was why his nose was so sharp. His mind was filled with them. If he came upon the expression *a posteriori* in mathematical logic, he would think of 'posterior,' and when he came across the mark 'X' he would think of a kiss. Luckily he had never made a careful study of Plato's dialogues with Timaeus; otherwise he would be dazed by every 'X' mark. (84)

Qian's narrator reveals Zhu's quest for scholarly knowledge actually to be a quest for carnal knowledge and further degrades Zhu's scholarship by pointing out his ignorance of a philosophical classic.

Several years before Qian wrote *Fortress Besieged*, Yang Jiang caricatured the occupational approach to courtship of another Shanghai businessman, also surnamed Zhang, in *Forging the Truth*. The chauvinistic patriarch Zhang Xiangfu is a wealthy capitalist who treats his daughter's marriage as a business transaction. He expresses his fear of "losing his capital" to an unworthy suitor (whom he calls "a bad piece of goods"), while promoting his own choice for a son-in-law as "a good product at the right price."<sup>17</sup> Both fictional Zhang families—Yang's and Qian's—share a vocational approach to marriage that is anathema to the notion of marriage as being founded on genuine emotional attachment. The Zhangs, like Zhu Shengming, are authentic only in the sense of being true to their own vulgar sensibilities.

16 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1973 ed.), 309. For more on Qian and Menippean satire, see my introduction in Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, esp. 8–12.

17 A similar type of linguistic conceit based on occupational mindset appears in Yang's first published story, "Don't Worry, Lulu!" in which students tease classmates suffering from the "sour" feeling of romantic jealousy by asking "Going to study up on C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>12</sub>O<sub>2</sub> [acid]?" See: *YJWJ*, vol. 1, 9.

## Independence

A key challenge for modern Chinese academics has been to maintain one's intellectual independence under the pressure of contemporary political imperatives. Independence manifestos are scattered throughout Qian and Yang's literary works. The preface to Qian's 1941 essay collection, *Written in the Margins of Life* (*Xie zai rensheng bian Shang* 寫在人生邊上), quoted in the introduction to this book, extols the virtues of the "margins" as a space for honest, personal expression. In the essay "A Prejudice" ("Yige pianjian" 一個偏見, 1941 [first published in 1939]), Qian cites Schopenhauer's notion that a thinker should be deaf, since the din of the outside world causes "prejudice [to] take the place of impartiality."<sup>18</sup> After the Mao period, Yang Jiang wrote of wishing she had a "cloak of invisibility" that would allow her to roam unfettered, to observe and explore without societal interference.<sup>19</sup> This desire for invisibility was motivated, in part, by a real institutional context in which individuals were subject to surveillance, invasion of privacy, and the arbitrary demands of authorities. To be noticed brings at best inconvenience and at worst disaster.

Yang alludes to fear of institutions even in works set after the Mao era. In her novella-cum-memoir *We Three* (*Women sa* 我們仨, 2003), Yang relates a dream in which the family is sharing a laugh at home after dinner when the phone rings. Yang picks it up to hear an anonymous voice brusquely summon her ailing, eighty-four-year old husband to a meeting. (Qian was born in 1910, so the year would be 1994.) The next morning a black car arrives and whisks Qian off to an undisclosed location. Yang feels panic: she does not know who has abducted her husband or how long he'll be gone. The passage intimates authoritarian state violence: in this system, nameless functionaries show up and take loved ones away. Yang's dream-narrative is one of constant separation anxiety, which may be read as an allegory for the ultimate separation, death. But it begins with the type of mundane incident that Qian, who served as a deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in the 1980s, might encounter as a prominent member of socialist China's academic bureaucracy. It conveys unease at the power of the institution over the family man and the thinker. As Jesse Field notes in chapter eight, the passage recalls the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo*, which Yang translated in 1999. Qian's departure is a result of a summons by "the same sort of implacable power that ended Socrates' life."

Yang and Qian also wrote about the question of how to achieve and maintain intellectual independence within a marriage or a romantic relationship.

18 Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 65.

19 See: Yang, "Yinshenyi," *XJWJ*, vol. 2, 192–96.

As spouses, Qian and Yang have a reputation for having respected each other's intellectual autonomy. The relationship between Yao Mi and Xu Yancheng in *Taking a Bath* represents a fictionalized version of this ideal, if one that deviates in some particulars. Xu Yancheng has a foreign degree but is humble about it; Yao Mi is self-taught and self-effacing. They bond over shared interests in books and ideas. Yancheng is an aloof and inattentive husband to Du Linlin, but she is overbearing. She tries "to take absolute possession of him and not allow him even a single secret, a single shred of independence" (153).<sup>20</sup> Yao Mi, in contrast, maintains a collegial distance from Xu even as their relationship intensifies into a chaste but passionate romance. Du is the wife in name, but Yao, by virtue of her reserve, has a better moral claim to Xu's affections.

