

Critical Response and Reception of Zhang Jie's Works

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Abstract:

The paper looks at the study of literary criticism of Zhang Jie's works, how her works were received and what kind of controversies her works generated. The paper covers an overview of her major works and studies issues she lighted; an effort is made into exploring how literary criticism of her works also involved political criticism. All major works of criticism and evaluation that were published in response to her works are covered.

Keywords: Zhang Jie, Women's consciousness, Literary criticism, gender

Since the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, literary discourse has been based on Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, which had retained orthodoxy and limitation within the literary discourse. Even before the establishment of the Party-State, when CPC (Communist Party of China) had its base in Yan'an, Mao Zedong in Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art in 1942 had laid down the foundation of the Party's policy on Literature and Art. Since then, an understanding of Mao's Yan'an Talks became crucial for appreciation and evaluation of literature, criticism and discourse, and remained the usual practice after 1949 also.

Yan'an Talks discussed many issues related to literature, of these, the most basic issue was the relationship between literature and politics, which manifested in the way literary criticism was to be carried out and the criteria of literary criticism. While discussing the relationship between Party's work in literature and art and Party's revolutionary work, Mao held that literature and art occupied a definite important position in the revolution. He said: "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert a great influence on politics".¹

It was clear that Mao's Yan'an talks were the foundation for understanding Party's position on a whole range of issues such as role of literature, role of writers etc; it was felt that the reflection of realism is as important in a literary work as was its task of inspiring people with positive images of life under Socialism. In other words, a writer in the China had the dual role of fulfilling the artistic criteria in his/her work as well as of ensuring that the said work had adequate and correct political context. Therefore, the

¹ Mao, Zedong, (1977), "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art", as in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, vol.3, p.69.

job of literary critics in China also was two-fold, one was to carry out literary criticism and research, and second was to check whether each work translates Party's policy into literary theory.²

The experience of literature in Mao's China, be it literary production or literary criticism, was shaped by the Yan'an Talks. However, after the tumultuous years of Cultural Revolution and the fall of Gang of Four in 1976, literature became one of the first areas to reflect the relaxed atmosphere of China; the kind of literary works produced were proof that literature benefitted immensely from the enthusiasm generated by the encouraging policies of the new regime. Yet, the official literary discourse was still more or less based on Yan'an Talks.

In 1981, Deng Xiaoping set out the guidelines for literary critics in the following words: "The main task of literary criticism under the guidelines of the Eleventh Party Congress is to develop a literary criticism which takes the spirit of Communism as its base and attempts to develop a Socialist spiritual civilization. They must vigorously oppose negative tendencies such as class exploitation, petty bourgeoisie sentiments, individualism, anarchism and revitalize the Party's spirit".³ Even with these guidelines, at least in the early years of Deng's China, literary circles showed a certain amount of hesitation and literary criticism continued to deal with both literary and political criticism. However, political criterion became less stringent with passing years. Literature, on one hand, saw a period of liberalization and experimentation in both form and content, on the other hand, some senior critics remained orthodox and tended to dwell on political criticism till the end of 1980s.

The official policy on literature was that of comeback of 'Let Hundred Flowers Bloom', but since literary works were still also analyzed on the grounds of political correctness, writers were criticized according to the political criteria of the leadership, if felt necessary. Woman write Zhang Jie ventured into territories which were forbidden in Mao's China; therefore, when analyzing and evaluating response or reception of Zhang Jie's works, both literary and political aspect of literary criticism faced by Zhang Jie must be taken into consideration.

Zhang Jie was one of the most innovative Chinese women writers who emerged after the fall of Gang of Four in 1976 and began to explore the reality of 'being a woman' in China. From the late 1970's to the late 1990's, her representative works include *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, *The Ark*, *Emerald*, *Leaden Wings* and *Without Words* etc.

Love Must Not Be Forgotten, published in 1979, is a story of an undying secret love between a married woman, Zhong Yu and a married man. Because the man is completely committed to the Party and the motherland, he could not acknowledge his love for her. This work portrayed their love in an extra-

² A detailed analysis of Mao's Yan'an Talks and an account of experience of literature in Mao's China can be found in Mitra, Sabaree, (2005), *Literature and Politics in 20th Century China: Issues and Themes*, Books Plus, New Delhi, pp. 37-39.

