

'Body Writing' in Beijing: Gender Liberation or Limitation?

*Two close-reading analyses of gender construction in 'body writing' novels set
in early 2000's Beijing.*

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Conventions

In order to avoid confusion I have decided to use the name 'People's Republic of China' when speaking of mainland China after 1949. Between 1911 and 1949 I will use the term 'Republican China' or 'modern China' and prior to 1911 I prefer to use 'pre-modern China' or the name of the reigning dynasty as its name. For lengthy terms I will write down the full name only once, from then on continuing to use the abbreviated version, for instance: 'People's Republic of China (now PRC)'.

For the transcription of Chinese characters to the Latin alphabet Hanyu Pinyin is used. Chinese terms will be introduced by their translation first, followed by their characters and transcription in Hanyu Pinyin between brackets. Since this thesis focuses mostly on *fin de siècle* PRC, Chinese characters will be provided in Simplified Chinese [简体字 *jiǎntǐ zì*]. Names of Chinese individuals will be mentioned by their family name first and their given name second, for instance: Yin Lichuan. This is not the case if the author or publisher decided to conform to Western conventions, as is the case with Xin Yang.

1. Introduction

At the end of the 20th century a new literary genre came to life in the People's Republic of China (from now on PRC). Its authors are named the 'beauty writers' [美女人家 *měinǚ zuòjiā*] and their style of writing that focuses on the bodily experience – in specific the female sexuality – is called 'body writing' [身体写作 *shēntǐ xiězuò*].⁰ The beauty writers caused a controversy in the PRC, which made them even more popular. Much research has already been done on why the beauty writers were considered controversial, how the PRC authorities handled the controversy, and whether these novels should be considered literature or pulp fiction. The methodology I propose in this thesis is focusing on close-readings of two novels rather than research in a political or social context. Similar research has been done on other novels within the genre, which is why I am of the opinion this methodology is valuable to my own analyses. I have chosen two novels from authors who have been labelled as beauty writers⁰: Chun Sue's *Beijing Doll* [北京娃娃 *Běijīng Wáwa*] and Yin Lichuan's *Fucker* [贱人 *Jiànrén*]. This thesis will focus on the construction of gender roles of the novels – mostly but not exclusively within the stories themselves – and will try to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is the gender construction in the stories of *Beijing Doll* and *Fucker*?
- 2) Does this construction deviate from older notions of gender construction in China and if yes, how so?
- 3) Where does the controversy surrounding the beauty writers stem from?

I have chosen these novels, because they have not been researched to the extent others have, such as Mian Mian's *Candy* [糖 *Táng*] and Weihui's *Shanghai Baby* [上海宝贝 *Shànghǎi Bǎobèi*]. I am also interested in the importance of location: *Beijing Doll* and *Fucker* are both set in Beijing rather than Shanghai. The difference in the location might seem frivolous when analysing gender roles, but might turn out to be quite telling.

Before introducing my analyses it is important to provide the reader with an understanding of the beauty writers, which I shall communicate in chapter 2. Chapter 3 introduces theories that will help define the notions of beauty and desire and will explain the mechanisms working behind the constructions of gender and sexuality. Chapter 4 will combine the aforementioned chapters for a condensed portrayal of China's history of beauty and sexuality. Chapters 5 and 6 will consist of my analyses on *Beijing Doll* and *Fucker*; in the final chapter I will give my answer to the research questions mentioned previously and suggest topics for future research.

⁰ Also known under many other names, see: Scheen, Lena. *Shanghai: Literary Imaginings of a City in Transformation*. Amsterdam University Press. 2015, p. 121.

⁰ Yang, Xin. *From Beauty Fear to Beauty Fever*. Peter Lang, 2011, p. 11.

2. The Beauty Writers

2.1 Introducing the Beauty Writers

The beauty writers are a group of female writers from the PRC born in the 1970's who published novels around the turn of the century (1996-2007). Their semi-autobiographical stories are characterized by topics considered a taboo in China, such as (pre-marital and casual) sex, drug use and crime.⁰ The writers actively pursued materialism in a cosmopolitan city, which was part of a transnational and cross-cultural fantasy, an imagination that expresses the public frenzy to identify with the new, exotic and global opportunities. ⁰ They had an urge for self-expression, drive to market themselves and were actively promoting their own novels and images. They often modelled, using trendy makeup, hairstyles and fashion accessories and showcased provocative, rebellious or seducing looks. Their topics, writing style and self-marketing made them quite controversial in the PRC, ranging from the government's policies on restricting certain topics to the literary discourse whether this genre is literature or commercial pulp fiction, since the genre seems to be bordering between the two.⁰ The beauty writers were by no means a homogenous group, though they were always grouped under the over-simplified categories of 'beauty writers'. The categorization in subgroups showed some distinction between the writers' styles and stories. The most well-known authors categorized as beauty writers are Weihui and Mian Mian.⁰ Weihui was arguably the most controversial literary figure around the turn of the century after the publication of her novel *Shanghai Baby*.⁰ Labelled as one of the 'stylish bad girls' group she was especially known for her explicit writings of female sexuality and her desire for a glamorous life. Mian Mian made her international debut with *Candy*, a novel portraying the pain of youth, physical and mental illness and the underground scene of Shanghai. Moreover, she is quite likely the first to publish a novel on drugs in the PRC.⁰

2.2 How the Genre Originated

The beauty writers first emerged in literary journals in the category of 'writers born in the 1970s' and were addressed as the 'newer-new generation' [新新人类 *xīnxīn rénlèi*] to distinguish them from writers born a decade earlier. Their generation was called that, because it was the first generation to grow up

⁰ Yang (2011), pp. 1-2.

⁰ Id., pp. 8-9.

⁰ Id., pp. 1-2.

⁰ I am following Scheen's decision of writing the name as one, since the author only uses her given name as a pen name. See Scheen (2015), p. 102 (footnote).

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 55.

⁰ Id., pp. 11, 28, 30.

without first-hand experience in the pain and poverty of war. The 1970s category was uncommon in that the writers were grouped according to their age rather than the common motifs and grounds of their literary products.⁰ According to labelled beauty writer Wei Wei, her generation began writing by imitating the general format and content of foreign novels with slight modifications to adjust to the local situation.⁰ In this ‘newer-new’ genre female writers occupied a dominant position. Three male intellectuals in top positions of magazine companies orchestrated the collective debut of these women – including Weihui and Mian Mian – in the July 1998 issue of *Writer* (作家 zuòjiā), an important literary magazine. The term ‘beauty writer’ was first used by Weihui in this very issue and became a trending word for the media.⁰ As the men had expected, the women’s visual and textual self-representation created quite a sensation. Although this was not the first opportunity for beauty writers to get published, this was the most collective and public debut.⁰ The name already set the scene for the boundary blurring genre; throughout Chinese history, the notion of ‘writer’ implies a sense of literacy, of the scholarly elite whereas ‘beauty’ seems erotic⁰ and – in my opinion – trivial when compared to intellect. The beauty writers are similar to the writers of the *Shanghai School* (上海派 Hǎi Pài) of the 1930-40s.⁰ This style of writing consisted of sentimental love stories, detectives and lyrical accounts of daily life. They also had a negative connotation, especially according to the *Beijing School* (京派 Jīng Pài) who called these authors superficial, sentimental and promoting foreign decadence. The most famous female writer of that time is the internationally famous Eileen Chang (张爱玲 Zhāng Àilíng),⁰ who has been an example for several beauty writers. In the late 1990s previous female authors including Eileen Chang were re-evaluated and re-addressed with their femininity as the focus rather than their literary talent, being called beauties rather than talented women (才女 cáinǚ).⁰

⁰ Id., pp. 2, 27-30.

⁰ Id., p. 8.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 3-4, 20-21.

⁰ Id, p. 24. According to Scheen the very first debut was in the magazine *Fiction World* (小说界 Xiǎoshuō Jiè) in 1996. See Scheen (2015), p. 119.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 4.

⁰ The name originated for a group of Shanghai-based painters who broke with tradition, but the name later spread to other cultural disciplines; see Scheen (2015) p. 35.

⁰ Scheen (2015), pp. 34-36.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 25.

2.3 The Reception of the Beauty Writers

The main readership of the beauty writers in the PRC consisted of *xiaozi* [小资 *xiǎozī*, literally 'small bourgeoisie']. This refers to a taste, a lifestyle and an imagination rather than a real class in the economic sense. The *xiaozi* emerged after the de-revolutionalization of daily life, the rise of the new urban (white-collar) professional class and the circulation and consumption of global cultural commodities. One of these new commodities was the Internet; a new world full of other *xiaozi*, but also an alternative space for aspiring authors to secure readership and fame if the conventional routes of publishing were not successful. The authors would publish their works online, made their pictures available for downloading, keep blogs and chat with their readers. Some authors would gain online literary success that resulted in their works to be published in print. Interestingly, despite not directly challenging the CCP some of their novels were banned by the government. This, however, rapidly expanded the beauty writers' readership, with millions of curious readers clicking on their webpages to have a peek at these controversial novels. This official taboo led to businesses burning their official copies or had them confiscated by government officials, but also to secretly appropriating the works by (successfully) selling bootlegs.⁰ In other words, within the circle of *xiaozi* the novels were a hit. It was this controversy that made publishers abroad eager to have these novels translated and published in their respective countries. It is likely the publishers anticipated the readers' curiosity to what scandalous content could receive a ban by a non-capitalist government, which is why the publishers emphasized the novels were (originally) banned in the PRC. Despite becoming bestselling authors, the novels of the beauty writers were not received well by readers abroad. When looking at readers' reviews on Amazon the ratings for *Shanghai Baby* are 2.5 stars out of five and 3.21 stars out of five on popular reading website Goodreads.⁰ The disappointment by readers worldwide might be due to the fact that the novels were politicized by the publishers but lacked political content⁰, or perhaps the self-sexualizing nature of the beauty writers was a phenomenon already naturalized in most Western countries.

The beauty writers' writing style has also been subjected to criticism by literary critics; they are too concerned with themselves, their feelings and other trivialities rather than portraying the broader context of the era's *zeitgeist* through large political and social events. Although it seems the beauty writers are superficial in their writings and feelings, the subtext reveals a broader context. After all, a representation of personal life is also an (alternative) way to narrate a larger story.⁰ As Lena Scheen has mentioned in her research, the novels are arguably not valuable from a literary perspective, but

⁰ Id., pp. 41, 43- 48, 61.