Qian's 1946 story "Cat" ("Mao" 貓) also conducts a psychological exploration of a marriage rent by a struggle for possession and autonomy. Aimo, a young and modish wife, hosts a salon of Beijing intellectuals. Having been educated at a "fashionable girl's school run by Americans" she "not only was unsubmissive to her husband but even felt that he by himself did not suffice to wait on her."<sup>21</sup> Her affable and obedient husband, Jianhou, comes to chafe at his domestic subservience attempts to make a name for himself by writing a book. Jianhou has traveled—if not actually studied—abroad and decides to write a travelogue as proof of his worldliness. Intellectual labor (mostly done by his assistant), he believes, is his ticket to gaining equal footing in his marriage and the respect of the intellectuals in their social circle. Soon, however, spousal competition over Jianhou's assistant leads to a chain of spiteful actions that endanger the marriage.

Marriage also appears as a metaphor for the social intimacy of academic institutions. Members of the Literary Research Institute's Foreign Languages Department in *Taking a Bath* joke that their organization is a "conjugal group" (188), but the atmosphere turns out to be one of claustrophobia and social surveillance. In *Fortress Besieged*, soon after their arrival at Sanlü, Sun Roujia remarks that "This school is like a big family. Unless you live off campus you can't keep anything secret. And there's so much bickering going on" (204).

Indeed, far from being a refuge from marriage, the academy is a hive of gossips, sexual predators, and romantic entanglements. The administration

20 Qian Zhongshu alludes to the opposite extreme of this behavior in his description of Fu Jujing, a character in his story "Cat": "In Britain, he had learned how to keep a straight face and look indifferent. Therefore, at public gatherings, if a man were beside him, strangers would assume that he was his brother and if it were a woman, that she must be his wife; otherwise he wouldn't be so indifferent." Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 126.

21 Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 111.

and professoriate of Sanlü University, for instance, despite their exaggerated shows of propriety are inordinately interested in relations between the sexes. The lecherous Dean of Students, Li Meiting decrees that unmarried male professors may not tutor female students, and even recommends that male and female faculty members avoid socializing. Eventually, this pressure closes in on Fang Hongjian and Sun Roujia, and they get engaged to be married as if this will protect them against the onslaught of gossip.

An even more gothic sense of claustrophobia permeates Yang's short story "What a Joke" ("Da xiaohua" 大笑話, ca. 1977).<sup>22</sup> It is the Republican era, and residents of the Pingdan Institute campus on the outskirts of Beijing are anticipating the arrival of the wife of a recently-deceased colleague. For the better part of a decade Wang Shijun spoke of the beautiful wife he had left in Shanghai, but Chen Qian never visited. Now all that is left for her up north is the task of disposing of her late husband's possessions. It turns out, however, that Chen's summons to Beijing originated with Zhou Yiqun, the wife of a faculty member, who wants to use Chen to separate Zhou's former paramour from his new lover in the Institute. But during her few days on campus Chen Qian becomes close to Zhou's husband, Lin Ziyu, derailing Zhou's plan and incurring the jealousy of one of the Institute's lesser beauties, who contrives to make it appear that Chen and Lin are having an affair. Chen takes the next train home, leaving the Institute wives to laugh about "what a joke" it is that Zhou tried to drive away a lover and ended up losing her husband.<sup>23</sup>

Divided into acts spread over a few days, the story compresses the time and space of the action to dramatic effect. The social atmosphere of the academy, even more so than in *Taking a Bath*, is thick with meddling and intrigue. "What a Joke" presents a case study of human behavior within a campus (located on the site of an old graveyard) whose inhabitants "like maggots boring into cheese, tend to bore in for life and forget the outside world."<sup>24</sup> Yang Jiang does

22 Dating from Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 321–32. My translation of this story appears in *Renditions* 76; for the original, see: *YJWJ*, vol. 1, 106.