³ Deng, Xiaoping, (1981), 在中国文学艺术工作值得四次代表大会上的祝词, 中国出版年间, p.489, cited from Thakur, Ravni, (1997), *Rewriting Gender: Reading Chinese Women*, Zed Books, London & New Jersey, p.80.

marital context, however, they are spiritually connected and in love with each other, and not otherwise. Yet, this work generated a lot of criticism as it challenged the traditional morality of the modern Chinese society.

The Ark published in 1982 is a story of three divorced/separated women who live in the same apartment and shares different yet similar challenges in the male dominated society. The story reflects the clash of patriarchal values and traditional role modeling of women with modern women's growing awareness and struggle to fulfill their individual dreams. In *The Ark*, Zhang Jie touches upon an unexplored territory i.e. the social response that women are subjected to when they are divorced or live by themselves.

Emerald, published in 1984, is a story of two young educated women who devoted their lives to a handsome man. The protagonist, Zeng Ling'er who is a strong-willed woman takes the blame for her lover, Zuo Wei; Zuo Wei had committed a petty crime during the Cultural Revolution, for which Zeng Ling'er not only endured psychological and physical torture for him but also secretly bore him an illegitimate son, Taotao.

Leaden Wings which came out in 1987, is a social-realist novel that takes the modernization of China's economy as its central theme. It shows that despite the fall of Gang of Four, chaos was still prevalent in China and with it a mood of confusion and disenchantment. The book reflects Zhang's strongly-held views on the value of the individual, and that economic reform should be accompanied by social and political reform.

Her magnum opus and her last work *Without Words* that came out in 2002 was a novel spanning 20th century China. In keeping up with most other works of Zhang Jie that are critical and satirical, *Without Words* also has a critical tone as it reflects the radical changes brought about by modernization, and especially with regards to how life has changed for women in China. Her most recent publication was her novel covering her last months spent with her mother, as she named it *A Love Story between Mother and Daughter*. The novel is also considered to be a reflection of social changes in China.

Zhang Jie was criticized for both *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* and *The Ark*. She was accused of lacking revolutionary radiance that was one of the most important requirements in literary production from 1942 to the end of Mao period. She was accused of portraying immorality in *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* and for promoting fickleness in *The Ark*. She has been written about and criticized for almost all her works; most criticized of Zhang Jie's works so far have been *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, *The Ark*, *Leaden Wings* and *Without Words*. Critics such as Wang Fei and Li Xifan have undertaken an extensive research and criticism of her works. This is the primary reason why criticisms by Wang Fei and Li Xifan have been chosen for this study, with some other critics as well. Moreover, they have not only analyzed her works in detail, but also both critics continued to be concerned about the criterion of political correctness.

Wang Fei (王绯)

Wang Fei, an eminent critic of China, who has served as the editor of popular literary magazines such as *Literary Review* (文艺评论) has discussed 'artistic spirit' and 'world outlook' of the women writers in general in his article "Zhang Jie: Transition in the World Outlook - Thoughts of a Literary Age".

He explains Wilhelm Worringer's⁴ views that the 'artistic spirit' of the art activities comes from the attitude that people build from everyday view of the world and from the psychological attitude formed by people; Worringer named this attitude as the 'world outlook', and it includes the subjective content such as the feelings, impressions, and views that people develop towards the world, and reduce it to a derived object.⁵ Once the 'world outlook' intrinsically transform into 'Artistic spirit', it becomes visible externally in the arts activities.

Following on the same formulation, Wang says: To understand women's world outlook and its transformation, Zhang Jie is perhaps the best area of research. Zhang Jie is a mystery. Style of her transformation is merely superficial from outside, on the underside, she's hiding something worth exploring. To decode the mystery of transformation of Zhang Jie is an event of great significance in itself".⁶ He terms women's world outlook as bisexual, i.e. the reflection of social life from a women's perspective and from a neutral perspective. In the sense of artistic performance, it goes beyond the women's consciousness, women's feelings, or life experiences, to create a second world of feminist literature which is a 'genderless' novel culture. The changes in women's world outlook are driving this transformation, in (literary) style & form, and gives unique value of recognition. The value of this recognition can be better revealed only if there's anticipation of reading only from the women's perspective, opines Wang Fei.