⁰ https://www.amazon.com/Shanghai-Baby-Novel-Wei-Hui/dp/0743421574/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1515499709&sr=1-2&keywords=shanghai+baby & https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/261479.Shanghai_Baby

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 32; Scheen (2015), p. 204 and Edwards, Louise & Jeffreys, Elaine. *Celebrity in China*. Hong Kong University Press, 2010, p. 137.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 31 & Scheen (2015), p. 118.

are a representative of Chinese fiction around the turn of the century.⁰ However, due to varying reasons many writers did not accept to be labelled as a beauty writer. Weihui consciously differentiated herself from other beauties by stressing her academic background.⁰ Mian Mian hated that her pains and addictions described in *Candy* were commercially packaged as 'cool' and 'entertaining' and she openly denounced the mainstream institution, expressing more affection with a subculture experience.⁰ Chun Sue has stated she is neither a writer nor a representative of her generation, since that would be too much of a responsibility; she can only represent herself.⁰ The spark of controversy slowly faded around the 2010s as the topics within the novels had gradually naturalized. The authors themselves matured and had fully absorbed and manipulated their transnational imagination constructed in their text; some changed their opinions, lifestyles and writings or have slipped to oblivion.⁰ In short, the beauty writers are no longer a trend.

⁰ Scheen (2015), p. 103.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 55.

⁰ Id., pp. 37-38.

⁰ <http://content.time.com/time/covers/asia/0,16641,20040202,00.html>

⁰ Yang (2011), pp. 1, 3, 12-13, 87.

3. Beauty Theory and Gender Constructions

This chapter will provide a basic understanding into visual beauty theory as it is the foundation of the analyses in chapters 5 and 6. The notions of beauty, gender and sexuality are closely related and often intertwined, so all will be included in this chapter.

3.1 Defining Beauty

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is a common proverb and many cultures across time and space have had a similar phrase indicating beauty is subjective.⁰ Beauty is a judgement of a person or a group of people, and the object of judgement can be tangible like a human body, natural like a landscape, artistic like music or abstract like an idea. Judging and defining beauty is a universal phenomenon.⁰ However, each group or individual brings elements – such as gender, geographical area, culture and time – into play while judging beauty. This means beauty is subjective, although the majority of people might have common rough measures to define beauty – such as a strong focus on facial features.⁰ But when one group of people views another, what or who decides what is beautiful? I shall use examples from China to illustrate this. The most powerful group of people defines the norms for beauty and liken these to their own looks. For instance, in pre-modern China the rulers in the capital viewed the Caucasoid people on the western outskirts of the empire as aesthetically inferior. This explains why in the 19th century when people of the West and East met they were mutually not impressed with the other’s appearance. Each group viewed themselves as the more powerful and therefore the more beautiful. When during the Opium Wars (1840-1842; 1856-1860) powers reversed and the Westerners became the more powerful in this exchange, Chinese views of Westerners’ appearance gradually changed to a positive judgement. This shows how one’s judgement of another’s appearance is a product of one’s evaluation of that group’s culture.⁰ Interestingly, observations of the same gender differed greatly from those of the opposite gender; the men who described their encounters with foreign men of a faraway culture were mostly negative about the other’s appearance, whereas foreign women were often considered to be beautiful.⁰ There is not much information on women’s perception on foreign people throughout history, which can be explained by the more restraining life women of both sides of the continent lived: more women were

⁰ Cho Kyo. *The Search for the Beautiful Woman*. Rowman et Littlefield, 2012, pp. 7, 9; Scruton, Roger. *Beauty*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 7.

⁰Scruton (2009), pp. xi-x, 1.

⁰ Cho (2012), pp. 6-7, 252.

⁰ Id., p. 4-5, 10.

⁰ Id., p. 3.

illiterate than men, their works would not have been published as easily as men's and they had less freedom for travels.

3.2 The Consumption of Beauty

The definition of beauty in the previous paragraph was kept abstract in order to be applicable to all cultures. However, when it comes to the consumption of beauty it is too ambitious to construct a universally applicable framework. Unfortunately, much of the theory on this topic has focused on western cultures, but in my opinion the next theories work well within the framework of my research.

When looking at the consumption of beauty the role of gender is vital. In 1973 Mulvey demonstrated the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the norm for visibility and narrative in film.⁰ She states the modern western culture is a patriarchal and a phallogocentric one: "Woman (...) stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, (...) [on] which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions (...) by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."⁰ This is especially evident in Hollywood film where visual pleasure is interwoven with erotic elements – mostly embodied by the woman and her beauty – while always adhering to the dominant patriarchal structure. One of these visual elements made erotic is voyeurism, which provides sexual stimulants from a one-way transaction of a subject (the spectator) actively gazing at an object (the on-screen character) that does not know it is being looked at. This is called the 'male gaze'. Conditions of screening and narrative conventions create an illusion for the spectator of looking in on a private world.⁰ According to Mulvey, "traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and (...) for the spectator (...)." ⁰ A knowing and narcissistic object, however, can flip this transaction by displaying oneself and inviting a sexual gaze, called exhibitionism. A woman's pleasure in exhibitionism is often considered provocative and undesirable. In both these transactions of pleasure it is the man who is the subject and the woman who is the object. In the exhibitionistic pleasure this makes the woman simultaneously looked at and displayed. In narrative a woman is not portrayed as a character on her own or a part of the plot; she is merely a provocation or representation, always in relation to the male main character, dependant on his existence to exist herself.⁰

Mulvey interestingly does not provide a theory on a 'female gaze' when woman is the subject in the

⁰ This theory is elementary to gender studies and is applicable in various disciplines with a visual component. Novels use the reader's imagination to create a visual surrounding for the story to play out in, which is why I believe Mulvey's theory is applicable for my theoretical framework.

⁰ Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen*, vol. 16(3), 1975, p. 7.

⁰ Id., pp. 7-9.

⁰ Id., pp. 11-12.

⁰ Id., p. 11.

transaction. Someone who did research on this is Teresa de Lauretis, who – incorporating philosophy with narrative fiction and cinema – has four propositions to explain. The first is that gender is not biologically decided; the definitions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are a representation that is fully created by society. The second is that this representation of gender is in fact the very construction of it⁰ or in other words, gender reality is created through social performances.⁰ An example of this is the construct of sexuality: it is a (self-) representation, although the female sexuality is a projection of the male’s sexuality, whether this is in contrast or in relation to male sexuality,⁰ just as Mulvey had stated before when analysing a woman’s role in cinematic narratives. De Lauretis’s third proposition is that although it has been recognized as such, all aspects of society and daily life still continue with a man-made binary gender (man/woman) system. And the last proposition; the construction of gender is affected by its deconstruction, although this does sound paradoxical.⁰ De Lauretis believes (female) subjectivity and ‘micropolitics’ – the small things in everyday life – will be the key. By deconstructing the generalized notions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ all people will be able to articulate their experience, giving way for people who do not feel they fit in the binary heteronormative gender system.⁰ According to this theory there will be space for a female gaze if women keep voicing their experience and subjectivity.

3.3 Beauty as Suppression

Although it might be a compliment and even a goal for many to be considered one, being a beauty can certainly have negative connotations. Several different forces have been constant in discourses of female beauty all over the world. For instance, because beauty is defined by physical standards very few can attain, women are subjugated to pressure to achieve this goal. A woman who meets the high standards gains love, public praise and admiration, but women who do not will be negatively judged.⁰ In patriarchal societies men will fear losing their position by the people not in power, i.e. women. This results in a fear for being too enchanted with a woman’s beauty to not be able to confine or manipulate her, especially when women are able to override class stratification in exchange for beauty and charm. This is why physical frailty is often seen as a beauty trait: it keeps women dependent. China is not a stranger to this, as in pre-modern times physical restriction – bound feet –

⁰ Lauretis, Teresa de. *Technologies of Gender: Essays of Theory, Film and Fiction*, Indiana University Press, 1987., pp. 3-5, 9.

⁰ Jeffreys, Elaine & Yu, Haiqing. *Sex in China*. Polity Press. 2015, p. 61.

⁰ De Lauretis (1987), p. 14.

⁰ De Lauretis (1987), pp. 3-5, 9.

⁰ Id., pp. 24, 25.

⁰ Man, Eva Kit Wah. “Beauty and the State: Female Bodies as State Apparatus and Recent Beauty Discourses in China” in *Beauty Unlimited*, edited by Peggy Zeglin Brand, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 282.

and physical and mental frailty – love sickness or a weak constitution – were considered beauty traits.⁰ The restriction of women can also have a commercial gain by selling products to women who do not meet the beauty standards. An example of this is the trend for slimness; commercials and advertisements tell women it is easy to look slim – suggesting this as the ideal body shape – and suggest their product will be the easiest way to meet those beauty standards. This is a system that can be found in nearly every cosmopolitan society participating in the global economy.⁰ Companies, governments or other groups of society who set these incredibly high standards for female beauty do this to confine women within the patriarchal construction and manipulate them for their own gain, making the woman the victim of female beauty.

3.4 Manipulation of Beauty Consumption through Writing

Once aware of these gender mechanics it is possible to play with them, to find and challenge their borders. In Chinese literature this has been done in several genres, like the ‘scar literature’ [伤痕文学 *shānghén wénxué*] that originated in the late 1970s as an answer to the communist era. Most of these writers were male, but their female characters were liberated figures that emerged as individual, sexually awakened spirits. Female sexuality in literature reached its climax with the 1990s genre of ‘body writing’. It is quite possible the beauty writers only had writing through their body and senses to fall back on as a constant in their perpetual changing surroundings within the urban space.⁰ Despite scholars’ variations of the reasons why authors use body writing the essence is the same: writers can be free of the pre-existing and restricting norms of society by following their senses and intuition rather than their minds.⁰ This resonates with De Lauretis’s encouragement for individual experiences and subjectivity to deconstruct patriarchal society as mentioned in chapter 3.2. However, it seems body writing has become sensational and sexy, re-enhancing and re-legitimizing the male gaze on women’s bodies.⁰ The genre seems to be the literary version of power femininity, which Michelle Lazar calls “a global discourse (...) which incorporates feminist signifiers of emancipation and empowerment (...) into a celebration of all things feminine, including the desire for self-aestheticization.”⁰ Beauty has been reclaimed by women not to please men but to gain pleasure by wearing it as a mask of irony, humour or playfulness. At the same time it is viewed as potentially subversive towards the patriarchal structures of society. Although the focus on women’s agency

⁰ Cho (2012), pp. 2, 46-47, 51, 58-60, 87, 199.

