HOMOSEXUALITY AND SELF-IMPOSED EXILE IN *THE SONG OF EVERLASTING SORROW*

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Abstract: In this paper, I hermeneutically scrutinise a 1995 award-winning masterpiece *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* and investigate its homosexual motif that lacks sufficient critical analysis. The author Wang Anyi features emotional and erotic entanglements between an archetypal yet extraordinary Shanghai woman Wang Qiyao and an array of male characters. I propound that apart from the protagonist's unceasing melancholia, as illuminated by the title, the narrative also concerns lifelong dolorousness of two female supporting characters, viz. Wu Peizhen and Jiang Lili, both of whom establish bonds with Qiyao at puberty. I postulate that analogous to schoolgirls depicted by Ailing Zhang, Peizhen and Lili demonstrate same-sex adoration of Qiyao, yet disparate from spurious, proto- or quasi-homosexuality portrayed in Zhang's writing, their zealousness and loyalty to Qiyao are not fugacious. Moreover, Peizhen's perpetual animation is also inextricably intertwined with acrimony triggered by her failed pursuit of heterosexual romance with Qiyao's committed admirer, leading to Peizhen's unremitting self-mutilation and self-banishment.

Keywords: *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, Wang Anyi, homosexual intimacy, acrimony, self-banishment

1. Introduction

The 1995 novel 长恨歌 *Changhen Ge* 'The Song of Everlasting Sorrow' (henceforward *Song*) is the chef-d'oeuvre of an illustrious female novelist and screenwriter 王安忆 Wang Anyi (1954-), a leading figure of Neorealism and post-Mao literary genres such as 伤痕文学 *Shanghen Wenxue* 'Scar Literature' and 寻根文学 *Xungen Wenxue* 'Root-Seeking Literature', who is celebrated for romantic self-expression, modernist style, critical realism and avant-garde narration (Feuerwerker 1998, Jing 2007, FitzGerald 2008, Zeng 2010, Castelli 2019). Wang endeavours to construct a language untainted by Maoist discourse and its ideological prescriptions and expounds psychological wounds and the devaluation of femininity during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that leaves post-Mao women scarred for life (Wu 2013, Denton 2016). The 2017

Newman Prize for Chinese Literature was bestowed upon Wang for her outstanding achievement and mega-writing of literature (Chiang and Rollins 2009, Newman Prize for Chinese Literature 2019); in the nomination statement, she is adulated as the most preponderant contemporary Chinese writer featured by mature and emotional insightfulness, who has illuminated the seismic transformations of China in the previous decades by means of innovative and consistent literary experiments, thereby elaborating Shanghai and even the whole country in literature (Dai and Feeley 2017). As a thought-provoking storyteller and a philosophical thinker, Wang's writing 'addresses not only China, Chinese life, and problems that Chinese people confront, but also grapples with universal modern conditions, taking long and broad views of human civilization and the evolution of people's living conditions. Shedding light on modern culture gone awry, she brings back the spectra of the past to weigh in on the present. She has invented ghosts of the past that come to haunt, derail, and critique modern life' (Wang 2018: 12).

Wang's writing bears similitude with that of 张爱玲 Zhang Ailing (aka Eileen Chang, 1920-1995), an iconic figure of urban modernist literature and public culture, who possessed splendid literary aptitude and literary prominence, as embodied by her sophisticated writing replete with stylistic devices and aestheticised details as well as an unparalleled mode of sensitivity and a multifaceted narrative configuration of temporality (Shen 2012, Wang 2012, Lee 2017, Weng 2018, Qu 2019). To be more specific, Wang demonstrates ambivalence towards Zhang's aesthetics of and penchant for detail: she lauds Zhang's devotion to details in life, whereas censures Zhang's aesthetic leap from the sensuous, viz. detail, to the nihilistic, viz. meaning; she deploys nostalgic details as signifying conduct to embrace idealism and reconstruct kaleidoscopic portraits of Shanghai in its previous incarnations, and strives to circumvent the dichotomy between detail and ideation (Xiao 2008). Moreover, notwithstanding the disparity that Zhang alternates between the real world and an illusory sphere in a nihilistic fashion yet Wang addresses real life and societal reality exclusively, both writers highlight nostalgia in old Shanghai by means of expatiating upon sumptuousness, cramped alleyway houses and the minutiae of everyday life, as well as typical indigenous women and their assiduousness, trivialities and travails (Gan 2004, Sun 2011, Bracken 2013, Bao 2017, Martin-Enebral 2017, Song 2017, Zhou 2018). Wang, therefore, is acclaimed as 'Eileen Chang's literary successor' of the 'Shanghai School' (Wang 1996, 2003, Xiao 2008, Basu and Guang 2010, Scheen 2015: 44).