Wang further explains how Zhang Jie grew with each work, starting from *The Child From the Forest*. He says: "If one reads *What Disease He Has* (1987), *Bait*, *Crossing the Road* and *There's only One Sun* (1988), Zhang Jie's style & form in this transformation are surprising. "It is hard to believe that the one who once wrote *The Child From the Forest* (1978), *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, *Emerald*, which gives a strong impression of classicism of Zhang Jie, and one who has written *Who Knows How to Live* (1979), *The Ark*, *Leaden Wings* that gives a realist impression of her, one finds that she can rebel and uphold that thorough feeling in her bones, she was quick to move from the Classical Idealism to the Cold Realism of Marxism, then turned to Modernism".⁷ Wang Fei has discussed her works in details, going systematically from piece to piece, and analyzed all her works in depth. About her first work, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, he feels this work, in particular, made people notice, understand and recognize Zhang Jie. Wang further discusses Zhong Yu's character and her 'undying love' to say: "This is the inevitability of the culture, and is also astringent fruit of the civilization. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden

⁴ Wilhelm Worringer, a German art historian and philosopher, is best-known for his work *Abstraction and Empathy*. In it he argued that there were two main kinds of art: art of 'abstraction' (which was associated with a more 'primitive' world view) and art of 'empathy' (which was associated with realism in the broadest sense of the word). He is credited by philosopher Gilles Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* as being the first person to see abstraction 'as the very beginning of art or the first expression of an artistic will'.

⁵ 王绯 (Wang Fei), 《张洁: 转型世界感——一种文学年龄的断想》 (Zhang Jie: Transition in World Outlook - Thoughts of a Literary Age), 《张洁文集》 (Literary Collections of Zhang Jie), p.147, Downloaded on 23 May.2010 from the weblink <http://ishare.iask.sina.com.cn/f/6212203.html>, translation by the scholar

⁶ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.147. translation by the scholar

⁷ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.147. translation by the scholar

of Eden and began to bear the human pain of life, but one who cannot escape the pain, like them, should not eat the forbidden fruit of wisdom?”⁸ Almost all the people who pay attention to Zhang Jie’s creative activities believe that *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* is certainly the embodiment of life’s experiences of suffering. She describes the beauty of ‘emotional value’ of love, and her work are a continuation of love themes. It is this experience of suffering, that made Zhang Jie realize the worth of soul value of love, to be able to grasp the narrative technique through her internal knowledge and not external knowledge, to get deep into the character of Zhong Yu or her emotional world, and exhibit to the people a cruel cultural fact that: Love because it is not free to honour, therefore cannot be forgotten, because it cannot be forgotten, it has a unique spiritual value.

Both Wang Fei and Li Xifan are of the view that, as a kind of human spirit of existence, sexual love has always accompanied and united with the earnest desire of love, however, under the iron rule (铁律) of civilization, human being’s wishes of love are certainly suppressed by this force. Love cannot fulfill and give freely as it has endless tragedy of its own. Love of humanity, under the eternal conflict between life and culture, shows its own superiority in the tragic tale. Describing such a lofty sense reveals that all the tragic love is an old ancient literary theme. Only under this theme can flow such profound and classical poetic emotion like Zhong Yu’s.... “Zhong Yu and her lover both want to forget one another, holding on to the fear and avoiding the “I love you” feeling that they cannot help but speak up; she could completely forget the hope for love and pin their hopes on the time and space.”⁹

Zhong Yu and her lover could not get married ever because the fate of a third person was involved. In order not to affect another person's life and give up your own, their conscience tread under the sexual morality of the civilization; because they cannot give up their resistance to vitality of burning desire, the reality of unfulfilled love, physical (material) and illusion became the only choice of Zhong Yu. Wang Fei says,

“Zhong Yu’s innocence, in significant sense, was a product of huge suppression of the civilizational sexual morality, it is a mysterious human strength, depth and clear spiritual value of love, which indicates great feats of a culture created in brutality, and this point, has long been discussed by intellectuals”.¹⁰ Their spirit of love not only goes beyond the ethical barriers, but also goes beyond life and death. His death did not interrupt her in writing words straight from her heart in a notebook; symbol of extraordinary significance which acquired a powerful force of love. “Chekhov’s collection of stories, which also served as a token of love, entered heaven to rest in peace with her soul”.¹¹

According to Wang Fei, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* was written on lines of Marx and Engels *Principles of Communism*. As this work from the perspective of sociology, although this novel is

