

**A CHINESE TELEVISION DRAMA:  
THE "ASPIRATIONS" PHENOMENON**

By

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**Declaration**

**Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.**

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## LIST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

**Liu Huifang:** Eldest daughter of Liu Dama. Initially engaged to the worker Song Dacheng, Huifang marries the intellectual Wang Husheng. She brings up a foundling child, Liu Xiaofang, as her own. Huifang and Husheng have a son together, Wang Dongdong, and later divorce.

**Wang Yaru:** The elder sister of Husheng. Engaged to Luo Gang, she has his baby while he is in a "reform through labour" camp. She is a surgeon. Depicted as strong and independent, she is also shown to be arrogant, ill-tempered and cruel. She rejects Luo Gang after she learns that he has lost their baby. She is always contemptuous of Huifang and the Liu family, but comes to realise the error of her ways when she discovers that Xiaofang is actually her own long-lost daughter, Luo Dan or Dandan.

**Wang Husheng:** A university student initially sent to work in the factory where Huifang and Song Dacheng work. Huifang is his supervisor. Husheng and Huifang marry, although his sister Yaru and Huifang's mother are against the match. The father of Wang Dongdong, he and Huifang later divorce. Husheng later rekindles a romance with Xiao Zhuxin, his girlfriend from university. However because Zhuxin can't bear to hurt Huifang, she breaks off the relationship with him. Husheng is depicted with the negative characteristics of a "typical" intellectual - physically weak, impractical and selfish, and interested only in material gain.

**Luo Gang:** The fiance of Yaru, he is sent to a labour camp during the Cultural Revolution. At one stage he escapes from the camp and returns to Beijing, where he finds that Yaru has had a baby. She leaves the baby with him for a few hours but his pursuers arrive and he has to leave quickly to avoid them. He goes to the long distance bus station to leave Beijing, but is re-captured there, and a peasant woman

takes the baby home with her. When he eventually returns to Beijing, he becomes a lecturer in the Literature Department of Beijing University, where Yanzi (Huifang's younger sister) is one of the students. He writes a book about a couple who lose a child, and Yanzi suspects that it is about himself and Yaru. He makes some attempts to reunite with Yaru, but she won't accept him. When he gets to know the Liu family he helps them by giving Huifang work and by helping with Xiaofang, especially after he suspects that Xiaofang is the baby Dandan whom he lost. In the end he wants to marry Huifang because he does not want to separate her from Xiaofang, to whom she has been a mother all these years.

**Song Dacheng:** A worker at the factory with Huifang, he was going to marry her until she met Husheng. He marries Yuejuan instead, later going to jail for two years through no fault of his own owing to a shady business deal arranged by Guoqiang (Huifang's brother). After his release, he becomes a successful businessman, bringing the factory into a joint venture deal with an Italian company. His honesty and patience are portrayed as "typical" working class traits.

**Xiao Zhuxin:** The college girlfriend of Husheng. He rejects her just before her return home to Fujian province. She returns to Beijing several years later, and Yaru tries to reunite her with Husheng. She gets a job as a translator in Beijing with the help of Wang Zitao, but rejects Husheng's advances because she doesn't want to hurt Huifang. As someone who was expected to marry into it, she is almost part of the Wang family in the same way that Song Dacheng is almost part of the Liu family. Yaru is always very affectionate towards her, and Wang Zitao treats her almost like a daughter. She becomes very close to Dongdong after his parents' marriage break-up, supervising his piano lessons and looking after him. On the eve of her departure for the united States to go and live with an aunt, Husheng proposes to her, but she turns him down. The last frames of the series show her return from America, and her arrival

at the front door of the Wang home, although it is impossible to tell what has happened in her absence or what will happen next.

**Yuejuan:** Best friend of Liu Huifang and wife of Song Dacheng. She suffers frequent attacks of jealousy over the relationship between Dacheng and Huifang. She is distraught to discover that she has a fertility problem. After treatment by Tian Li she is cured, but Dacheng is arrested and sent to jail for two years, dashing her hopes for a baby. During his absence she then becomes a private entrepreneur more concerned with cash than people. After being accused by Yuejuan of having an affair with Dacheng, Huifang goes wandering through the streets in a daze and is hit by a car, to be bedridden for months.