⁰ Man (2012), pp. 282, 292.

⁰ Scheen (2015), p. 233.

⁰ Id., p. 71.

⁰ Scheen (2015), p. 122; Man (2012), pp. 282,290 and Yang (2011), p 72.

⁰ Lazar, Michelle M. “Discover the Power of Femininity: Analyzing Global “Power Femininity” in Local Advertising” in *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 6 (4), 2006, pp. 505.

makes power femininity highly subjective from a woman's standpoint, it is also important to keep in mind that these feminist messages are de-politicized and are put in the public eye by companies for their commercial gain. The brands also keep the dominant position by educating women on power feminism through their products. These advertisements are hardly matched by fundamental shifts in gender structures in everyday life.⁰ An example in literature of seemingly female empowerment that still is female oppression is the character of a *femme fatale*. She is most desirable aesthetically, but men fear her for her power to seduce them. She would not be a proper, submissive housewife and mother, therefore denying the man his male dominance. This alluring yet frightening character of the *femme fatale* has unsurprisingly been adopted by the beauty writers, although in their stories they convert the *femme fatale* to a desiring agent forcing the male gaze towards her, while also gazing at men.⁰ As Sheldon Lu has demonstrated in his essay, the beauty writers did not reverse the male gaze, but instead made the *inactive* female objects *active* agents.⁰

Lena Scheen seems to portray the beauty writers as passive victims of this exchange created by a commercialistic society, whereas Xin Yang and Sheldon Lu have shown the beauty writers were active agents. This does not necessarily mean the beauty writers were not victim to the patriarchal system that minimized the importance of a woman's literary talent and maximized the visibility of her body and beauty, but rather shows the paradox the beauty writers struggle with; on the one hand they attempt to fight the patriarchal system – by voicing their sexual and personal experiences and subjectivity – but on the other hand they display themselves as objects of desire for the male gaze, engage in active self-promotion and play with the media to gain fame. This paradox seems very similar to women who use beautification to undermine patriarchal structures without realizing these brands are still holding the reins, as Michelle Lazar has made clear. Although the beauty writers shook the male dominance, they did not make serious cracks in the patriarchal foundation to move away from female objectification. Whether this is also the case in the works of Chun Sue and Yin Lichuan – and if yes to what extent – will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

⁰ Lazar (2006), pp. 506-508, 509-510, 513 and Yang (2011), p. 4-5.

⁰ Scheen (2005), pp. 128-129, 134.

⁰ Lu, Sheldon H. "Popular Culture and Body Politics: Beauty Writers in Contemporary China" in *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 69(1), 2008, pp. 176-177.

4. History of Beauty and Sexuality in China's Society

This chapter aspires to explain the discourse surrounding feminine beauty, gender and sexuality in the history of Chinese society. This is done by combining several scholarly works on this topic in the form of a very condensed history of beauty and sexuality per era that will provide a better understanding of the reasons why and how the beauty writers came to be.

4.1 Pre-modern China: Classic Beauty and Spiritual Sex

Within the framework of this thesis it is impossible to give an accurate history of the changing beauty perspectives throughout Chinese history. However, it is possible to name a few beauty traits starting in imperial China that survived until present day. A classic beauty has a slender body with sloping shoulders, a fair and smooth skin, a straight nose, a small mouth and well-aligned, white teeth.⁰ China has a culture that is more obsessed than any other with the beauty of eyebrows.⁰ Overall thin eyebrows were in favour, but the preferred shape continuously changed. They were painted on with a dark coloured substance and the lips and cheeks were applied with rouge.⁰ The current beauty aesthetics of fair skin and double eyelids in the PRC are said to be heavily influenced by Western beauty standards, but both traits have been favoured before direct contact with European countries.⁰ Apart from physical traits much praise of beauty was grounded in a woman's clothing and accessories that not only showed a woman's social stratification, but also made it harder to achieve beauty for the majority of less affluent women.⁰ Most praise, however, went to a woman's vivacious eyes that show her charm and intelligence by responding quickly in communication.⁰ For education on sexual acts the Chinese had special manuals for over 2000 years ago –the ideas described within were already existent as early as the later Zhou dynasty (770-222 BC).⁰ Based on the daoist principle that man and woman are a union exactly resembling the union of heaven and earth, sex is important. Not only does it give the participants spiritual and physical benefits, it is also necessary to keep the Earth's

⁰ Cho (2012), pp. xi, 21, 22, 24, 28, 77, 216.

⁰ Id., p. 20.

⁰ Id., pp. 24-25, 113-119.

⁰ Id., pp. 75, 102.

⁰ Id., pp. 10, 77, 95.

⁰ Cho (2012), pp. 16-18, 93 and Man (2012), p. 293.

⁰ Gulik, Robert van. *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1622 A.D.* 1972, Brill, 2003. p. 45.

harmony; sex was considered a metaphor for the clouds and rain that help fertilize the lands. It was considered that the woman had a nearly inexhaustible *yin* energy and the man a preciously small amount of *yang* energy. Foreplay was necessary to rouse a woman's energy, so the handbooks give many instructions on them. When having sex the man could absorb the woman's energy through her vaginal fluids which would give him more vigor. It is important to note absorbing the energy could only been done correctly if the sex was mutually consensual and enjoyable. Confucianism encouraged the teaching of the manuals, stating that this building up of energy would make a man stronger and therefore create better offspring once he does ejaculate.⁰ It was not until the later half of the Ming (ca. 1500-1644 CE) that sexuality became a taboo, reaching its peak of prudery during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE). In these years many sexual handbooks and pornographic novels were banned, and sexuality was no longer openly discussed.⁰

4.2 Modern China's Cosmopolitan Crazes

Western beauty ideals started to somewhat permeate in the coastal cities of 1920's republican China. More deep-sculpted faces like those of Westerners had become an element of admiration since the 1850's, but were especially evident in advertisements of the 1930s and 1940s.⁰ It is quite possible these fashions were not consciously adopted by the Chinese, since these images often appeared in the guise of warped nationalism, or 'return to the East'.⁰ Calendar posters, introduced by the West a couple decades earlier, became the most important visual advertisement. Women were portrayed seductively and sexually to promote products such as silk, whisky and cigarettes.⁰ However, a countermovement was growing in urban areas to move away from both traditional conservative attitudes and from western sexiness. This movement called *jianmei* [健美] *jiàn měi*, literal translation 'healthy and beautiful' consisted of the admiration of healthy physiques in a spiritual way; as a cult of health. Women were photographed wearing short clothes to show off their muscles. Interestingly *jianmei* was built on Western ideas and motifs in a discursive way, since it was considered Western women had already attained the *jianmei* bodies by exercising.⁰ When looking at the sex life of this era it has underwent rigorous change through enforcing monogamy over polygamy. However, the Confucian take on sex as a tool for eugenics was kept and now used on a national scale for citizens to help strengthen the nation.⁰ These changes resulted in a fear for sex; men feared they would impose themselves too much on their wives, which would weaken their physical and mental health, thus

⁰ Van Gulik(1972), pp. xix-xxi, xxxii, 16-17, 46-48.

⁰ Van Gulik (1972), pp. xxxi-xxxii, 90, 270.

⁰ Cho (2012), pp. 244-245.

⁰ Id., pp. 217, 240-241.

⁰ Scheen (2015), p. 126.

⁰ Man (2012), pp. 284-286.

resulting in weaker offspring. Researchers urged men to restrain themselves more and this advice was taken very seriously. Sexuality became an even more dangerous force which demanded strict supervision.⁰

4.3 The Communist Nation: Equality and Repression

Since the 1940s one of the goals was to make both men and women equally productive to the communist state, which is why gender equality was enforced.⁰ The newly constructed femininity was one of strength, uniformity and productivity. Women were encouraged to wear clothes that hid their figure so as to not distract attention from work. Interestingly, this implicitly but firmly sets the lifeway and goals of masculinity, physical strength and the will to work hard as the standard for women. In other words, this was a time in which femininity was attempted to be erased from society. There was a general consensus of what Yang has called 'beauty fear'; a result of the revolutionary ambition of breaking down old institutions and ideologies, replacing it with what was supposedly gender equality, but has actually been masculine collectivism.⁰ It is a popular belief the Mao era was repressing the population's sexuality by politicizing people's daily life. However, there are indicators proving this is not necessarily the case. When the CCP prohibited printed copies of sexual themed novels from the imperial and Republican eras, many people made handwritten copies.⁰ Hidden sexual discourse can also be found in the portrayal of women in CCP propaganda. Despite Mao's attempt to reconstruct women according to masculine standards, beautiful female images were still employed for propaganda. Though the posters ostensibly only aimed at promoting the political agenda of the CCP, the embodiment of youth, elegance and beauty in posters was a way to hide yet exploit the erotic images of women.⁰ Although the highly politicized life of the PRC's population concealed expressions of sexuality, it did not disappear from people's lives.

4.4 The Socialist State's Sexual Revolution

When in 1978 the PRC shifted from a centralized plan economy to a market-based economy this resulted in changes for the population at a rate and scale unprecedented in world history.⁰ The global economy, especially growing foreign investments in the beauty industry, has a strong impact on

⁰ Dikötter, Frank. *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period*. Hong Kong University Press, 1995, pp. 2, 56.

⁰ Id., p. 52-53, 56.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 14.

⁰ Yang (2011), pp. 14-16.

⁰ Jeffreys & Yu (2015), p. 2,5,7.