23 Typical of Yang Jiang's creative works, women are the chief instigators and the chief losers in these machinations: Zhou is humiliated, and Chen is forced to part from the one person who has shown her genuine solicitude. Like a Lu Xun story, "What a Joke" concludes with an ironic shift in focus to the ensemble, reinforcing the power of the crowd over private individuals. Gossip is inescapable, as we are told at the outset, and the "joke" outlasts even the life of the Institute itself. A literal translation of the story title would be "A Big Joke," but the current rendering both conveys the tone of contempt with which the phrase is used in the story, and rings better as a sonic motif at story's end: "The wheels of the entire train sang out in rhythmic unison: 'What a joke! What a joke! What a joke!'"

24 *YJWJ*, vol. 1, 58.

not indicate whether their mutual antagonism is produced or merely magnified by confinement, but she leaves no doubt that this institutional mindset is the norm.

The academy thus functions as a motif of human entrapment similar to the marital simile that looms over Qian's novel: "Marriage is like a fortress besieged: those on the outside want to get in, and those on the inside want to get out." At its best, it insulates individuals and couples from the social and political pressures of modern life, allowing the quiet contemplation necessary to intellectual labor. At its worst, it is a claustrophobic dystopia that only exacerbates human inclinations to conflict and petty self-interest.

If Yang Jiang never felt confined in her marriage, as a widow she has become its sole living insider voice and has used this voice to exercise what might be called the independence of the bereft. Her writings since 1998 affirm her intellectual and emotional kinship with Qian Zhongshu, while also asserting her autonomy from his outsized reputation. Wu Xuezhao reminds us in her biography that Yang's fame, from her success as a playwright in 1940s Shanghai, preceded Qian's.<sup>25</sup> And whereas Qian was incapacitated by illness before his death and left no last words, Yang's longevity has enabled her to complete a pair of philosophical works concerning death and the afterlife: her translation of *Phaedo*, and *Arriving at the Margins of Life: Answering My Own Questions* (*Zou dao rensheng bian shang: ziwèn zìdā* 走到人生邊上：自問自答, 2007).

The main text of *Arriving at the Margins of Life* uses a dialogic form, tracing Yang's personal train of thoughts about life and death toward a conclusion about "The Value of Human Life" ("Rensheng de jiazhi" 人生的價值). The appendix (which comprises half the book) contains a collection of "Notes" ("Zhushi" 注釋), including personal anecdotes, reading notes, and transcribed oral stories. The main text's style of cumulative argumentation differs starkly from Qian Zhongshu's fondness for piecemeal and fragmentary criticism. The "Notes" exhibit more comfort with loose ends and discrete observations. In this, as in its title, the book harkens back to Yang's first book-length collaboration with Qian Zhongshu: *Written in the Margins of Life* (*Xie zai rensheng bian shang* 寫在人生邊上, 1941), a collection of essays that Yang during the war compiled and for her husband and gave a title.

*Arriving at the Margins of Life* in its very title offers a tidy symmetry, linking the end of Yang's writing career to the beginning of her husband's. Yang's advanced authorial age (over ninety-four), her accumulated life experience and writings, now endow her with the philosophical stature of a sage. The

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25 Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 349.

questions and answers are her own. Whether or not readers agree with her philosophy, this twilight work affirms Yang's autonomy as a writer and thinker.

### Devotion

Devotion is the inverse of institutional entrapment in Qian's and Yang's fiction, in which character is often tested in terms of commitment. Fang Hongjian's peripatetic lifestyle, for example, is symptomatic of his lack of devotion to any vocation or individual, including himself. Qian's and Yang's stories present love and learning, in large part, as a function of intellectual devotion to scholarship or emotional devotion to a spouse or romantic interest. Again and again, characters' commitment is measured and found wanting.

Yang's short story "Indian Summer" ("Xiao yangchun" 小陽春, 1947) concerns a marriage which could be said to be suffering from one partner's excessive devotion.<sup>26</sup> Professor Yu Bin has been feeling old and faults his wife, Huifang, for putting too much into her role as wife, at the expense of romance. He becomes infatuated with a flirtatious female student, Miss Hu, and experiences an "Indian summer" of rejuvenation when an accidental kiss leads to an exchange of love letters and visits. His reverie ends when he encounters another caller at Miss Hu's apartment, and in a flash of inspiration he gives the candy and flowers he had planned to give to her to his wife instead.