⁸ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.148. translation by the scholar

⁹ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.148. translation by the scholar

¹⁰ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.149. translation by the scholar

¹¹ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.148. translation by the scholar

considered as the attempt by Zhang Jie to write literature in the form of book notes, after the study of Marx and Engel's *Principles of Communism* and *Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, but it almost touched the insoluble problems of life. Wang cites Freud and describes the three stages in the process of cultural development of human marriage, and said, "in the first phase, all kinds of sexual behaviour cannot lead to reproduction, but one is free to indulge in them. In the second phase, except the one that culminates in reproduction, all the other satisfying sexual interactions shall be suppressed. Then in the third phase, only when it is 'legitimate' to give birth only then sexual satisfaction must be achieved".¹² Wang Fei feels the sexual morality of the Chinese civilization belongs to the third category as sexual freedom is more restricted; people who by nature are strong and surge in open rebellion, at the same time, people who are weak by nature, are placed under the dual attack of cultural forces and psychological pressures. Wang Fei explains the point further: "Zhong Yu's almost melancholic spirit of love can be seen as under attack of this double emotional distortion. From the perspective of psychology, love can make unusual 'symbols' (in her case, Chekhov's collection of books and her diary) to teach people the power of love; Zhong Yu's innocent feelings of material love substituted sexual love, this is against nature's culture; one is most certainly unable to escape this culture. So, this is her self-found ideal refuge of sexual love under the eternal conflict between culture and life".¹³ Wang Fei feels *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* is a classical trend of sentiment of pain and idealism, while *Emerald* is an endless love tale.

From the concept of universal nature, love should be the highest form of all values and abilities. Like in *Emerald*, Zeng Linger's endless love is an experience of women's pains and blues, but from the other side if one examines this experience, this is what makes this novel, which got the National Award for best novella, possess a unique value and recognition. Zeng Linger's love had created the miracle of life in a specific historical era, and healed her trauma or her fate (referring to the Cultural Revolution). Women's love is portrayed as giving out of unconditional love without expecting anything in return, total commitment, a high degree of ecstasy, a fearless sacrifice, a brave defense, a generous kindness, great tolerance, and an enduring patience. "As if she had received guidance of religious sentiment from Virgin Mary, Zeng Linger's endless love made her exhibit exceptional strengths of personality".¹⁴ Indeed, the endless love of Zeng Linger, just like many women, was all her life. As Wang Fei explains: "Only women can possibly have endless love like Zeng Linger's, thereby adding to the world, since ancient times till today, so many silly stories of women with pessimistic heart. Putting aside the bad luck caused by Zeng Linger's specific historical and political background, only from the human perspective, can we comprehend some of the true meaning of love from Zeng Linger".¹⁵ We see this world outlook, be it in the significance of women or in universal significance of human, both can create Zhang Jie's aesthetic style. Wang Fei while discussing Zhang Jie's growth onto another level, says: "Zhang Jie's mature age in literature have shown self-transcendence which is astonishing, and exhibit affinity with social and political knowledge, and emotional alienation of women in the past (such as the so-called 'female male' in *The Ark*)

¹² Ibid., Wang Fei, p.149. translation by the scholar

¹³ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.149. translation by the scholar

¹⁴ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.150. translation by the scholar

¹⁵ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.150. translation by the scholar

and strong defense and a serious attitude towards the world and towards orthodoxy”.¹⁶ He hints that Zhang Jie’s gender positioning is not about traditional inequality between men and women, and not similar to that of *The Ark*, but rather when women gain her political, economic and cultural rights that she should have in all aspects of life, ‘people’ in general should have a modern view of the soul of women and women’s ‘self’ in a man’s world. This is an important theme of the modern women’s writing as she goes through ‘female’ to ‘women’s rights’ and finally gets to the ‘women’s consciousness’.