Song is construed as Wang's most well-established work, in that it attains critical accolades, commercial success and media adaptations, as well as the prestigious literary award Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2000 (Callil 2011, Lau 2011, Scheen 2015: 159, Jia 2014), and its publication marks new attention to female subjectivity (McDougall 2005) and nostalgia as a personalised remembrance emerged in the Chinese cultural scene of the mid-1990s (Jiang 2003, Wang 2016). Spanning four decades of eventfulness and political turmoil between 1945 and 1985, *Song* has its setting in evocative alleyways of pre-liberation and reform-era Shanghai and concerns cathartic vicissitudes and dolorous denouements of the inconsequential petty bourgeoisie (Basu and Guang 2010, Hou 2014), so it is regarded as a post-revolutionary allegory of Shanghai in the 20th century (Wang 1996, Zhang 2000, Xu 2011, Scheen 2015: 176) represented via male-female relationships (Lei 2013, Yin and Lin 2013). This embroidered narrative features the extraordinary life of the protagonist 王琦瑶 Wang Qiyao notwithstanding her identity as a quintessential ordinary city-dweller (Fong 2012, Lynton 2013): born into a working-class family in the crowded, labyrinthine alleyways, Wang Qiyao is crowned 'Miss Third Place' in the Shanghai Beauty Pageant, upon which she is reduced to a mistress of a powerful bureaucrat of the Nationalist regime; despite complex entanglements with several men at different stages, Wang Qiyao has no matrimonial relationship but an illegitimate daughter, and she is murdered by a thief for a box of gold bars left by the deceased bureaucrat (Long 2007, Wang 2016, Li 2017).

In this article, I investigate the everlasting sorrow encapsulated in *Song*, focusing on the unrelenting melancholia of two supporting characters, i.e. 吴佩珍 Wu Peizhen and 蒋丽莉 Jiang Lili, which deserves more critical attention. Hermeneutic interpretation indicates that both characters exhibit homosexual adoration of the protagonist, and Lili's devotion is additionally intertwined with her heterosexual affection for the protagonist's faithful admirer.

2. Title and sorrow

The title of *Song*, viz. 长恨歌 *Changhen Ge*, is identical to that of a celebrated poem composed by a renowned realistic poet 白居易 Bai Juyi (aka Po Chü-i, 772-846 AD) of the Tang (618-907 AD) dynasty (Yang 1996, Shang 2011, Buswell and Lopez 2013, Luo 2018), a pioneer of an innovative genre dubbed as 新乐府 *xin yuefu* 'new music bureau/folk-song' (DeBlasi 2002: 25, Chen 2015, Tan 2017), whose verse is characterised by a wide range of themes, styles and forms, as well as exquisite rhythm, plain language, deep nostalgia and elaborate

depiction (Shields 2006, Chan 2011: 144, Zha 2015, Wang et al 2019). Bai's poetry can be categorised into four groups, concerning allegorical signifiers, leisure life, sentimental feelings and various metrical patterns (Fang 2010, Zhai 2019), and *Changhen Ge* is a paradigm of the third category, viz. 感伤诗 *ganshang shi*, in that this narrative chronicles the legendary love tragedy between Emperor Xuanzong (reign. 712-756 AD) and his royal consort, the notorious beauty Yang Guifei (aka Yang Yuhuan, 719-756 AD) (Mao 2016, Yu 2016, Sun and Gong 2017). This elaborate and aesthetic ballad is constituted of 120 lines in seven-syllable verse (Waley 2005: 44) and is replete with cultural images bearing implied connotations with and without figurative senses (Zhang 2002, Yang 2019). Moreover, there are sensual lines encapsulating obscenity that is fundamentally visual and hence invites voyeuristic imagination, thereby being perceived as the quintessence of erotic literature and inspiring following textual and visual works portraying Yang (Li 2008, Wang 2018). As an epitome of classical Chinese poetry that integrates aestheticism with sentimentalism, this poem manifests abstract aesthetic feeling with distinctive oriental colour in concrete imagery and narration, and thus substantially impinges upon East Asian poetry (Jiang 1999, Wang 2015, Zhang 2017).