⁰ Yang (2011), p. 17.

standards of female beauty ideals and practices. This resulted in women being prioritized by their appearances and their daring emotional and erotic expressions rather than morality.⁰ The consumers' market was flooded by fashion, cosmetic commodities and plastic surgery to bring the 'best' femininity out of women and to introduce the transnational imagination to the PRC. Fair skin and double eyelids became a beauty trademark again, this time influenced by the (Western) leaders of the global economy. In order to live out the transnational fantasy women had a strong focus on international luxury commodities: flaunting accessories, showing off make-up styles and posing like movie stars in photos.⁰ Since 2005 the transnational imagination had naturalized and was no longer sensational, which explains both the waning of the beauty writers' fame and the shift from the super-feminine public body to a tomboyish, subversive alternative.⁰ The economic changes have been accompanied by equally dramatic changes in public discussions and expressions of sex and sexuality.⁰ Some go as far as saying this era is one of an undeniable sexual revolution.⁰ An example of this is the one child policy implemented in 1979. Although this is generally considered repressing and controlling a society's population, it gave way for people to have sex for pleasure rather than reproduction. However, this so-called 'sexual revolution' is not completely accurate. Due to the portrayal of the Mao era as sexually repressive, this era is put down as its counterpart, where female sexual bodies were depicted with a liberating passion and a lively personality.⁰ In chapter 3.3 I have explained how the current cosmopolitan lifestyle keeps women firmly in a patriarchal construction through society and advertisements, which is not liberating or revolutionary at all. In my opinion this contraposition of sexual repression by the communists versus sexual liberation by western influences is an incorrect narrative created by western ideologies.

4.5 Sexy Shanghai

Although Chun Sue and Yin Lichuan are not Shanghai-based it is important to mention the role of this city in the shaping of the body writing genre. Shanghai was a small fishing village until Western settlers turned it into a modern metropolis considered the "Paris of the East" during the 1850-1920s.⁰

⁰ Jeffreys & Yu (2015), p. 1.

⁰ Man (2012), pp. 282, 290-293.

⁰ Yang (2011), pp. 19-20, 22.

⁰ Id., p. 91.

⁰ Jeffreys & Yu (2015), p. 2.

⁰ Burger, Richard. *Behind the Red Door: Sex in China*. Earnshaw Books, 2012 , p. 4.

⁰ Man (2012), p. 289.

⁰ Scheen (2015), pp. 16-18.

Shanghai was simultaneously imagined as a 'city of light' with its education, literary revolution and social reform, and a 'city of darkness' with its decadence and sexual promiscuity.⁰ This perspective was adopted by Westerners within a colonial framework: the city was perceived as the exotic, but also as the dominated and subdued 'Other', compared to the masculine and Western 'Self' of the colonizers. In the eyes of the Chinese the city was also feminine because of the readiness to accept Western modern culture: it made the city wildly interesting and exotic, but also mysterious and threatening. The sexualisation of Shanghai has continued since then, going to the extent that the city itself was imagined, personified and sexualized as a *femme fatale*. Many male authors at the time portray a male protagonist falling for the exotic, modern Shanghai woman who turns out to be unattainable. This could be seen as the authors' projection of the ambivalent feelings they have towards the city itself.⁰ When reading the stories of the beauty writers the city is again eroticized, but not necessarily feminized. An example of this is the comparison of the Orient Pearl TV tower with a phallus in *Shanghai Baby*.⁰ This might indicate the beauty writers view Shanghai as a hypersexual city in general rather than a feminine 'sexy' city. Whether this is also the case with Beijing in the works of Chun Sue and Yin Lichuan will be researched in the next chapters.

⁰ Id., pp. 29, 31.

⁰ Id., pp. 125-128, 246.

⁰ Id., p. 131.

5. Chun Sue: Beijing's Bad Girl

The previous chapters have attempted to give a background into the beauty writers' genre that function as the foundation for the analyses in chapters 5 and 6. They are set up similar: firstly a short analysis into the authors and publishers followed by the main close-reading research into the stories' gender structures.

Chun Sue, pen name of Lin Jiafu, was born in Beijing in 1983. Although younger than the other beauty writers, researchers Sheldon H. Lu and Henry Y.H. Zhao give some indications why she fits the beauty writer genre.⁰ *Beijing Doll* was written in 1999, the same time frame the other beauty writers' wrote their novels. *Beijing Doll* was also banned a couple of months after its release in 2003. Although not involving herself in alcohol and drugs, her struggles and her fascination for the subculture experience resemble that of the 'cruel youth' depicted in Mian Mian's *Candy*.

5.1 The Role of Cover Art in the Creation of a Sensation

Beijing Doll did so well that in early 2004 Chun Sue was the cover of Time Magazine in Asia (see appendix). On the cover the descriptions reads, "BREAKING OUT: China's youth finally dare to be different" and "Chun Shu,⁰ 20, is a high school dropout turned best-selling author." When talking about the title *Beijing Doll* – which resembles Weihui's *Shanghai Baby* – she says the novel was initially titled *The World of Ice*, but the publisher changed the name. "I have no choice. Sometimes we are like the products on a production line."⁰ I believe the publisher has used the title to associate Chun Sue with the beauty writers. Another tool publishers can use for branding is the novel's cover art. In the appendix appear all the covers I could find. When looking at the editions from the PRC Chun Sue is modelling the black-and-white covers; solemn-looking, no makeup or distinctive clothing. Red accents brighten the solemn style. One of the versions has a badly translated English phrase, "I, Seventeen, Badness Girl [sic.]" The cover art seems to emphasize the 'cruel youth' struggles, the lack of happiness, but the subculture experience is missing. The English phrase seems to appeal to Chinese young urbanites experiencing transnational imagination. Chun Sue believes that her novel embodies the issues young people everywhere struggle with.⁰ *Beijing Doll* was translated into twelve

⁰ Lu, Sheldon H. "Popular Culture and Body Politics: Beauty Writers in Contemporary China" in *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 69(1), 2008, pp. 167-185; Zhao, Henry Y.H. "The River Fans Out: Chinese Fiction since the Late 1970s" in *European Review*, vol. 11(2), 2003, pp. 193-208.

⁰ Her pen name in pinyin is *Chūn Shù*, but since the English novels all use "Sue" instead of "Shu" I have held on to this version. It also better resembles the transnational imagination of Western cultures.

⁰ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-08/11/content_364242.htm

languages and published worldwide.⁰ However, her novel was not received too well internationally; mediocre at best. In my opinion many readers were disappointed, because the publishers had manipulated the novel's description and cover art in such a way it no longer represented the story. The best example of this is the Indonesian cover: a picture of a woman's stomach with her jeans unzipped with the lines: "Controversial. Forbidden in China."⁰ I believe the publisher has deliberately sexualized the cover and had to expect the content of the novel would disappoint the readers. Another tactic publishers have used is to appeal to the readers' orientalist curiosity by emphasizing the 'Chineseness' of the novel. A handful of covers have Chinese characters on the cover. Nearly all covers are depicting an East Asian woman, not all of them are Chun Sue herself. The story, however, does not focus on living as a teenager in the PRC, but instead focuses on the transnational imagination. As has happened with the novels of Weihui and Mian Mian, *Beijing Doll* has been manipulated by publishers to portray a story that is not found within the content, which resulted in disappointed readers worldwide.

The beauty writers were often criticized for actively sensationalizing themselves and their novels, therefore firmly placing themselves in the patriarchal gender structure as a female (active) object. The publishers worldwide have had an important role in this as the subject manipulating the object. *Beijing Doll's* cover art often did not represent the content very well, suggesting Chun Sue also was a pawn in a larger game. Whether Chun Sue actively manipulated her story to attract and shock readers can be analysed through a close-reading of *Beijing Doll*.

5.2 Analysing the story

The novel is set up as a diary telling the story of the teenager Chun Sue – alias of Lin Jiafu⁰ – in the course of two years. The work is quite fragmented and therefore at times hard to understand; on the other hand it gives the reader a good understanding of her experience without manipulation by an all-knowing narrator. The novel comes with a small list of names of what the protagonist directly experiences, such as her friends, her detested school and her favourite genre of music. The story starts with Chun Sue as a 15 year old student who loves to write and dreams of attending university and meets two university students named B5 and A2. Sue is insecure – even too scared to meet them in person – which results in two failed romances. Not long after she meets art student Li Qi and they get into a sexual relationship despite Qi already having a girlfriend. Sue has fallen in love, but he has not. Their romance ends when he leaves Beijing for his hometown. They meet again, but Sue has

⁰ Chun Sue [春晓]. *Beijing Doll* [北京娃娃]. Little, Brown UK, 2004, p. vii.

⁰ <https://www.goodreads.com/work/editions/910540-beijing-doll>

⁰ Own translation.

⁰ Since the novel's protagonist has the same name and pen name as the author, for this analysis I will use the name Chun Sue when referring to the character, using 'the author' when referring to the real person.

changed and no longer likes Qi. She starts to struggle in high school, especially with obeying authoritarian figures. She meets rock musician Zhao Ping, but he turns out to be a jealous, verbally aggressive and emotionally abusive boyfriend. Sue is scared to leave him, but is not afraid to rebel against him by sleeping with his friend. When she finally breaks up with Ping it takes him weeks – if not months – to finally stop harassing her. Sue drops out of school and starts working as a writer for a magazine when she meets the musician G and settles for a relationship with him. This is kept secret for G's parents, but inevitably they find out. She regrets her rebellious decisions and goes back to school, but within a couple of months quits again. Although she happy with G she starts a relationship with her colleague Mint. However, Sue is not too happy with Mint as their personalities do not go well together. Not long after she starts flirting with another colleague, a photographer named Lulu. Mint sees her interest and tries to avert them becoming romantically involved, but this resulted in an argument that most likely ended their relationship. The story quite abruptly ends with Sue expressing her unhappiness with how her life turned out at the start of a new century.

Relationships and Romances

Most of Chun Sue's views on gender can be found in her exchange with other people. In some cases, however, it can be found in what is not there: the author rarely mentions any female friends throughout the story; even Sue's best friend is – apart from two sentences at best – condensed to a reference in the introductory list. It seems the author feels friendships between women are not interesting enough to write down, or maybe their mechanisms are too self-evident for the author to describe them in more detail. Leaving out women in a story about a woman's experience is contradictory to Cixous's and De Lauretis's answers to break patriarchal gender structures through (body) writing as mentioned in chapter 3.4.