Commenting on *The Child from the Forest*, Wang Fei discusses Zhang Jie’s age that like many people and even like China itself, Zhang was already not very young. However, after the turmoil of ‘Cultural Revolution’ where her heart suffered trauma, her heart didn’t stop weaving hope and fairy-tale with poetry. He explains, “She is sincere, not a bit hypocritical or pretentious. In her pen, the mysterious forest was locked in cruelty and sin of a brutal era, and buried the chaotic autumn of world that slaughtered people mercilessly with a political knife. A decade’s calamity that the country suffered, it separated life from death; but in Zhang Jie’s eyes it had not brought the destruction or the end of the world. She then becomes the successor of the dead and alive heritage, promoter of ‘longing for brightness, pursuit of truth, love of life’ and teaching of one beautiful soul to another beautiful soul reflects a kind of eternal religious sentiment”.¹⁷

In *There is a Youth* and *Who Knows How to Live*, she empathised with the unrecovered pain, which was an outcome of social unrest caused by crude and cynical behaviour of the generation and call upon optimism ‘to save the hopes in their heart’. Like a lost lamb facing the Virgin Mary, she calls upon her deep feelings we all know to preach the civilized manners into the boy from *Who Knows How to Live*. In her mind, the world really is full of hope, and one should completely love and trust. “Like a pure little girl wants the world full of blossoming flowers, Zhang Jie strongly makes people believe that the world will not collapse, and there’s no such era of collapse”.¹⁸ It is this ‘world outlook’ that dominates and dictates Zhang Jie’s ‘artistic quality and spirit’; it makes her show her love for beauty and fineness. Thus, she could not help encouraging and educate using her own aesthetics, which almost looks like a style of religious worship.

In her heart, literature was like a flag, one that’s hand dyed with the blood, one that doesn’t fall down. Wang Fei describes Zhang Jie’s personal situation of early nineties, when many people out of poverty and wanted to improve their standard of living, and wandered into the bitter sea, Zhang Jie, also struggled to work hard... She was rushing between two elderly sick people, her mother and her husband, at the same time kept holding on to literature with all her heart, ‘still with that flag stained with blood’, and supported her family with writing. In her works in this period, compared to her creation of the late eighties, her sophistication and ferociousness is even more evident. “Her heart seemed too much heavy and has inextricably hidden bitterness and resentment, as if it doesn’t get burst in silence but gets

¹⁶ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.151. translation by the scholar

¹⁷ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.147. translation by the scholar

¹⁸ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.148. translation by the scholar

terminated in silence; she cannot help but become particularly hysterical, especially like a mad woman, and in this effort the literature that comes out of a ‘blood’ dye can only be evil”.¹⁹

From *What Disease He Has* onwards, there has been a visible irregularity in Zhang Jie’s works. “Zhang Jie is not doubtful but is greatly disappointed in the world. If we say that this disappointment brings the aging and distortion of spirit in people, then it still brings Zhang Jie anxiety and peculiarities of a life like menopause. Zhang Jie became sophisticated, pungent, sharp, and cynical with time.”²⁰ Wang explains this dramatic transformation as her rebelling in her maturity & sternness of adult age in the literature; her hidden emotions and grievances that earlier resided in normal sentiments were exposed now. She also, without losing face in social orthodoxy, had reasonable social and literary observation and knowledge. Thus, we get to see a new avatar of Zhang Jie, where people deem her hysterical to cynical to mad woman.

Another of her works, *Leaden Wings* sparked off heated debate and strong reactions when it was first published in China in 1987. It described the post-Cultural Revolution struggle between industrial reformer and their opponents in and around the ministry of heavy machinery. In the novel Zheng Ziyun, a vice minister, is keen to promote new ideas of “industrial psychology” to improve efficiency and promote production. Parallel to this high-level attempt at modernization, a similar shake-up is described in the Dawn Motor Works where a new manager’s financial initiative improves conditions for the workers after he has dismissed the full-time party secretaries in each workshop. The opponents of these vanguards are caricatured as corrupt, weak and vengeful.

The issue of *Leaden Wings*’s evaluation was discussed in a meeting organized by *Literary Gazette* in November 1987. Prominent critic Yu Kexun writes that around the same time the critical essay by Chen Juntao “Evaluation of Novel 《Leaden Wings》” which offered minute analysis of this novel & also gave it a relatively high assessment. Other quarterly magazines also came up with critical essays like “A Masterpiece of Keeping Pace with History’s Progress- Evaluating ‘Leaden Wings’ ” (和历史的进取同一步伐的力作-评《沉重的翅膀》) by Yang Guixin and “Dare to Cry for Four Modernizations- Evaluating Zhang Jie’s ‘Leaden Wings’ ” (勇于为四化呼喊-评张洁的《沉重的翅膀》) by Min Ze etc.”²¹ As Frances Wood say in a review of *Leaden Wings* “The novel begins with promise as peripheral characters, many of them women, are introduced in a series of deft sketches. Yet, as Delia Devin points out in her afterword, many of the female characters ‘shock or disappoint more than they inspire’. At best they are worn out by their acceptance of drudgery, at worst, they are scheming and corrupt. The personal and political struggle with their multiple roots and their multiple effects are accurately described as are the