The focus of the narrative, however, is not the love affair but the existential crisis it precipitates for Huifang about her role as a wife. Early on, Huifang is mocked as a symbol of women's pettiness and capacity for self-deception. In jealousy, she dolls herself up and flaunts her and Yu's marital bliss to spite her perceived competitor.<sup>27</sup> Yet she becomes a pathetic figure when she discovers love letters in her husband's pocket. In revenge, she washes the garment with the letters inside, pulping them into mush. Huifang breaks from her daily routine to seek temporary distraction, but at the end of the day she has no recourse but to walk home alone in the rain. The marriage is "saved" when Miss Hu becomes engaged to her classmate, and Professor Yu laughs at his wife's

26 Judith Amory and Yaohua Shi's translation of this story appears online at the MCLC Resource Center: <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/indian-summer/>.

27 Yang's narrator cites Huifang as a typical example of female stupidity for accepting her husband's re-gifting of the chocolates and flowers. Having "eaten lover's candy," she then inadvertently thwarts his rendezvous with his erstwhile lover by bounding out of bed and accompanying him on a walk in the park. The student, Miss Hu 胡 is also slightly caricatured, her name being a homophone for "fox" (*hu* 狐), meaning "seductress."

misplaced fear, claiming to have warded off Miss Hu's puppy love by arranging the match himself. Huifang is not fooled, however, into thinking that her husband's suggestion of an impromptu excursion to Hangzhou will happen—the Indian summer has passed and the chill of old age has set in. The ironic reconciliation comes about not because of their devotion to each other, but simply for lack of an alternative to their indifferent marriage.

In Yang's "Jade Lady" ("Yuren" 玉人, ca. 1970s), a middle-school teacher in wartime Shanghai plans to uproot his family to take up a teaching position at a university in the interior, but his plans are thwarted by a broken leg. His wife, meanwhile, grows distant after discovering an old poem of his addressed to a "jade lady's," which makes her suspect that she was his second choice. While he is recuperating in hospital, she feuds with the landlady over responsibility for and rights to the outhouse near their new apartment—Who gets to use it, and who has to pay for the waste to be removed? Enlisting her husband to expose the landlady's duplicity in an outhouse stakeout, both are shocked to discover that the landlady happens to be the poem's inspiration. In this story, however, the wife finds satisfaction, coming to believe that she had in fact stolen the "jade-like beauty's" husband away, reducing her to a miserable and petty life, while the husband curbs his professional ambitions—to upgrade from high school teacher to university lecturer—for the sake of marital harmony.

In Qian's story "God's Dream" ("Shangdi de meng" 上帝的夢, 1946), the Creator himself finds himself in an existential predicament. The story presents a divine twist on fraught domesticity, in which God becomes the "obtuse angle" in a love triangle with Woman and Man. The story of the Creator (who is repeatedly likened to a writer)<sup>28</sup> is not of an author's devotion to his work, but rather of an artist who demands that his works be devoted to him. In this cosmic joke about the "utility" of art,<sup>29</sup> the Creator loses control over his creation. Like Du Linlin in *Taking a Bath*, God demands absolute possession of them and behaves like a petulant lover when he is jilted. Having created Man and Woman to flatter his own vanity, he is chagrined to find them shutting him out, and in a spiteful attempt to make them suffer and run back to beg forgiveness, he inadvertently kills them.

Even in the mundane realm, characters are punished for not performing their social roles to peers' satisfaction. Fang Hongjian's downfall is sped by his glib commentaries on social institutions and his sarcastic deviations from

28 For a detailed analysis of how God is likened to a writer, see: Chang, "Reading Qian Zhongshu's 'God's Dream' as a Postmodern Text."

29 For more on Qian's antagonism to this notion, see his essay "Eating" ("Chifan" 吃飯), in Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 50.

social convention. In the company of self-styled poets he mocks a plagiarized poem of Su Wenwan's, rather than duly praising it, and having led her to the brink of a marriage proposal, he then responds to her moonlit advance with the most perfunctory of kisses.<sup>30</sup> Later, at Sanlü University, his refusal to flatter his superiors like the thriving scoundrel Li Meiting hastens the end of his tenure. In both cases, Hongjian suffers for his inability or unwillingness to act the part of the adoring lover or the deferential junior professor. His complaints about this double standard—the imperative to be a sincere individual but also to fit oneself into a pre-determined role—only further estrange him from those around him.<sup>31</sup>

Such negative fictional examples of insufficient or excessive devotion contrast with the picture of devoted scholars and spouses we find in Yang's life-writings.<sup>32</sup> Howard Goldblatt calls the “devotion between husband and wife . . . perhaps the most touching theme of all” in *Six Chapters of Life in a Cadre School*.<sup>33</sup> Yang's memoirs often note that for most of their lives they stayed together in one place.