The main theme of *Beijing Doll* is Sue's romantic life and this gives more insight into her perception of gender roles. Sue's eagerness to get attention from men is apparent throughout the novel. The first two romantic interests are the two university students, B5 and A26 Sue has gotten to know by phone conversations.⁰ Once she meets B5 in person she stops liking him partially due to him not treating her to lunch or walk her home. This suggests Sue is attracted to men who treat her in a traditional way; as a vulnerable and financially not self-sufficient person. Although no longer liking him she still thinks, "My sense of self-worth vanished when I was with him. I hated myself for not having seen the movies he mentioned, for not having any decent clothes or shoes, for having no class."⁰ This phrase shows how little her self-esteem is and how intimidated she is by B5's status as a university student. This might have resulted in Sue being too scared to meet A26 in person, despite having arranged a meeting with him. She has a very submissive attitude when she tells the reader, "I was just a girl who liked him but couldn't say the words. I wanted to satisfy all his demands on me – if he had any, that is."⁰ In both exchanges Sue strongly values the men over herself to the point they have become a

⁰ Nearly all of Chun Sue's love interests are adults while she is a minor throughout the novel. Interestingly this aspect of the story is not mentioned in any reader's review.

⁰ Chun (2004), p. 2.

⁰ Id., p. 5.

fantasy for her. Sue's attitude starts to change when dating Li Qi and Zhao Ping: she becomes more confident and extrovert. The problem with these romances, however, is that they were both out of convenience. After Sue breaks up with Zhao Ping she flirts with several men while simultaneously trying to get her own friend Xiaohai to fall for her: "I wanted him, I worshiped him, but (...) he never expressed any true feeling for me; if he had, I'd have fallen passionately in love with him."⁰ It is evident Sue is still praising men and seeks validation for herself through the approval of men around her. At this time in the novel she already considers herself a 'punk' girl, yet her attitude towards men is still quite traditional. Her eagerness to flirt with men does not stop when she is in a relationship and at times she ends her relationship and starts a new one on the same day. She describes it as a curiosity and a need to understand someone, but conveniently always makes sure she does not need to be without a man's approval for a single day. Rather than breaking any elements of traditional patriarchal gender notions, Chun Sue seems to be the embodiment of the female sexuality always being invariably defined in relation to the male, as Teresa de Lauretis has stated.⁰

Sue's Sexuality

Despite the promise of a sexually promiscuous novel the story is light on descriptions of sex. In some interactions the whole sexual encounter is unmentioned while in other instances the sexual language is covered up with phrases, such as "[forgetting] the remnants of morality in my relationship with [my boyfriend]. No big deal, fickle as the clouds and rain. (...)"⁰ The latter refers to the daoist metaphor for sexual intercourse as mentioned in chapter 4.1. A little more explicit was the description of Sue's first sexual encounter with Zhao Ping. They had sex a day after meeting each other and although Sue said it seemed perfectly natural she also says Ping hurt her a lot, causing her to scream. This could mean that he lacked the patience and gentleness to arouse her, an important step he skipped according to the traditional manuscripts mentioned in chapter 4.1. It is revealed Ping probably only had sex with Sue because he thought she was a virgin which caused Sue to respond: "Neither are you, so what difference does it make? (...) You only took me to bed because you thought I was a virgin. You're too old-fashioned to be in rock 'n' roll."⁰ This suggests the rock 'n' roll scene is an escape from traditional views on love life and female sexuality. In Sue's eyes it is a lifestyle where men and women should not be judged for the sexual activities in their past, but this exchange with Ping also shows this is not necessarily a given.

One chapter provides an ample introspection into Chun Sue's views on sex. A friend of hers, Luo Xi, asks her to have sex with him. At this time Chun Sue is still in a relationship with G and she refuses him with the following explanation,

"Actually, I think that the ideal sexual relationship would be like some of those American clubs (...) where everybody's got the same spirit (...), where everyone's free, and they're all

⁰ Id., pp. 125-126.

⁰ See chapter 3.2, footnote 17.

⁰ Chun (2004), p. 92.

⁰ Id., p. 77.

sincere on a basic level (...), so long as you don't attack or force your will on others. No holding back, no concealment." I spoke with ease and conviction, like a girl who'd been around. In fact, I had no confidence in what I was saying.

"I have to say there aren't many girls like you. That goes double for China."⁰

The hypocrisy of the statement is something she recognizes herself, "On the one hand, I was someone who advocated sexual liberation and was opposed to people who tried to monopolize sex, but on the other hand, I was hypocritical in my approach to G and Luo Xi. According to my logic, I ought to have gone with Luo Xi (...) and fucked his brains out – that would have been the correct way to enjoy life, since I didn't feel that casual sex could have any effect on my emotions." (...) Pride meant a lot to him, and I could see that my refusal had injured his self-respect.⁰ Chun Sue has attempted romances very quickly, because according to herself she wanted to see and feel strong emotions, but here she states that sex does not affect her. Possibly she had hoped that sex might reveal deeper emotions, but she is not finding these. The loss of self-confidence within Luo Xi shows that men can also be dependent on romantic relationships for validation and self-esteem.

The last aspect of Chun Sue's views on sex is a very controversial one. She tells Zhao Ping a story of when she was nine and lived with her father in a military camp – his workplace. One night a soldier asks her to touch his penis. She refused and the soldier watched her leave. When Zhao Ping asks her whether she was raped she denies this and even wished she could "tell [the soldier] that after all that time, I could still see the dreamy look in the guy's eyes. I still remembered him. I don't know if that meant I loved the guy or hated him, but he was the bravest man I ever saw. Maybe he should have taken things a step further."⁰ This encounter might be an explanation for Sue's focus on sex at quite a young age with little detail about her feelings during sex. Calling the abuser a very brave man might be in the same way that she admires people who commit suicide, "I've got this crude idea that anybody who fucking scorns life, who sees life as a pile of shit, who feels that life is meaningless and offers nothing but constant suffering, is fearless, courageous... in a word, cultivated."⁰

Fighting Tradition, Enforcing Beauty

The author has made it clear Chun Sue is a young 'punk' girl rebelling against tradition. However, there are some indicators that show Sue is quite traditional, especially when it comes to beauty. In the second half of the story Sue focuses more on her appearance: "I carefully applied some lipstick (...) then imagined myself, appreciating how I looked through the eyes of a man, a process I found fascinating, even though I knew that made me a narcissist."⁰ Sue seems oblivious make-up is an

⁰ Id., pp. 140-141.

⁰ Id., p. 141.

⁰ Chun (2004), p. 84.

⁰ Id., p. 58.

⁰ Id., pp. 171-172.

enhancement tool used by women to fight over men's approval through their appearance,⁰ not recognizing the man's role in the consumption of beauty. Instead, the blame for appreciating one's makeup-enhanced aesthetic is directed at the woman – in this case herself. Seemingly less obedient to feminine beauty is Sue's fascination for very colourful and bold makeup styles. However, Chun Sue is interested in men from a subculture in which those styles are considered attractive. Overall, the need to please men is strongly enforced in *Beijing Doll*.

Another example of Sue's traditional views is the description of G's mother: "Her gaze stuck to my face like glue, which made me feel sort of creepy and gloomy. She embodied the shrewdness and narrow-mindedness shared by a lot of women who grew up in traditional compounds. I didn't like her the first time I laid eyes on her."⁰ G's mother had a conversation with Sue after finding out the two had sex, saying: "Girl, how could you be so foolish? How can a boy like G be responsible for anything? (...) It's always the males who come out without a scratch..."⁰ The phrasing suggests it is the norm that men do not need to take responsibility if they get a woman pregnant. The conversation enraged Chun Sue, possibly because she is confronted with the unfair treatment of men and women in society. However, she directs her anger towards G's mother and states the latter has traditional views on gender and sexuality, because of her traditional housing accommodation. It is more likely Sue is angered because she has a false sense of freedom, of living without consequences. Throughout the novel Sue seems to only like older people who give her and her friends total freedom, which G's mother has now taken away. Another woman Sue strongly dislikes is Mint's mother, a widow working hard to give her son whatever he requests. When seeing an old picture of Mint's mother she thinks, "She was (...) a real beauty. Sadly, she'd changed a lot and put on weight – her looks were gone completely. The passage of time, hard work, and loneliness age a beautiful woman, and having a son only makes it worse. Her fate was a sort of warning to me."⁰ This phrase is traditional and misogynistic for several reasons. Firstly, it implies a woman only has her beauty as an asset. Secondly, that working hard and lacking a man in her life will result in the loss of her only asset. The author directly links a woman's beauty to men, both in romantic and financial contexts. Although her fight against tradition make her seem willing to break with traditional views on gender and sexuality, in my opinion Chun Sue is more conservative than she realizes and I hoped to have proven this throughout this chapter.

Beijing as the Story's Setting

The role of Beijing as the story's background is definitely different from the Shanghai-based beauty writers. The author rarely describes anything of the city life, despite the fact she goes to certain areas that are popular within the underground scene. The only area she described lovingly is the campus of

⁰ My opinion on this seems to resonate with Kathy Peiss, see McCabe et al. (2017), p. 3. Makeup is also a part of the power femininity movement as mentioned in chapter 3.3.

⁰ Chun (2004), p. 131.

⁰ Id., p. 134.

⁰ Chun (2004), p. 206.

Peking University of which she dreams to be attending. For readers who do not live in Beijing, however, the description of the city is lacklustre and therefore disappointing.⁰ Beijing does not have the history of being an international transport hub like Shanghai and therefore there are not as many Western foreigners in the city, as is reflected in the story. Where the transnational imagination of the Shanghai beauty writers extended to a strong romantic interest in Western foreigners in the city, Chun Sue only has one brief encounter and flirtation with a foreigner. Despite the lack of a 'China and the West' narrative so many readers were expecting, there was one aspect that stood out for me: the communist language. Communism has no direct role in the story, but in Chun Sue's daily life there are still active remnants of its ideology. In my opinion this does not make the story more interesting for foreign readers, but does the opposite and makes it harder to understand. This is due to the lack of explanation of the communist background, since it is so evident for the author. An example of this is the final description of Li Qi, "The country was populated with girls who had been tricked into falling for his phony idealism (...). With his bourgeois mentality and proletarian identity, this heartless self-styled artiste never did anything worthwhile (...)"⁰ The author states he has a phony idealism, but at the same time a bourgeois mentality and a proletarian identity, using many communist words while also making contradictions. This makes it hard to understand, especially to readers unfamiliar with communist ideology. Overall, Beijing as the story's setting had little to no relevance, especially to non-Chinese readers.