Apart from the identical title, the correlation between Bai's poem and Wang's novel also lies in the latter's quotations of verses from the former, as well as analogous literary allusions pertaining to flora and fauna abounding in cultural connotations (Zeng 2013). More significantly, Wang's imitation and enrichment of the poem as an archetype can be embodied by her similar source of inspiration, political stance, depiction of male-female relationships, as well as unravelling of individuals' doomed victimisation in the event of destiny and time (Zhang 2000, Sun and Gong 2017). Furthermore, there is an intertextual correlation between *Song* and a 1688 drama 长生殿 *Changshengdian* 'Palace of Everlasting Life' composed by a Qing (1644-1912) playwright 洪昇 Hong Sheng (1645-1704) concerning this love tragedy of the Tang dynasty (Sun 2009, Stuckey 2010, Wang 2010).

As indicated by the title, *Song* concerns 'everlasting sorrow', which has been hermeneutically scrutinised from the perspective of the protagonist Wang Qiyao. Nonetheless, I postulate that apart from the perpetual melancholia and yearning of Qiyao, the narrative also alludes to that of two female supporting characters, i.e. Wu Peizhen and Jiang Lili.

In addition to a list of distinctive male characters romantically or erotically entangled with the heroine (Lee 2005, Liu and He 2010, Lei

2013), *Song* entails female characters who have established multifaceted and fragile friendships with Qiyao since the bureaucrat's decease: Madame Yan, who perceives herself as 'a crane among chickens', demonstrates complex integration of conniving reverence and covetous disdain for Qiyao; the supercilious yet self-abased Zhang Yonghong extols Qiyao's fashion sense whereas endeavours to eclipse her (Wang 1996, Mao 2010, Dai 2014). At puberty in an all-girls school, however, Qiyao's female friends are exclusively Wu Peizhen and Jiang Lili, both of whom exhibit strong and sincere bonds with Qiyao prior to and after she becomes the renowned 沪上淑媛 *Hushang Shuyuan* 'Proper Young Lady of Shanghai' (trans. Berry and Chan 2008)¹ in 1945 Shanghai.

3. 'Sisterly love' and homosexuality

In this section, I explore the female-female friendship between the protagonist and the two supporting characters, and I propound that the 'sisterly love's is analogous to female same-sex bonds depicted by Zhang Ailing. The schoolgirl homosexual bond manifested by Jiang Lili is correlated with carnal intimacy, rather than just spiritual love. In terms of Wu Peizhen, her adoration of the protagonist is featured by unceasing melancholia and loyalty, as opposed to fugacious infatuations.

In *Song*, female-female friendship is referred to as 'sisterly love' (姊妹情谊 *xiao zimei qingyi*) that might be lifelong between girls and women in Shanghai. In Zhang's fiction composed in the US, such as the highly anticipated and contentious 相见欢 *Xiangjianhuan* 'Ecstasy of Encounters' and two posthumously-published narratives 小团圆 *Xiao Tuanyuan* 'Little Reunion' and 同学少年都不贱 *Tongxue Shaonian Dou Bu Jian* 'Schoolmates and Adolescents are All Meritorious' (trans. mine), there is an element concerning spurious, proto- or quasi-homosexuality between pubescent and mature females. In works appertaining to lesbian representation and sexuality, Zhang unravels fugacious impulse and precocious play of normal instinct among schoolgirls at the evolution of puberty in a form of sexual irritation fostered by physical intimacy (Chen 2004a, 2004b, Wang 2014).