In the 1980s, she took it upon herself to defend Qian from the besiegement of fans. Shortly after the republication *Fortress Besieged*, Yang felt compelled to write an essay, “On Qian Zhongshu and *Fortress Besieged*” (“Ji Qian Zhongshu yu *Weicheng*” 記錢鍾書與圍城, 1985), to rebut the notion that Fang Hongjian was an incarnation of Qian himself. Since Qian Zhongshu's death, Yang Jiang's writings have testified to her continued devotion to her spouse.

30 When Fang Hongjian and Sun Roujia inadvertently become engaged under pressure from colleagues at Sanlü, Hongjian again fails to fulfill his role as an engaged man. “Miss Sun was silent for a long while, then said, ‘I hope you won't ever regret it,’ and lifted her face as though expecting him to kiss her, but he forgot about kissing her and said only, ‘I hope you don't regret it’” (276).

31 In a moment of cynical candor, Hongjian remarks to his wife Roujia that he feels he's been duped by the whole institution of courtship and marriage: “The fact is, no matter whom you marry, after you're married, you'll find it's not the same person but someone else. If people knew that before marriage they could skip all that stuff about courtship, romance, and so on” (344).

32 In a more ironic example from *Taking a Bath*, during his public self-criticism, Yu Nan blames his earlier philandering on his excessive devotion to his academic specialty of Western literature: “Almost all of the poems, plays and novels that he studied were about love, and inevitably love had a great influence on him” (262). The comment seems to allude to the aborted extramarital affair of the romantic poet Wu Mi, Qian Zhongshu's mentor and teacher at Tsinghua, with which Qian had a field day in the 1930s. See my essay “The Critic Eye (批眼).”

33 Howard Goldblatt, “Translator's Afterword,” in Yang, *Six Chapters from My Life Downunder*, 101.

Yang's memoirs detail the personal and environmental circumstances surrounding their cultural production, including the conditions in which they completed monumental works such as *Fortress Besieged*, *Don Quixote*, and *Limited Views*. They also focus on Qian Zhongshu the man. While Yang's accounts of her relationship with her daughter betray ambivalence and a degree of estrangement, her image of Qian Zhongshu's is overwhelmingly positive. She documents meticulously his disdain for title, honor, status, and financial gain, portraying him as a considerate husband who always praises his wife's cooking.<sup>34</sup>

Yang's retrospective accounts allow readers an intimate view of a pair of writers who otherwise held themselves aloof. They also make a spousal claim of exclusive ownership over the story of their lives and marriage. "No matter how much literary talent someone else might have, your wife or husband is solely your topic," Qian's narrator remarks in *Fortress Besieged*, "It's a topic with a registered patent on it."<sup>35</sup> Stark examples of Yang making this claim occur in the authorized biography of Yang Jiang written by Wu Xuezhao. Dedicated to the memory of Qian Zhongshu on the tenth anniversary of his death, the book is really a family biography. Though Wu is credited as the sole author, the book is more akin to a co-authored oral history.<sup>36</sup> Wu's third-person voice shields Yang from charges of immodesty. Yang nevertheless signals her central role in the project in a preface, in which she categorically discounts all other biographies, past and future, on the grounds that Wu's is the only one written with her permission.<sup>37</sup>

The format and style of Yang's non-fictional writings are also noteworthy. At the beginning of her essay on Qian and *Fortress Besieged*, she states that as Qian's first reader she is the most qualified person (besides Qian himself) to

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34 To cite just two examples of the former: Yang told Wu Xuezhao that after his 1979–1980 trip abroad, Qian declined honorary doctorates from Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, and the University of Chicago, as well as visiting fellowships at various U.S. institutions. Qian was also reportedly persuaded to accept appointment as deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences after the director agreed to make concessions to Qian's dedication to scholarship and distaste for administrative work. See: Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 335, 336. Qian did, however, apply unsuccessfully for a lectureship at Oxford in 1937. See: Cairncross and Chen, "Qian Zhongshu and Oxford University," n.p.

35 Qian, *Fortress Besieged*, 232–33.

36 Wu relies primarily on the "intentional sources" of Yang Jiang's and Qian Zhongshu's own words, but she synthesizes a variety of material, including published works, papers and photographs from Yang Jiang's private collection, and in-person interviews.