¹⁹ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.154. translation by the scholar

²⁰ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.151. translation by the scholar

²¹ Yu, Kexun, 于可训, (1988), 《中国当代文学手册》(A Guide to Contemporary Chinese Literature), Hubei Education Press, Hubei, p.202.

home lives of the worn-out women. Though it informs, and despite heroic efforts by Gladys Yang and Delia Devin, *Leaden Wings* remains disappointing as literature”.²²

On the other hand, Wang Fei is of the opinion that she is a writer who cannot be considered moderate in her approach as they feel that only the extreme form of exposure to emotional state, can really release their artistic spirit. He explains: “What Zhang Jie embraces, is concerned about, doubts and has a cold view of, undoubtedly, belong to each one of us, she gives us all a world that had too many temptations, too much hope, too much worries and too much disappointment. The changes in the world outlook, underlie the rhythm of the times and society. Zhang Jie’s transformation of style & form is a derivative of this rhythm”²³ Wang Fei has emphasized on the positivity of her characters which in a way is a reflection of Zhang Jie’s ‘self’; that people do not hope that god (a bigger force above) will die. They hope they are lucky because, no matter how ugly the world gets or how it breaks, as long as God is alive in people’s hearts, the world will not lose its perception of beauty.

Li Xifan and others

Li Xifan (李希凡) is another prominent literary critic of China who received approval by Chairman Mao Zedong himself for his research on *Dream of Red Chamber*. The article “If There’s a So-Called Heaven...”²⁴, Li not only undertakes a criticism of Zhang Jie’s works, but also quotes and comments on another critic comrade Qiu Yun’s criticism of Zhang Jie. Li is of the opinion that while evaluating Zhang’s works, “Comrade Qiu Yun has tried to seize special traits of her personality as well. Qiu Yun had pointed out that: Zhang Jie’s novels and essays give the impression that, ‘as if she would like to see an elegant and graceful painting of light colours, poetic meaning posed in a layer of gentle sadness among the hazy mist’. I have read Zhang Jie’s *Child from the Forest*, *Where Did She Go*, *The Girl Flying a Kite* etc., including the screenplay, and we all agree with Comrade Qiu Yun’s evaluation. Zhang Jie’s works, her ‘touch of sadness’ not only touches the reader’s heart with a unique hue and feelings, but also her gloomy and innovative ideas inspires in people a yearning for beauty. However, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* this story, I have some different ideas and views from Comrade Qiu Yun”.²⁵ Li Xifan while discussing the climax of *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* asks that this ‘love’, of course ‘cannot not be forgotten’, but whether anything can be done to avoid such a tragedy? He feels that the author has thought about it before writing it, but still wrote a very predictable draft: “In the age of Communism, will the issues of separation of marriage and love not happen? Since the world is so big, when people call out to one another they may not answer. So, will such things still happen? But this sadness.. Oh! Do we have a way out of this tragedy?

²² Book review by Wood, Frances, (1988), “Leaden Wings” by Zhang Jie, *The China Quarterly*, Virago press, London, vol. no.113, p.137.

²³ Ibid., Wang Fei, p.147. translation by the scholar

²⁴李希凡 (Li Xifan), (1980), 《倘若真有所谓天国...》, (If There’s a So-Called Heaven...) 《文艺报》 (Literary Gazette), No.5 in 《张洁文集》 (Literary Collections of Zhang Jie), downloaded on 23 May.2010 from the web link <http://ishare.iask.sina.com.cn/f/6212203.html>, translation by the scholar.

²⁵ Ibid, Li Xifan, p.159, translation by the scholar.