In *Song*, Qiyao's girlhood friend Wu Peizhen has ardour for her, functioning as a paradigm of 'sisterly love'. Nonetheless, Peizhen's passion for Qiyao should not be analysed as pure friendship, but rather

¹ Unless specified otherwise, translations of all expressions and examples are cited from Berry and Chan (2008).

female-female homosexuality, as illustrated in Example (1). Furthermore, I posit that parallel to Zhang's representation of schoolgirl homosexual romance as the incarnation of celebrity worship (Yan 2012), Peizhen's zealous fondness for Qiyao encapsulates her reverence and fantasy, as shown in Example (2). Nevertheless, given the fact that Qiyao also embraces Peizhen's worship and presumes herself to be an ideal idol, her failure to enter the film industry triggers her humiliation and reprehension against Peizhen, and hence the cessation of their friendship (Lei 2013, Dai 2014, Zheng 2019).

(1)

这晚上, 吴佩珍竟也做了个关于片厂的梦, 梦见水银灯下有个盛装的女人, 回眸一笑, 竟是王琦瑶, 不由感动得酸了。她对王琦瑶的感情, 有点像一个少年对一个少女, 那种没有欲念的爱情, 为她做什么都肯的。

She dreamed of an elegantly dressed woman under the mercury-vapor lamps. When the woman turned to her and smiled, Wu Peizhen saw that she was none other than Wang Qiyao; she was so excited that she woke up. Her feelings for Wang Qiyao were a bit like the puppy love that a teenage boy feels for a girl for whom he is willing to go to the edge of the earth.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 29)

(2)

由这谦虚出发, 她就总无意地放大别人的优点, 很忠实地崇拜, 随时准备奉献她的热诚。...吴佩珍的粗心其实只是不在乎, 王琦瑶的宽待她是心领的, 于是加倍地要待她好, 报恩似的。

In her modesty, she tended to exaggerate other people's strengths, place them on a pedestal, and offer them her devotion...Wu Peizhen's carelessness was the function of an uncalculating mind. She appreciated Wang Qiyao's magnanimity and tried even harder to please her as though repaying her kindness.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 27)

In modern Chinese culture, female-female same-sex love is escalated by emotionally intense and physically intimate friendship and is inextricably intertwined with women's memory of adult femininity (Martin 2010: 12). That is to say, schoolgirl homosexual bonds are interconnected with carnal intimacy, as opposed to purely spiritual love. As mentioned previously, apart from Peizhen, same-sex closeness in *Song* can be attested from another girlhood friend, Jiang Lili. In Lili's initial encounter with Qiyao, physical contact accelerates her 'sisterly love' towards Qiyao, as shown in Example (3). Although I propound that

Lili adopts a gender-separatist mode in which female femininity is a prerequisite shared by both partners (Rohy 2000: 4), rather than a gender-transitive framework entailing secondary genders of butches and femmes (Roof 1991: 5), Lili might subconsciously assume a gender role of a tomboy, triggered by Qiyao's inordinate feminine attraction while her own lack of it.

(3)

蒋丽莉还时不时将她的手紧握一下, 似乎有什么你知我知的秘密。这陡然而起的亲密, 是叫王琦瑶 发窘, 可她面上并不流露, 也是知己的样子。

Meanwhile, Jiang Lili would give Wang Qiyao's hand a little squeeze from time to time, as if there were some secrets that only the two of them shared. But such forced intimacy only made Wang Qiyao ill at ease. However, no trace of uneasiness showed on her face and she continued to act as if she and Jiang Lili were the best of friends.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 51)

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of female-female romantic/erotic practices are reduced to a temporary adolescent phase of spurious homosexuality, and only a trivial proportion of girls are congenitally predisposed to homosexuality in the presence of heteronormative sexual objects (Ellis 2001: 126, Ellis and Symonds 2008: 163). Nonetheless, I postulate that as manifested in the title, the 'sorrow' is 'everlasting' not only for the protagonist Qiyao, but also for her two female friends. Discrepant from Qiyao, whose sorrow is attributed to her emotional/erotic entanglements with various men as an ill-fated femme fatale, the 'everlasting sorrow' of Peizhen is triggered by her same-sex homosexual devotion to Qiyao. In stark contrast to spurious, proto- or quasi-homosexual relationships between pubescent girls in Zhang's fiction, the vast majority of which are fugacious, Peizhen's adoration of Qiyao is not an infatuation but characterised by unceasing melancholia and loyalty, as in Example (4), albeit Qiyao's irrational estrangement.