37 Yang Jiang, "Xu" 序 (Preface). In Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 1–2.

“annotate” (*zhushu* 注疏) his work.<sup>38</sup> To annotate is to assert *scholarly* authority. Yang’s memoirs combine this academic mode with at least two others. Psychoanalysis, for example, figures in her 1980s essay on Qian and his novel, in which she explains his eccentric, even childish “foolishness” (*chiqi* 癡氣), as well as in her dream-work in *We Three*. *We Three* concludes with a family scrapbook of calligraphy, letters, drawings, photographs, and other mementos from Yang’s life with Qian Zhongshu and Qian Yuan. The display of calligraphy throughout the book is a type of literati-style authentication: Yang’s handwriting is a mark of personal involvement that distinguishes her books from those written or edited by others. The display of deceased family members’ handwriting testifies to her proprietary access to a personal archive. This work continued with her editing of a follow-up book dedicated to Qian Yuan.<sup>39</sup>

Yang and Qian were well aware of the prejudicial nature of much biographical and autobiographical writing. In the short story, “The Devil Pays a Nighttime Visit to Mr. Qian Zhongshu” (“Mogui yefang Qian Zhongshu xiansheng” 魔鬼夜訪錢鍾書先生, 1941), the Devil advises Qian that:

Writing biographies about others is also a type of self-expression, so there’s no reason not to insert your own views or write about others as a way of showing yourself off. Conversely, autobiographers invariably don’t have much of a “self” to write about. . . . So if you want to learn about a person, you should read biographies he has written of others, and if you

38 See: *YJWJ*, vol. 2, 135. Qian is said to have reciprocated as the first reader of *Baptism*. See: Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 349. Yang is also quoted as having opposed the translation of her essay for inclusion in a Chinese-English bilingual edition of *Fortress Besieged* because it would confuse foreigners who are entirely ignorant of Chinese culture and customs. See: *Ibid.*, 343.

39 *Our Qian Yuan* (*Women de Qian Yuan* 我們的錢瑗, 2005), a collective work with twenty-seven named authors comprised of individual recollections and more archival materials related to Qian Yuan, was published on the eighth anniversary of her death. Like *We Three*, it is an expression of devotion to the deceased, and the primary materials reproduced in both volumes are captioned and annotated in Yang Jiang’s own hand. Also a collective tribute to the living mother, the book is a measure of Yang’s influence as a cultural figure. Yang, et al. *Women de Qian Yuan* (Our Qian Yuan). An “Editor’s Afterword” (“Bianhou” 編後, dated August 15, 2005) notes that an educational scholarship has been established in Qian Yuan’s name, and that the current book came about thanks to a flood of new contributions after the magazine *Hong Kong Literature* (*Xianggang wenxue* 香港文學) published a “Qian Yuan” special issue.

want to learn about other people, you should read his autobiography. Autobiography is biography.<sup>40</sup>

Yang cites this story in the preface to her account of how Qian Zhongshu wrote *Fortress Besieged*, acknowledging the risk of self-parody and explicitly recognizing that her account could be taken to be like an “elegy for a deceased husband.”<sup>41</sup> In any case, Yang’s writings since 1998 leave little doubt as to the extent of her spousal devotion.

### The Domesticated Intellectual

Mrs. Premise: (*on the phone, to Mrs. Jean-Paul Sartre*) “Well, when will he be free? Oh, pardon! Quand sera-t-il libre? [*pause*] Ooooooh! Ha ha ha ha! (*to friend, Mrs. Conclusion*) She says he’s spent the last sixty years trying to work that one out! Oooooh! Ha ha ha ha!”

—*Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, Episode 27<sup>42</sup>

Chatting in a Laundromat, British housewives Mrs. Premise and Mrs. Conclusion decide to pay a visit to Jean-Paul Sartre in Paris to settle their debate about whether or not his masterwork *Roads to Freedom* is “an allegory of man’s search for commitment.” In Paris, Mrs. Sartre complains to them about her husband being “in one of his bleeding moods” and threatens to “revolutionary leaflet *him*” if he doesn’t start cleaning up after himself. In *Fortress Besieged*, the narrator observes that “great philosophers have never had good wives. Socrates’ wife was a shrew . . . Aristotle’s mistress rode on him like a horse . . . Marcus Aurelius’ wife was an adulteress, and even . . . Bertrand Russell had been divorced several times” (91–92). The Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming, we’re told later, was also henpecked. The big joke on philosophers is that they tend to be thoroughly domesticated, their existential musings deflated by the mundane negotiations of married life. The flip side of the Python joke, of course, is the presumption that marriage is not a place for intellectualism, but for doing the laundry.