Conclusion

Through analysing the story I believe Chun Sue is a girl who wants to rebel, but does not exactly understand the mechanisms she is trying to rebel against. This has a counter effect to which she at times affirms the traditional gender roles. She actively engages herself in many romantic and sexual relationships, because she is validating herself through her relationships with men. She initially values the men she is involved with so highly that she inevitably becomes disappointed and dissatisfied. Her focus on her experience with men rather than her experience as an individual in a patriarchal society makes this story not one that Teresa de Lauretis would classify as the way to deconstruct the traditional gender construction. The novel lacks the descriptions of bodily experience to be classified as 'body writing' and can therefore not be regarded as being free of the pre-existing and restricting norms of society, as Ge Hongbing and Hélène Cixous have noticed in body writing. Instead, the novel is doing what Mulvey has proclaimed – reinforcing patriarchal gender structures through the male gaze, by having a man approve of a woman's beauty in order for her to be relevant. On the other hand, the author was still a teenager when she wrote the novel and it makes sense someone so young does not have a grasp of these mechanics. There is one thing the author has done very differently than beauty writers Weihui and Mian Mian: she has written a story that has not been sensationalized or eroticized, a story not manipulated by what readers might have wanted. As a public person she has also not been an agent to garner more publicity or sensation. In that way the

⁰ <https://www.amazon.com/Beijing-Doll-Chun-Sue/dp/1594480206#customerReviews>

⁰Chun (2004), p. 45.

author has at least not given in to the demands of a beauty writer as a voyeuristic object to (male) gaze at.

6. Yin Lichuan: Lover of Losers

Yin Lichuan was born in 1973 in Chongqing. She graduated in Western languages from Peking University and from film academy ESEC in Paris.⁰ She is especially known as one of the controversial “Lower Body” [下体 xiàtǐ shēn] poets and like many other young writers of this era most of her work was published online. Her debut as a novelist came in 2001 with *Fucker* [贱人 jiànrén].

6.1 The Publishers’ Branding and Misbranding

Lichuan’s poems have been described by Maghiel van Crevel as “[attempting] to get as much pleasure as possible out of sex (...) as a casual addition, almost an afterthought. (...) [Yin’s style is] derisive, tired, cynical, playful yet tough. The effect is strengthened by a dogma that holds everywhere but is particularly deep-rooted in China (...): public, detailed description of sexuality is scandalous, especially if the author is a woman.”⁰ Her writing style – I am of the opinion this description is applicable for *Fucker* as well – has several similarities with that of the beauty writers. Firstly, both have an allegiance with the youth culture: they (strategically) brand themselves as anti-intellectuals. Secondly, their stories are set in the decadent urban jungle that is a reflection of its society at the time rather than a political statement. Lastly, both writing styles use body writing and in particular sexuality in their stories. However, there is a notable difference: Van Crevel mentions that the beauty writers reinforce stereotypes of female sexuality – which is why they were internationally marketable as a new brand of the ‘exoticizing sexualisation’ of Asian women.⁰ Yin Lichuan, in Van Crevel’s words, “plays with female stereotypes (...) that enhance female literary agency and self-representation – whereas [beauty writers] undermine these things.”⁰

Yin’s work has not been as popular with foreign publishers as the works of the beauty writers: only one publisher had *Fucker* translated. Unfortunately this was translated to Dutch, providing only a very small audience with the opportunity to get acquainted with this novel. Even more unfortunate was the misbranding of the Dutch publisher. In the PRC, Yin Lichuan was known as a young leading poet in a controversial group. For the Chinese publication of the novel, the goal seems to have been to tap into the avant-garde scene of the PRC. The cover art (see appendix II) reflects this as it is as mysterious and unclear as the novel itself and can be interpreted in many ways. The Chinese

⁰ All information on Yin Lichuan’s life is translated from the back cover of the original Chinese novel, since the Dutch version lacked (correct) information.

⁰ Crevel, Maghiel van. *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*. Brill, 2008, p. 309.

⁰ Id., pp. 321-322.

⁰ Id., pp. 322.

publisher has added pictures of Yin showing her as a modern writer experiencing the transnational imagination (see appendix II, pp. 1-2). In the Dutch version, however, much has been done to reshape the novel and brand Yin as a beauty writer. Firstly, the Chinese title of the novel is translated in a way to create a bit of a shock.⁰ 贱人 [jiànrén] in the Far East Chinese-English Dictionary is explained as “(a term of revile used in old novels) slut/tramp”⁰ or ‘scum’. It seems the translator and/or publisher wanted to shock the public and appeal to a younger audience by using a trendy English word such as *Fucker*, despite the translation being somewhat incorrect. When a novel called *Fucker* is described on the back cover as “having caused a stir in China”⁰ one expects quite a controversial novel. The novel’s theme is also described as “how outsiders want to be insiders in the hypermodern city of Beijing” and is branded “the Chinese answer to *Trainspotting*.”⁰ The description and title suggests the novel focuses on modern and trendy subjects such as pop music, make-up and fashion with lots of drugs, alcohol and parties. Yin Lichuan is the model for both the front and back cover (see appendix II, p. 3). Yin models her trendy late 1990’s/ early 2000’s fashion, while posing with either a daring or a coy expression. These elements are reminiscent of the covers of beauty writer novels such as *Shanghai Baby* and *Beijing Doll*. It seems the publisher actively shaped the novel into the beauty writers’ category.⁰ There are several reasons why *Fucker* does not fit in with the beauty writer genre. Firstly, Yin’s writing style is undoubtedly fictional – instead of beauty writers’ walk between the line of diary or autobiography and fiction. Secondly, none of the characters seem to want to – as the description mentions – “become insiders” as they are not once worried about being trendy. Lastly, Yin’s main character, Su Hang, is a man in his early twenties, rather than a teenage girl or barely adult woman. However, in the next section I will show that this does not mean an author cannot play with gender stereotypes.

6.2 Close-reading of *Fucker*

The novel tells the story of a disabled young man named Su Hang. Not only is he mentally somewhat challenged, in the course of the story he also becomes a cripple. People around him often get angry with him due to his lack of ambition and character. He meets an older man named Old Willow and

⁰ The notion of the mistranslated title comes from this Dutch review by sinologist M.A. Leenhouts: <https://www.bol.com/nl/f/fucker/30085879/>

⁰ “贱人” *Far East Chinese-English Dictionary*. [远东西方词典]. The Far East Book Company, 2010.

⁰ All translations of this novel are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁰ Yin Lichuan. [远东西方词典], *Fucker* [远东西方词典]. Vassalucci, 2004.

⁰ After researching this myself I stumbled across a Dutch review from a Chinese literature magazine, in which a reviewer uses most of the same examples and comes to the same conclusion. See: Vries, Jaap de. “Een nietsnut ontdekt de Kunst van het Stelen” [A Layabout Discovers the Art of Stealing] in *Trage Vuur* vol. 26, 2004.

introduces him to his best friend, Little Thunder and the latter's girlfriend Wrinkle. The couple lives in the house of Wrinkle's other boyfriend, a Frenchman who is often not in China. Old Willow comes up with a plan to make money by getting subsidized as performance artists by the USA and in order to achieve this he and Su Hang move in with the couple. The plan fails, however, and they are left nearly broke. Weeks later Su Hang goes to a supermarket and has some sort of an epiphany: he regards stealing products from the supermarket as a performance art that defies the system. He brings this revelation to his friends and they all participate, which is making them very happy. Su Hang becomes quite obsessed with a cashier in their nearby supermarket, but this does not lead to an interaction with her. A guy named Hunk⁰ suddenly shows up at their door and reveals he has been following and filming them steal. He becomes a part of the group as the cameraman. The group finds out the French boyfriend had never paid the rent for the home and they have to move out. They start squatting in an apartment building, but the lack of funds and furniture is a burden to them. Hunk makes a connection with a boy named Scampie⁰, a fan of the group's 'art of stealing', who wires stolen money to Hunk's bank account. Not long after they find out they have neighbours in the squat, who use the group for money and disappear before the group can hold them accountable. Broke again, Little Thunder starts planning a bank robbery and wants Su Hang to join him, but while discussing the plan near the bank they witness a robbery that ends in the robbers being shot. After this freakish altercation Little Thunder wants to live an honest life and proposes to Wrinkle. The group splits, but Su Hang and Little Thunder decide to do one more theft. However, it goes horribly wrong: Su Hang is apprehended and sent to prison and Little Thunder's attempt to escape results in a fatal car accident. Wrinkle goes insane over her boyfriend's death and is held at a psych ward in a hospital. The story ends quite abruptly when Su Hang, out of prison, sees a bloody traffic accident as he walks to his mother's house.

The Insignificant Women

There are three main female characters in the novel: Lili, Wrinkle and the cashier – the latter will be discussed later. Lili is originally Little Thunder's girlfriend, but he passes her off to Su Hang. He uses this to show the reader what a good friendship the two men have. Little Thunder had met Wrinkle already and talked about her whilst licking his lips. Su Hang automatically copied this movement because he was slightly hungry, but Little Thunder misunderstood and decided to 'give' Lili to Su Hang. Su Hang refused, but Little Thunder insisted. Lili obeys without any display of emotion as if she has no will of her own. Due to Su Hang's lack of action she takes the initiative in their first sexual interaction. This exchange exaggerates the traditional gender structure in which men have agency over women and can regard them as objects they can acquire, resembling the customs of centuries

⁰ In Chinese his name is 志强 [Zhiqiáng], a personal name meaning "ambitious and strong" This is a joke, because the masculine man also has a masculine name. I will continue with this concept by translating the name as 'Hunk' in English.

⁰ His Chinese name is 阿飞 [Āfēi] on which I could not find anything apart from it sounding the same as 阿飞 [Āfēi], meaning 'hooligan' or 'rebel'. In Dutch his name is Scampie, which does not seem to make any sense. However, in English it works better as the nature of his work is scamming people, so I have decided to not translate the name.

ago. In my opinion this is not a method in which traditional femininity is subverted, but it does bring to light the absurdity of women's standards of the past and present. There are several ways in which Su Hang delegitimizes Lili. Firstly he does not call Lili his girlfriend; he merely states they were "seeing each other".⁰ She is not an active character in the novel since the novel starts with Lili's exit, so her only relevance is her connection to Su Hang – the very connection he refuses to give a legitimate name to. Secondly, Su Hang delegitimizes Lili through her beauty. As has been shown throughout chapters 3 and 4 a woman is irrevocably connected to her beauty; it is a tool for women override class stratifications. Su Hang describes her as average looking, her elongated eyes resembling small fish but lacking vivacity – suggesting she is not bright and quickly to respond in communication, as has been mentioned as a classic beauty trait (see chapter 4.1). He further describes Lili as ugly when she is angry with him and pouts her lips, which he also mentions to her on every occasion. Finally he only finds her sexually attractive when she is crying uncontrollably – which also is the only time he takes initiative. This suggests he is only interested in her when she is unhappy in the way a woman kept in the restraints of pain and/or sorrow is attractive (as mentioned in chapter 3.3).