(4)

吴佩珍感觉到王琦瑶的回避, 不由黯然神伤。但她却并不丧失信心, 她觉得无论过多少日子, 王琦瑶 终究会回到她的身边。她的友情化成虔诚的等待, 她甚至没有去交新的女朋友, 因不愿让别人侵占 王琦瑶的位置。

Sensing that she was being avoided, Wu Peizhen felt heartbroken, but she held on to the hope that Wang Qiyao would eventually come back to her. Her friendship changed into a kind of pious

waiting; she did not even look for any new girlfriends, afraid that they might take Wang Qiyao's place.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 38-39)

The temporariness of schoolgirl same-sex love indicated in Zhang's writing accords with the mass-cultural representation of temporary lesbian love between pubescent girls and youthful women in Chinese modernist literature during 1920s and 1930s, which predominantly entails excruciating incursion imposed by socially mandated cross-gender matrimonial relationships (Martin 2010: 12) and portrays idealised and failed romances featured by utopianism (Martin 2010: 51). In *Song*, however, Peizhen's homosexual adoration of Qiyao still exists after marriage: it can be seen from Example (5) that Qiyao has been serving as Peizhen's sole object of 'sisterly love', which cannot be circumnavigated or suppressed by a heterosexual/matrimonial relationship.

(5)

她收起些局促,身子坐正,抬起脸,对着王琦瑶说:她这次冒昧地上门,是来向她告别的,她本来不准备打搅她,可临到要走,总觉得不见她一面就走不了,这一走,不知什么时候才能见面,王琦瑶是她最好的朋友,也是唯一的朋友,她对于王琦瑶也许情形不同,可王琦瑶对于她确实如此,上海这地方叫她留恋的,除了父母家人,就是王琦瑶了,和王琦瑶做朋友的那一段,是她最快乐,最无忧无虑的时光。

She recomposed herself and sat up to face Wang Qiyao, to tell her that she was sorry for the sudden visit but that she could not possibly leave without saying goodbye. Once she left, she said, she did not know when she would see her best friend, and her only friend, again. This might not be how Wang Qiyao viewed their friendship, she realized, but she herself had always done so. Apart from her own parents, Wang Qiyao would be the only person in Shanghai she was going to miss; their carefree time together had been the happiest in her life. Wu Peizhen was overstating the case, but it was true for her then and there.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 135)

4. Reprehension and self-imposed exile

In this section, I focus on the character Jiang Lili and illustrate her reprehension and self-imposed exile triggered by her homosexual devotion to Qiyao and heterosexual adoration of Qiyao's admirer. Albeit merely assuming trivial roles in the narrative, such as sponsoring the

protagonist's participation in the beauty pageant, Jiang Lili is represented as a multifaceted character with distinctive attributes and mindset (Berry 2017, Zheng 2019).

Parallel to Peizhen, Lili has been treating Qiyao as her only girlhood friend, and her loyalty and veneration for Qiyao does not vanish after the beauty pageant which marks the end of their puberty. Owing to her arrogant characteristic, mediocre appearance and thus lack of friends, Lili is eager to ingratiate herself with Qiyao. Additionally, her zealousness is enriched and fantasised by fictional works, which entertains herself and touches her own heart yet functions as a form of moral coercion for Qiyao, as in Example (6). Moreover, notwithstanding an affluent background, Lili is void of familial rapport and thus falls prey to loneliness and resorts to fiction prior to Qiyao's presence (Dai 2014, Zheng 2019), rendering her to deem Qiyao as the only beneficiary of her care and love (Example (7)). Analogous to schoolgirls embroidered in Zhang's narratives, Lili's admiration for Qiyao should also be perceived as fantasy projection, instead of her own homosexual recognition or identification.