This “institutional mindset,” I’ve argued, is more than a thematic interest for Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, since in so much of their writings character is defined in relation to marriage and/or the academy. A successful marriage is an emblem of virtue rooted in mutual devotion; a dysfunctional or sham marriage

40 Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 34.

41 Yang’s words are *wangfu xingshu* 亡夫行迹. See: YJWJ, vol. 2, 134.

42 French is as it appears in the original dialogue of the skit.

is a symptom of flaws of character or just of human nature. The academy is the hallowed realm within which Qian and Yang built much of their intellectual prestige, drawing on its resources and cultural capital, while distancing themselves from its corrupted elements.

The Year of Divorce, as the Chinese press dubbed 2004, saw a twenty-one percent year-on-year increase in failed marriages in China. A “new divorce culture” has emerged since the market liberalizations of the 1990s, scholar Hui Faye Xiao writes, a national obsession with marital strife that has been chronicled and embellished in dozens of television shows and films.<sup>43</sup> Pervasive Chinese academic fraud has in the past decade become a matter not just of domestic concern, but of international alarm. In *Fortress Besieged*, Fang Hongjian was able to purchase a Ph.D. diploma in the mail; nowadays one need only call a toll-free number (and pay a hefty fee) to buy an academic paper with your name on it and the promise of publication in a prestigious international journal.<sup>44</sup>

The sense of crisis that pervades popular discourse about marriage and the academy helps to explain why the institutional mindset that Yang and Qian embody resonates so strongly in today’s China. Since Qian’s death, Yang’s cultural production has blended individual expression with the fulfillment of idealized social roles. Her late-life persona has been a potent combination of “virtuous wife” (*xianqi* 賢妻)<sup>45</sup> and “person of letters” (*wenren* 文人). In “God’s Dream” Man and Woman inadvertently realize “the vow that all lovers share to ‘die on the same day of the same month of the same year;’” as a widow, Yang revealed to her biographer that when Qian was sick she wished to realize the wifely ideal of living only one year longer than her husband.<sup>46</sup> Yang’s widowhood lent new weight to her words. The terse opening section of *We Three* (“We Two Grow Old”) is devastating because Yang Jiang and Qian Zhongshu appear not as self-assured scholars but as a old couple plagued by recurring nightmares about losing each other. We sense Yang’s vulnerability, and we know that Qian will predecease her.

43 Xiao, *Family Revolution*, 3, 177–83.

44 For representative news media reports, see “Looks Good on Paper”; Clark, “China’s Academic Scandal.” On publishing fraud in the sciences, including the toll-free hotline, see: Hvistendahl, “China’s Publication Bazaar.” At least six articles on academic fraud and misconduct in China appeared in the journal *Nature* between 2010 and 2014. On publishing fraud in the humanities, see: Liu, “How is Research on Academic Plagiarism in China Conducted?”

45 Wu Xuezhao uses this term in chapter 17, which is entitled: “A most virtuous wife, a most talented daughter.”

46 Qian, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, 105; Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 384.

Biographers writing well of friends and spouses is nothing new, of course, and Yang's post-1998 writings may well be regarded simply as grieving "self-consolations."<sup>47</sup> Yang's defining style in writing about personal suffering has been the power of understatement. During the outpouring of "scar literature" after the Cultural Revolution, Yang's *Six Chapters of Life from a Cadre School* recorded the couple's hardship in a denuded linguistic style that completely elides hyperbolic emoting and graphic imagery. *Taking a Bath*, to the poet Shi Zhecun 施蛰存, was written in a "fluid and pure vernacular" (*yuwen liuli chunjie* 語文流利純潔).<sup>48</sup>

Unadorned prose has widely been taken as a reflection of Yang's personal diffidence, following the enduringly popular, if clichéd, truism that "as one writes, so one lives" (*ren ru qi wen* 人如其文). Wu Xuezhao writes that Yang "refuses to stand out" and "is utterly content always being a zero." Yang, who in the 1980s wished for a "cloak of invisibility" has in the latter part of her career been conspicuously inconspicuous.<sup>49</sup> Mustering skills developed in the academy, she has reconstructed for the public a marriage and a family separated by death. The shift from "we" to "me" forced Yang Jiang to re-think an existential question: "Who am I?" Her answer has been manifold: widow, bereft mother, scholar, writer, thinker. This private-as-public persona, as Jesse Field discusses in the following chapter, has made her an object of veneration among Chinese readers.