According to the classification of Comrade Qiu Yun, my view of the story may be is that it belongs to a kind of unpleasant feeling that only a category of ‘some readers’ can comprehend”.²⁶

Xu Kun (徐坤), herself a woman writer of standing, discusses *Without Words* in “Zhang Jie- Hate is More Lasting than Love”.²⁷ She says: “This conclusion horrifies me, the moment she says ‘We’- she completely wipes out the expectations of the real love of many women. Made of blood and tears, madness and despair mixed to construct a ‘bible’ like this, who can decipher it? How can one imagine, the Zhang Jie of *Without Words*, was the same Zhang Jie who was full of love, with tearful misty eyes crying *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* 20 years back? What happened in 20 years? And after 20 year’s long ‘sharp sword’ carves a mark on a spiritual and intelligent woman, will it make her an immortal fruit?”²⁸ Xu Kun admits having been deeply moved by the compassion in *Without Words* but questions the relationships while comparing it to *Gone Is the Person Who Loved Me the Most*. She asks: “In the world, men and women love each other, and then there is blood relation factor in mother and daughter’s love, after all which one is more important? Who is our last emotional refuge and emotional nourishment?”²⁹

Li Guiren (李贵仁), another critic, while discussing *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* in “She Offers Two Pure Heart - On How to Understand *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* ” feels that this work reflects nothing but contradictions of marriage and love. Quoting two prominent Chinese Literary critics Xiao Lin and Li Xifan, he says: “Both Xiao Lin and Li Xifan acknowledges that in our society, there are still painful love-less marriages, and that for this kind of ‘imperfect social life’, ‘the writers should absolutely criticize’, but specifically talking of the ‘hero’ in the plot, they are convinced that this loveless marriage is impossible. This is clearly inappropriate”.³⁰ It is clear that Li Guiren differs from Xiao Lin’s and Li Xifan’s stand on literary criticism of Zhang Jie’s works; he feels that the problem this novel reflects is undoubtedly serious and deep. In his view, the contradictions of love and marriage that it exposes is essentially the contradiction between the ideal and the real life.

²⁶ Ibid, Li Xifan, p.159, translation by the scholar.

²⁷徐坤 (Xu Kun), 《张洁——恨比爱更长久》(Zhang Jie- Hate is More Lasting than Love), 《张洁文集》(Literary Collections of Zhang Jie), p.158, downloaded on 23 May. 2010 from the weblink <http://ishare.iask.sina.com.cn/f/6212203.html>, translation by the scholar.

²⁸ Ibid. Xu Kun, p.158, translation by the scholar.

²⁹ Ibid. Xu Kun, p.158, translation by the scholar.

³⁰李贵仁 (Li Guiren), (1980), “她捧出的是两颗纯洁的心 ——谈怎样理解《爱，是不能忘记的》” (She Offers Two Pure Hearts - On How to Understand *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*), *Beijing Literature and Art* (北京文艺) in 《张洁文集》(Literary Collections of Zhang Jie), downloaded on 23 May.2010 from the weblink <http://ishare.iask.sina.com.cn/f/6212203.html>, translation by the Scholar.

An in-depth analysis of Zhang Jie's representative works have been done by using the comparative analytical method which compares Zhang Jie's images of women with that found in the literary works of earlier periods, to reflect the evolving nature of women's consciousness in her works. Qualitative research criterion has been used to study the response and criticism generated by her works, literary or political, as is clear above.

In conclusion, it is evident that Mao's China was dominated by 'political literature'; added to this was the intense emotional experience of the Cultural Revolution. It is in the post-reform period where we see a vibrant variety of themes and issues being brought into the mainstream literary production; this period saw a gradual distancing from political content, and many women writers made their mark with writings on gender.

Zhang Jie was one such writer of the post-Mao era who contributed enormously in reflecting the women's consciousness since the late 1970's. In the process, she played an important role in highlighting the Chinese women's cause. Zhang Jie made significant literary innovations by articulating the contemporary Chinese women's reality as she breaks away from the dominant norms of character portrayal under the literary discourse based on the Yan'an Talks, i.e. just black and white portrayal of characters. There are no shades of grey or no room for nuances.

In China's case where literary criticism often involves political criticism of the works as well, critics have often indulged in personal criticism of the writers as well. Few critics provided historical criticisms, i.e. look into the historical and social circumstances that surrounded the writing of a particular text, Li Guiren was one exception. Interestingly, many critics despite criticizing Zhang Jie on personal front, by calling her mad woman or calling her works 'evil', still agreed that loveless marriages are part of our society or abusive marriages are also a social reality; their criticism of Zhang Jie's works seem inadequately measured or an oversight of gravity of situation, at best.