(6)

这爱不仅是她自己的, 还加上小说里看来的, 王琦瑶真有些招架不住了。

But this love issued not only from Jiang Lili. Much of it came from the novels she had read. Wang Qiyao could hardly bear it.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 57)

(7)

上海小姐”这称号对她无关紧要, 要紧的是王琦瑶。她想得王琦瑶的欢心, 这心情是有些可怜见的。她对父母兄弟都是仇敌一般, 唯独对个王琦瑶, 把心里的好兜底捧出来的, 好像要为她的爱找个靶子似的。

The title of “Miss Shanghai” actually meant nothing to her—all that was important to Jiang Lili was Wang Qiyao. She wanted to win over Wang Qiyao's favor; it was, in fact, a little sad to see. Her parents and siblings she treated like enemies, reserving all her affection for Wang Qiyao, who seemed to be the longed-for target of her love.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 57)

In addition to worshipping Qiyao in a quasi-homosexual manner, Lili exhibits complete adoration of an exemplary Shanghai gentleman Mr Cheng, which contributes to her lifelong sorrow and reprehension. Mr Cheng assumes a dual role as both a dedicated amateur photographer and aesthete who presents Qiyao's beauty to the old Shanghai, as well

as a faithful admirer of Qiyao since her puberty, who adamantly remains single until committing suicide after the advent of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Zhang 2000, Prose 2008, Martin-Enebral 2017). Nonetheless, Qiyao's aspirations lie in glory and upper-class extravagance (Lee 2005, Castelli 2019), so she declines yet exploits Mr Cheng's genuine love (Liu and He 2010, Fong 2012, Lei 2013). In a word, as illustrated in Example (8), Qiyao has always been treating Mr Cheng as a backup. Therefore, upon discovering Lili's deep affection for Mr Cheng, she ridicules Lili's reverie due to her self-confidence in retaining Mr Cheng's loyalty (Example (9)) and keeps deploying both of them.

(8)

倚靠的是哪一部分命运, 王琦瑶也不去细想, 想也想不过来。但她可能这么以为, 退上一万步, 最后 还有个程先生; 万事无成, 最后也还有个程先生。总之, 程先生是个垫底的。

To what extent Wang Qiyao was willing to put her fate in his hands was something to which she gave little thought; she couldn't. Perhaps she was thinking: Even if I take ten thousand steps back, in the end I'll still have Mr. Cheng; even if everything comes to naught, when all is said and done, he will still be there. Mr. Cheng was her cushion.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 85)

(9)

王琦瑶这么撮合蒋丽莉和程先生, 有一点为日后脱身考虑, 有一点为照顾蒋家母女的心情, 也有一点看笑话的。她再明白不过, 程先生的一颗心全在她的身上, 这也是一点垫底的骄傲。看着蒋丽莉 心甘情愿地碰壁, 虽也是不忍, 却还是解了一些心头委屈似的。

By bringing together Jiang Lili and Mr. Cheng, Wang Qiyao was partially setting things up for her own retreat. It was also her way of looking out for Jiang Lili and her mother, as well as an opportunity to sit back and laugh at them. She knew better than anyone that Mr. Cheng had already invested his heart in her, which gave her self-esteem a padding she could always fall back on. Although it was painful to see Jiang Lili throwing herself against a brick wall, it was also a means for Wang Qiyao to vent some of her own pent-up resentment.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 87)

In the narrative, there are paradigms illuminating Mr Cheng's wholehearted love for Qiyao and Lili's love for him. However, as is axiomatic for all three of them, Mr Cheng remains adamant and even

intransigent in terms of his love for Qiyao, rendering Lili dolorous and despondent (Example (10)).

(10)

她痴痴地想了半天, 觉得了自己的可怜。从小到大, 都是别人为她做的多, 唯有两个人是反过来, 是她为他们做的多, 这就是王琦瑶和程先生, 偏偏是这两个人, 是最不顾忌她, 当她可有可无。The very idea depressed her, and she spent the rest of the day feeling sorry for herself. Since she was a child, everyone had tried to please her; the only people she had ever tried to please were Wang Qiyao and Mr. Cheng. And in the eyes of these two people, she might as well have never existed.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 120)

As a consequence of her ignored sincerity and failed pursuit of heterosexual romance, Lili harbours a grievance against Qiyao and Mr Cheng, thereby resolving to retaliate against them by means of punishing herself. Although born into a moneyed capitalist family with an extravagant lifestyle, Lili becomes an ardent communist in a Lenin suit, baggy khaki pants and shabby, dusty pigskin shoes. More significantly, apart from dishevelled appearance, Lili demonstrates recalcitrant defiance against her original social class and substitutes previous self-indulgence with self-discipline and political re-education: she ceases education to work as a factory labourer, marries a military representative she abominates and is keen to join the Communist Party. From Qiyao's perspective, Lili's radical transformation is self-fulfilling and self-deluding, as manifested in Example (11).