Insofar as literature is a vehicle for projecting human desires and anxieties, the stark contrast between Qian's and Yang's fictional and (auto)biographical treatment of the twinned institutions of marriage and the academy suggests a politics of personal exceptionalism. Fang Hongjian and Sun Roujia, both university teachers, could have been a happy couple as husband and wife, but Qian denies them this opportunity. Yang made a different decision. In *After the Bath* (*Xizao zhi hou* 洗澡之後), her 2014 sequel to *Taking a Bath*, she arranges for Yao Mi and Xu Yancheng to marry. In the end, Yang, unlike her husband, gave her fictional couple happiness and closure.

To be domesticated is to be subject to the limited ideological and moral vision of institutional imperatives. It's hard to think big thoughts when there's

47 See: Hsia, "A Yuan huiqu le."

48 Shi, "Du Yang Jiang *Xizao*." *We Three*, as Jesse Field notes in the next chapter, does employ graphic images of suffering.

49 Wu's words are: *jue bu chutou* 絕不出頭 and *zijue ziyuan shizhong zuoling* 自覺自願始終做零. See: Wu, *Ting Yang Jiang tan wangshi*, 336. I made several of the points in this paragraph earlier in my essay, "Yang Jiang's 楊絳 Conspicuous Inconspicuousness."

laundry to be done—or colleagues to mind. Marriage and the academy, in this sense, stand in for a larger problem of intellectual provincialism, one that critic C.T. Hsia called an “obsession with China.” How can one think big thoughts when there is a nation to save? Or a party-state, for that matter? The Chinese Communist Party’s bureaucratization of intellectual labor through government schools and institutes, which began in the 1950s, continues today. Along with state censorship, this institutional structure remains the Achilles heel of intellectual life in China. Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, to some degree, bucked the trend and refused to “run with the herd” of establishment intellectuals. But little could be more “establishment” than to translate Chairman Mao’s *Selected Works* or his poetry, as Qian was recruited to do in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>50</sup> The same could be said for Yang’s flaunting, in *We Three*, of the couple’s close relationship with powerful cadres like Hu Qiaomu 胡喬木 (1912–1992), the wordsmith behind some of Mao’s most infamous declarations who became president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where they worked.<sup>51</sup>

Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang are extraordinary representatives of a dying breed of modern Chinese intellectuals. Their writing careers, long but stunted by politics, beg a question that will remain relevant for the foreseeable future: how are mainland Chinese writers influenced by the institutions they inhabit? Marriage and the academy, in the works of Qian Zhongshu and Yang Jiang, are institutional touchstones to their shared insistence that self-possession

50 According to Yang, Qian was recruited into a group to translate Mao’s *Selected Works* after his first year teaching at Tsinghua (around 1950). A year in, the group consisted only of him and several assistants and work was temporarily suspended in 1954. He completed translation of *Selected Works* in 1963 and was appointed to a five-person group to translate Mao’s poetry in 1964. That work was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. The group was reinstated after Qian’s return to Beijing from the countryside “cadre school” and he completed his portion of the work in a cramped and cluttered room in 1975. Yang, *Women sa*, 124, 126–27, 141, 151–52.

51 Hu Qiaomu was President of CASS from 1977–1982 and again from 1985–1988. In *We Three* (*Women sa*, 156–159), Yang describes Hu suddenly coming to their home to pay Qian a visit, the first of many, in October 1977. Qian, she says, came to Hu’s attention for having the temerity to point out an error in one of Mao Zedong’s poems, which Qian was translating. Yang emphasizes that Hu sought them out and not the other way around, and that the couple remained conscious of their place respective to this powerful cadre, even as they became familiar. Yang mentions a photograph of Hu laughing uproariously at something Qian said; the photo is reprinted in Wu Xuezhao’s biography of Yang. Hu nominated Qian to be one of four vice-president of CASS in 1983. On these appointments, and Hu Qiaomu’s purge of humanist intellectuals in 1983–1984, see Sleeboom-Faulkner, *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)*, 73–75.

is pre-requisite to critical and moral integrity. Yet the domesticated intellectual, a familiar Cold War specter, still shadows the mainland Chinese writer on the international stage. When Mo Yan 莫言, an establishment writer of high standing China's cultural bureaucracy, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, the perennial question made headlines again: "When will he be free?"