The most prominent woman in the story is Wrinkle. She is the girlfriend of both Little Thunder and of a Frenchman who is often not in Beijing. Wrinkle and Little Thunder could both be seen as immoral people for not being monogamous, but within this story they are not described as such. In fact, Wrinkle is very open about her other boyfriend and Little Thunder is not bothered, suggesting monogamy is not necessarily the only norm for a functional relationship. More interesting, however, are descriptions of Wrinkle's appearance: every character is described when first introduced to the reader or when their appearance drastically alters – such as getting injured – but Wrinkle is one of only two (female) characters whose appearance is described often.⁰ In the same way that Lili's relevance was minimized by downplaying her appearance and personality, Wrinkle's only relevance is her femininity which is being showcased through her appearance. Wrinkle cooks and knits and takes care of her friends when they are sick or injured, which are all stereotypical women's chores. When Little Thunder and Old Willow go outdoors for business, Wrinkle stays indoors. All these aspects confine Wrinkle to a domestic life; she lacks a public life purely because she is a woman. Her only way of feeling more modern is her use of clothing and makeup to create an image of a *femme fatale*. She might think this makes her trendy, but she does not realize she is only enforcing high beauty standards demanded by a patriarchal society; standards that directly link a woman's happiness to her beauty, standards that can only be realized through buying the right products (see chapters 3.3 and 3.4). If these mechanics of beauty culture and femininity would have been described in Yin's characteristic absurdist style they could have been interpreted as subversive, but this is not the case. Even though Wrinkle adheres to patriarchal gender stereotypes, her femininity is still downplayed and belittled by the male characters. For instance, her nickname seems inappropriate: someone who is focused on beautification is named after a facial feature despised by the beauty industry. Little Thunder has given her that nickname, which ensures the governance and agency of men over female beauty. In other words, Wrinkle adheres to patriarchal society by using the products that are supposed to make her more beautiful and more desirable by men, but she is still being mocked by the one man she wants approval of: her boyfriend. This is even quite literally said by Su Hang when he

⁰ Yin (2004), p. 14.

⁰ The other is the cashier.

says that the group has long stopped seeing Wrinkle as a 'real woman'.⁰ This shows that adhering to patriarchal society is not making women become more desirable, successful or happy since women will always be considered inferior in such a construction.

Comparing Manhood

Most of this thesis has focused on the portrayal and status of women and has glossed over masculinity. This does not mean there is no standard for men to live up to in order to be considered masculine. In this novel, Little Thunder's personality is the epitome of traditional masculinity: he is decisive, active and always has something to say. He also has some rough traits such as his swearing and his attitude towards women and sex (licking his lips at the thought of an attractive woman). Hunk, however, is the epitome of a man physically: strong, tall and muscular. Su Hang is neither; he is passive, lazy, not sociable and weak. Su Hang is clearly not worried about coming across as masculine, but the other two men are occasionally shown to be struggling with it. Hunk's virile appearance is not cohesive with his very shy personality, often blushing and at a loss for words. Little Thunder, jealous of Hunk's friendship with Su Hang, also tries to attack Hunk's masculinity by suggesting Su Hang and Hunk are in a sexual relationship together. It seems Little Thunder – and therefore the majority of men, since he is the portrayal of this demographic – regards homosexuality⁰ as the ultimate insult to a man's masculinity, which is only confirmed by Hunk's reaction to brawl. Little Thunder's jealousy and attempt to berate another man's masculinity show his own insecurity of not being virile enough. Su Hang, however, did not mention being insulted by the comment. When Hunk leaves the group he tells Su Hang, "I'm sorry, but I've fallen in love with someone else."⁰ This confirms that Hunk was in love with Su Hang, but Su Hang had not noticed – and had no reaction after finding this out either. Hunk's appearance playfully subverts the gender stereotype that physical strength resembles masculinity; the subversion is strengthened by Hunk's sexual orientation, as Little Thunder – symbol of the traditional stereotypical man – confirms homosexuality is often seen as a trait not belonging to masculine men. By giving Hunk such different traits the reader is pushed to not regard gender as a binary; masculinity and femininity are not necessarily assigned to only one gender. As Su Hang has zero stereotypical masculine traits he is the ultimate subversion of binary gender stereotypes.

The Pleasure of Watching

Fucker is rooted in voyeurism, the pleasure of watching. Su Hang becomes interested in a cashier at a supermarket – her importance already downplayed by the lack of a name. Su Hang never has any interaction with her other than purchasing products from the store, but he becomes obsessed with her. The reason is that her face resembles Lili's, although Su Hang has forgotten what Lili looks like – another way he minimizes Lili's role in the story. He coincidentally sees the cashier being fired, because she is suspected of stealing the products Su Hang and his friends had actually stolen. The

⁰ Yin (2004), p. 155.

⁰ It is not mentioned Hunk is exclusively attracted to people identifying themselves as male, but all non-heterosexual proclivities are also often seen as 'not masculine'.

⁰ Id., p. 224.

cashier is going home and Su Hang decides to follow her. He makes the route to her house many times and watches the building while smoking cigarettes. He makes sure not to be noticed by her, indicating he enjoys watching and following her secretly. As explained in chapter 3.2, voyeurism results in the subject creating a fantasy about the object. Su Hang has no control over nearly anything in his life, always letting his friends decide for him. By following the cashier he creates the illusion he has control over the woman. This illusion is overturned when Hunk admits to having followed Su Hang following the cashier. This makes Su Hang both the follower and the followed, which angers him – one of the few moments throughout the novel he displays any emotions. “I always thought I was the one manipulating [the cashier], but I’ve now come to the conclusion she was the only one in the entire world (...) for whom I cherish good feelings. I started to believe we were destined for the same fate. I hated her, but at the same time I wanted to see her.”⁰ Su Hang realizes he is not the one in control, which is why he believes they share the same fate: a life of no control, of passively accepting the struggles. Interestingly Su Hang starts to hate the cashier for getting these feelings, although it was Hunk who destroyed his voyeuristic fantasy. Although Laura Mulvey has researched gender power structures in films, the voyeurism in *Fucker* is quite a literal embodiment of her theory. Film is also important to *Fucker* as a story, since Hunk films store thieves and he and Su Hang edit the footage into what they themselves term documentaries. One of these documentaries is described in detail by the author, therefore forcing the reader to take part in the voyeurism of following someone unnoticed.

‘Chineseness’

Although *Fucker* is described as a novel set in ‘hypermodern’ Beijing, the story has several traditional Chinese elements. An example of this is the uneasiness with the introduction of multinationals– as the group never steals from businesses owned by small business owners or the state. The strongest traditional element in *Fucker* is Old Willow. He is an artist and poet and uses his status as an elder to get respect and admiration from others. He has grand ideas of making money, but without the safety net of a backup plan they never succeed. This is reminiscent of the grand – but often horribly failed – ideas from the Mao era, such as the implementation of backyard steel production; it was meant to help gain more resources, but contributed to the starvation of 30 million people.⁰ Where Chun Sue embraced the “hypermodern Beijing” by eagerly purchasing products from Western brands, Su Hang and his friends are a little more reserved towards the changes in their city. Beijing is again not portrayed as a ‘sexy metropolis’ like the beauty writers have portrayed Shanghai.

6.3 Conclusion

Fucker has been branded in the PRC as avant-garde, modern and controversial, but the Dutch publisher misbranded Yin Lichuan for the simple fact she fits the demographic of the beauty writers,

⁰ Yin (2004), pp. 134-135.

⁰ Schoppa, R. Keith. *The Columbia Guide to Modern Chinese History*. Columbia University Press, 2000, pp. 112-116.

disregarding the strong differences in their writing. Yin's characteristic writing as a 'Lower Body' poet can be seen in *Fucker* as well; her characters are somewhat immoral, unlikable and difficult to comprehend. Yin plays with male stereotypes and masculinity in this novel; Little Thunder struggles with his fear of not being masculine enough in the eyes of other men, whereas Hunk and Su Hang subvert traditional masculinity. When looking at femininity and female stereotypes Yin has done little to subvert conventional gender mechanisms, as Van Crevel has also noticed in her poems.⁰ De Lauretis's request for female subjectivity is unanswered here as all women in this novel are merely supporting roles for the men in the story. Wrinkle is the epitome of the modern *femme fatale*, unconsciously reinforcing stereotypes of femininity within a strong patriarchal structure. Lili is the embodiment of a traditional woman, passively accepting her fate as being treated as property. And finally, the cashier's relevance only exists in Su Hang's fantasy. Yet again, as Mulvey has worded, "Woman (...) stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other."⁰ In conclusion, in its core *Fucker* is strongly patriarchal.

6.4

⁰ Van Crevel (2008), p. 355.

⁰ See chapter 3.2.

7. Conclusions and Future Research

Answers to the Research Questions

In chapters 2, 3 and 4 I have provided the reader with a theoretical framework on the beauty writers, beauty theory and the history of beauty and sexuality in China. This theoretical framework is the foundation for my close-readings in chapters 5 and 6. Coming back to the research questions posed in chapter 1 they can now be answered.

- 1) What is the gender construction in the stories of *Beijing Doll* and *Fucker*?

The gender constructions in both stories are traditional; gender is binary – either man or woman – and the woman's role is inferior to the man's. In *Beijing Doll* Chun Sue insinuates her relevance is merely to be a man's love interest. In *Fucker* the female characters all have supporting roles for the male characters. In short, the patriarchal gender construction prevails.

- 2) Does this construction deviate from older notions of gender construction in China and if yes, how so?

Both novels have elements that deviate to a certain extent from a traditional gender construction. Chun Sue is sexually active with multiple men in a short time frame and likes to dress like a tomboy. In *Fucker*, Hunk is a playful adaptation of the stereotypical man and the only non-heterosexual character in both novels combined. Su Hang's character comes closest to breaking gender stereotypes since he has few traits to label him as a stereotypical man or woman. In both cases some alterations to the traditional structure can be seen, but they are not grand enough to make cracks in the patriarchal foundation.