(11)

听她说这些, 王琦瑶恍惚看见了那个对月吟诗的蒋丽莉, 不过那时吟的是风月, 如今却是铁骨热血, 有点献祭的味道。两种都带有夸张的戏剧的风格, 听起来总叫人不敢全信。但别人再是怀疑, 蒋丽莉自己却是全心投入。听她说完, 王琦瑶便再无话可说了。

Listening to her, Wang Qiyao could almost see the old Jiang Lili, that romantic poet she had known in her youth, reappear before her eyes. Times had changed, however, and Jiang Lili's odes to the wind and moon had been replaced by devoted words about steely determination and selfless sacrifice. Now, as then, however, the style smacked of theatrical exaggeration and was not entirely persuasive. Nonetheless, Jiang Lili's sincerity and dedication were not to be doubted. After listening to her lecture, Wang Qiyao was at an utter loss as to what else she could say.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 263)

Furthermore, as can be seen from Example (12), Lili is fully aware of her anathema to the novel prevailing social and ideological norms, along with her work and marriage that are characterised by salient political connotations; she even disdains her three sons, in that as 'diminutive copies' of her husband, the three boys are 'rambunctious, foul-mouthed, disorderly, and dirty' and speak Mandarin 'with a thick rustic accent, reeked constantly of onions and garlic, and ha[ve] smelly feet' (Berry and Chan 2008: 264). However, Lili resolves to force herself to endure the abhorrence, so as to punish her previous animation for Qiyao and Mr Cheng. By means of torturing herself as self-imposed banishment, Lili surmises that she has managed to avenge on Qiyao and Mr Cheng with her 'whole life'. As a result, even if Lili is entrusted by Mr Cheng to attend Qiyao and her illegitimate newborn, she is still self-contradictory between adoring Qiyao and Mr Cheng as well as resenting them along with the previous self inevitably intertwined with them (Example (13)).

(12)

这十多年来, 她过的是一种截然不同的生活。她以她历来的狂热, 接受这生活里不堪承受的一面。从前放纵任性的冲动, 这时全用在约束检讨自己。她的积极性令她左右上下的人都感到跟不上。什么样的事情, 她都要做得过头。她自知是落后反动, 于是做人行事就都反着她的心愿来, 越是不喜欢什么, 就越是要做什么。比如和丈夫老张的婚姻, 再比如杨树浦的纱厂。她变得越来越不像自己, 有点像演戏, 却是拿整个生活作剧情的。

For more than ten years now, Jiang Lili had been leading a radically different life. She had redirected her passion toward accepting everything that she had once found repugnant. Where she had been impulsive and self-indulgent, she was now self-critical and disciplined. Her ardor left everyone else straggling far behind. She took everything to the brink—and then some. To make up for her bad political background, she was determined always to go against what her heart truly desired—the more she abhorred something, the more she insisted on doing it. Marrying Old Zhang was one example, choosing to work at the cotton mill in Yangshupu another. As time went by, the old Jiang Lili grew increasingly distant; it was as if she was playacting, and her whole life was the play.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 245)

(13)

如今, 蒋丽莉每过十天半月就会来王琦瑶处坐一坐, 她对自己说是为了受人之托。其实那只是一半。另一半是因为对旧时光的怀恋, 这个怀恋甚至使她忽略了王琦瑶是她的“情敌”这一事实。但这是她不能正视的情感。她是要与旧时光一刀两断的新人。

From this time on Jiang Lili began coming by to visit Wang Qiyao every two weeks or so. She told herself that she was merely holding true to the promise she had made, but that was only the half of it. The other thing that kept drawing her back was nostalgia; this nostalgia was so strong that it even allowed her to overlook the fact that Wang Qiyao was actually her rival in love. At the same time, however, she fancied herself as a product of the new society, someone who had made a clean break with the past.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 263-264)

Although both Qiyao and Mr Cheng fully understand Lili's integrated love, acrimony and self-abasement, neither Qiyao or Lili unravels her ambivalence till Lili is diagnosed with fatal cancer. Being in her death throes, Lili eventually expresses her reprehension by means of chastising Qiyao and Mr Cheng for ruining her life, yet she still rejects Mr Cheng's visit as a gesture of atonement (Example (14)). In other words, Lili's paradoxical emotions and self-imposed exile last till her decease.

(14)

王琦瑶流着泪说: 蒋丽莉, 你多么不值得, 为了一个男人, 就不好好做人了, 你简直太傻了! 蒋丽莉泪如泉涌地说道: 王琦瑶, 我告诉你, 我这一辈子都是你们害的, 你们害死我了! 王琦瑶忍不住抱住她, 说: 蒋丽莉, 你以为我不知道? 你以为他不知道? 蒋丽莉先是将她推开, 后又一把拉进怀里, 两人紧紧抱住, 哭得喘不过气来。蒋丽莉说: 王琦瑶, 我真是太倒霉太倒霉了!

'Jiang Lili...' Wang Qiyao spoke through her tears. 'It's not worth it. Don't throw your life away for a man. How could you be so foolish?' Jiang Lili's tears were coming down in a steady stream. 'Well, let me tell you, Wang Qiyao. It's the two of you who have ruined my life, totally ruined it!' Wang Qiyao couldn't suppress the desire to console her; she reached out to hug her. 'Jiang Lili, do you think I don't know? Do you think he doesn't know?' At first Jiang Lili tried to push her away, but Wang Qiyao pulled her back into her arms and held her tight. They embraced and both were crying so hard that they could barely breathe. 'Wang Qiyao, I have had such wretched luck...such wretched luck!' Jiang Lili sobbed.

(Wang 1996. Trans. Berry and Chan 2008: 279)

5. Conclusion

It is overwhelmingly acknowledged that the everlasting sorrow in the narrative, as indicated by the title, is correlated with the protagonist Qiyao. Nonetheless, the unremitting melancholia of Peizhen and Lili is prone to be neglected, so in this article, I explore these two multifaceted supporting characters, illustrating their complex homosexual bonds with the protagonist.

I propound that as Qiyao's girlhood friend, Peizhen exhibits 'sisterly love' and deep fondness for Qiyao in a homosexual fashion, which bears similitude to female characters in Zhang Ailing's writing appertaining to lesbian representation and female-female sexuality. Nevertheless, discrepant from schoolgirls depicted in Zhang Ailing's fiction, whose spurious, proto- or quasi-homosexual bonds are fugacious, Peizhen adores Qiyao even after she has established a heterosexual matrimonial relationship. After Qiyao vents reprehension against Peizhen by virtue of her failure to enter the film industry, she is worshipped by another schoolgirl, Lili, whose ardour, I argue, is intensified by emotional intensity, physical intimacy and fantasy projection. Nevertheless, I posit that Lili's devotion to Qiyao is entangled with her zealous affection for Qiyao's faithful admirer Mr Cheng, rendering Lili acrimonious for the rest of her life. Impinged upon by social transformations and haunted by agony, Lili resolves to go into self-imposed exile by means of defying against her original social class and family, converting to Communism, as well as substituting previous indulgence with political intransigence. That is to say, Lili's reprehension and self-imposed exile are caused by her homosexual devotion to Qiyao as well as an unsatisfied heterosexual desire.

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《长恨歌》中的同性情愫与自我放逐

本文旨在探讨王安忆发表于 1995 年的长篇小说《长恨歌》。作者描绘了一位典型的上海女性王琦瑶与不同男性角色之间的爱恨纠葛,而书中的同性恋情愫却少有研究。如题目所示,《长恨歌》不仅揭示了主人公王琦瑶的凄惨命运,还暗示了其他两位女性角色的毕生痛苦,即王琦瑶少女时期的亲密女伴吴佩珍和蒋丽莉。与张爱玲笔下的女学生相似,吴佩珍和蒋丽莉对王琦瑶展现出同性间的爱恋。而与张爱玲笔下短暂的迷恋不同,两位女性配角对主角的情感更为炙热而忠诚。此外,蒋丽莉对王琦瑶的毕生追求者爱而不得,这份失败的异性恋情进一步加剧了她的悲剧色彩,并最终导致了她的自我毁灭与放逐。

关键词

长恨歌, 王安忆, 哀恸, 同性情感, 自我放逐