- 3) Where does the controversy surrounding the beauty writers stem from?

Since the beauty writers adhere to the traditional patriarchal gender construction existing in the PRC, the controversy surrounding their works must be found outside of the novels. The changing society opening up to a global market contributed to the revival of body writing by female authors. The Shanghai beauty writers were quick to market themselves as such, using their sexuality as a marketing tool. Foreign publishers added their Chinese identity to market the novels as political readings and its writers as exotic and sexy. In my opinion this is where the controversy with the writers stems from. In chapter 6 I have explained the misbranding of Yin Lichuan as a beauty writer by the Dutch publisher, but in my opinion Chun Sue is not a beauty writer either. Although her writing is similar to the style of the Shanghai beauty writers, there is a lack of glamour and 'sexiness' in her novel. I believe the role of Beijing is an important one here, since the capital has less appeal to Chinese readers than 'sexy Shanghai'. Another important element is that Chun Sue and Yin Lichuan both have not marketed themselves as sexy objects as the Shanghai writers have. In my opinion, the beauty writers are a genre originated in a very specific era, culture *and* geographical location.

Further Reading and Future Research

Throughout my research I have come across some aspects I would have loved to research more, but was unable to. Tani Barlow has done extensive research on Chinese literature in relation to gender studies, but sadly I could not add her work in my thesis. The works of Robert van Gulik and Frank Dikötter also had interesting information I had to omit, but is definitely worth reading. I nearly side-tracked after reading *Fucker*, because I noticed this novel also had a shocking mention of sexual abuse. Since the role of sex in *Beijing Doll* was quite important I managed to include the sexual abuse, but I could not do so in *Fucker*. It would be an interesting research topic to see why sexual abuse is prevalent in both stories, if this occurs in other works by female authors more often and also why sex and violence – or sex and abuse of power – seem to be closely connected.

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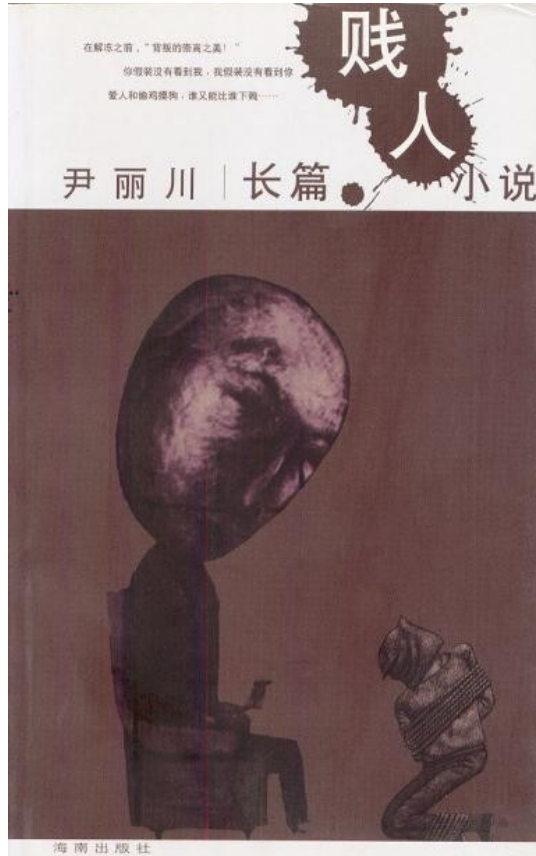
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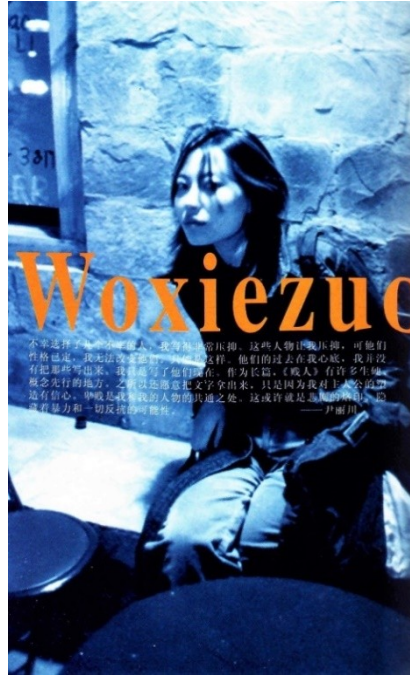
Appendices

Appendix II: Images of Yin Lichuan and *Fucker*

Front cover of *Fucker* (Chinese)

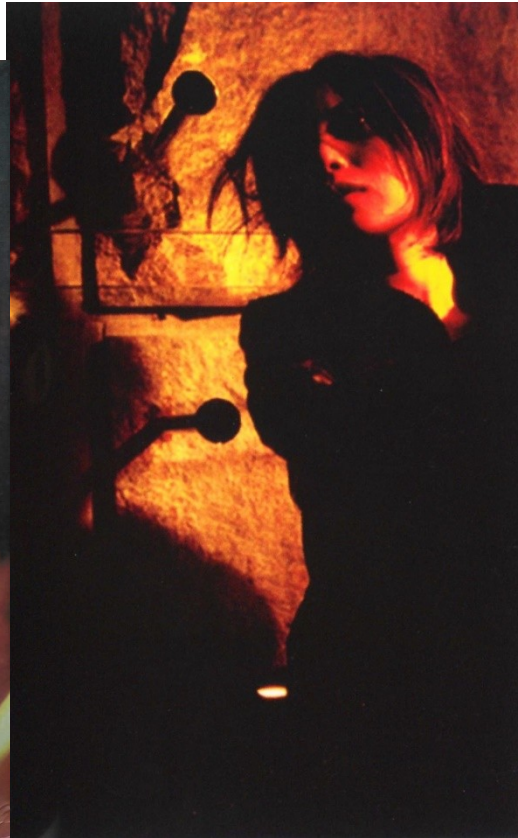
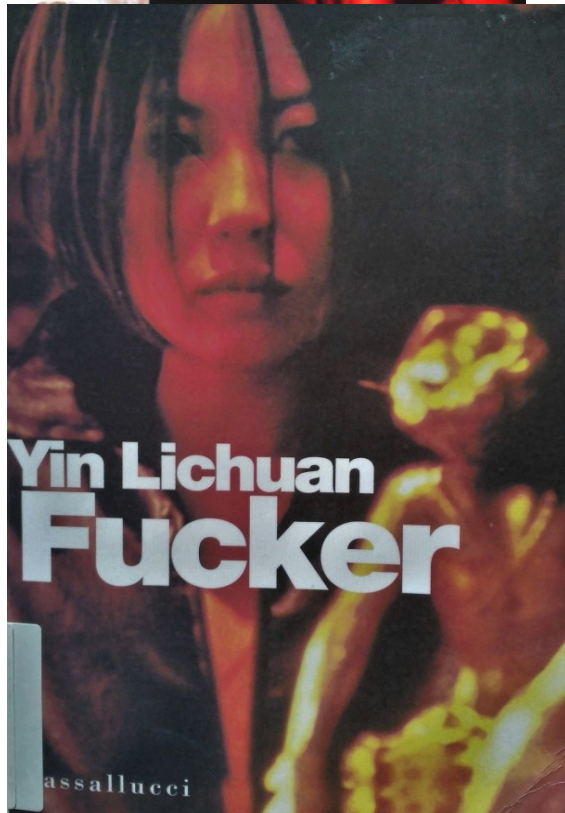


Added pictures of Yin Lichuan (Chinese)



Added pictures of Yin Lichuan (Chinese

Front and back cover from *Fucker* (Dutch)



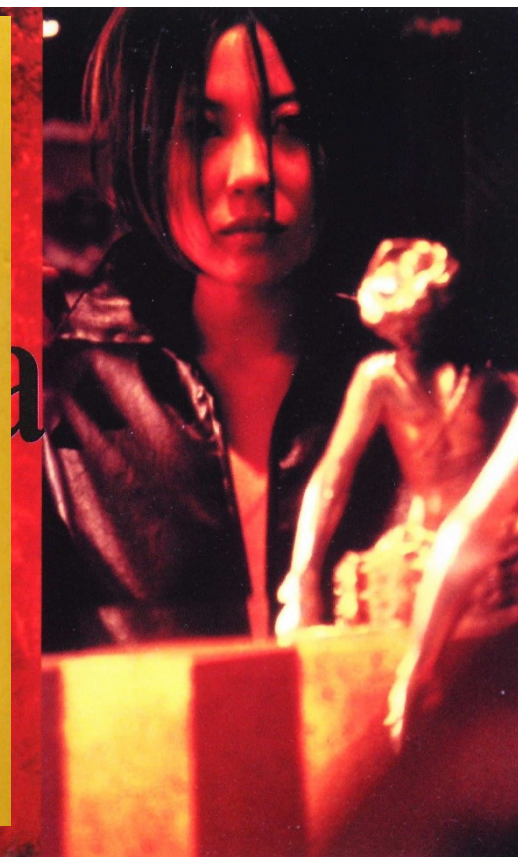
Yin Lichuan (1975) studeerde filmwetenschappen in China en Frankrijk en heeft al verschillende korte verhalen en essays op haar naam staan. Veel van haar poëzie kan alleen online gelezen worden. Met haar indrukwekkende romandebuut *Fucker* heeft Yin Lichuan

in China veel stof doen opwaaien.



Su Hang is een rommelaar die zijn kost verdient met een onduidelijk koeriersbaantje en een al even onduidelijke relatie heeft met Lili. Samen met zijn vrienden Oude Wilg, Kleine Donder en diens vriendin Rimpel vormen ze een moderne 'bende van vier' die eerst als performancekunstenaars door het leven willen gaan, maar er al snel achter komen dat de criminaliteit sneller geld en drugs oplevert...

In een robuuste, onsentimentele stijl laat Yin Lichuan op vaak hilarische wijze zien hoe haar karakters op zoek zijn naar vrijheid en hoe outsiders insiders willen zijn in de hypermoderne stad Beijing, waar niets is wat het lijkt. Niet erg verwonderlijk dus dat *Fucker* ook wel wordt gezien als het Chinese underground antwoord op *Trainspotting*.



Yin Lichuan. *Fucker* [Dutch translation]. Vassalucci, 2004.