**Tian Li:** The faithful friend and confidante of Yaru, she is tireless in her efforts to get Yaru and Luo Gang back together again. She is portrayed as the voice of reason for Yaru. As she is also a doctor at the hospital, she becomes involved in helping Huifang to find an adoptive home for Xiaofang when she is a baby, although Huifang finally decides to keep Xiaofang herself. She also treats Yuejuan for her inability to become pregnant.

**Yanzi:** Younger sister of Huifang. Yanzi brings a baby, (later named Liu Xiaofang), home from a school trip to the countryside. She later studies literature at Beijing University, developing a crush on Luo Gang who is lecturing there. She guesses the truth about Xiaofang from Luo Gang's novel. When she graduates she becomes a journalist.

**Liu Dama:** Mother of Huifang and Yanzi. The son-in-law she wanted was Song Dacheng. A "typical" working class woman, she always speaks her mind. She never accepts Husheng.

**Liu Xiaofang:** Also known as Luo Dan or Dandan. Natural daughter of Wang Yaru and Luo Gang, she is lost by Luo Gang as a small baby when he is arrested. Yanzi finds her and brings her home from a trip to the countryside and Huifang brings her up as her own daughter. Xiaofang has an accident as a child and is crippled. Wang Yaru later on performs surgery so that Xiaofang can regain the use of her legs. Xiaofang learns who her real parents are when she is about fifteen.

**Wang Dongdong:** Son of Liu Huifang and Wang Husheng, "younger brother" of Liu Xiaofang. He is adversely affected by the break-up of his parents' marriage. Xiao Zhuxin acts in a maternal role towards him once his parents separate and he sees less of his own mother Liu Huifang. Dongdong wins a piano competition by playing a song for his mother when she is in hospital.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Chinese television drama "Aspirations" (*Kewang*) was first screened in China in November 1990. It was based on a simple story, a baby lost by its parents is brought up by a kind-hearted woman, and eventually re-united with its parents. The moral choices made by the characters relate to issues of home, abandonment, family and social obligations. The abandoned, or found, baby is a particularly powerful motif to employ as the audience can sympathise with the situation and also become engrossed in the story. A combination of elements made this a powerful drama which touched many people and sparked controversy over the moral choices made by the characters. The actions taken by the characters were controversial for the reason that they were not portrayed in the series as simply good or bad but in an ambiguous manner. The series was lauded by Chinese political leaders for several reasons. The series promoted discussion of Chinese moral values of truth, goodness and beauty, the bases of traditional Chinese morality. It also diverted public attention away from politics, and in late 1990 the after-effects of June 4 1989 were still being felt. Popular feeling against the government was high and the government welcomed the opportunity to divert popular feeling towards the artistic and cultural arena, which would also provide evidence that artistic expression was flowering.

"Aspirations" caused a sensation when it was broadcast, stimulating a lot of discussion of the moral choices taken by the main characters. However other dramatic series' broadcast in China in the previous few years had also produced strong popular reactions. One of the earliest successes in China's TV soap operas was a program called "New Star" *Xin Xing* which screened in the mid-eighties<sup>1</sup>. It concerned an

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<sup>1</sup>James Lull, *China Turned On: Television, Reform and Resistance*, 1991, Routledge. Pages. 92-126 contain a discussion of the Chinese television program "New Star" (*Xin Xing*) which was screened in 1986.



honest Communist Party cadre who was sent to work in small town, where the corruption of his predecessor had caused suffering for the people. The honest cadre is depicted with some human shortcomings, in contrast to usual practice where the hero, particularly if he was a cadre, would be depicted as a model of virtue. It was popular because the audience could identify with the situations raised, and the 'rounded' depiction of the hero, which showed him with some character failings. In 1988 "River Elegy" (*Heshang*) was broadcast. This series, although an analytical narrative rather than a soap opera, was controversial for the interpretation it placed on Chinese history and culture, inspiring discussion about these subjects. "River Elegy" described Chinese tradition and history as the basis for the problems plaguing China to-day, implying that China should look forward and away from itself (ie to the West) for the future. In some ways the "Aspirations" phenomenon was an extension of this, because without the "River Elegy" debate a couple of years previously, the basis would not have been laid for the debate over Chinese moral and ethical issues which "Aspirations" started in 1990. "Aspirations", however, took the other side of the issue, by praising what was good about traditional Chinese culture.

Although at that time several foreign television series had been broadcast on Chinese television, such as the American programs "Falcon Crest" and "Hunter", "Aspirations" was the first long, Chinese-made television drama to be broadcast. The fifty-part series caused a sensation when it was shown and became the centre of a number of debates<sup>2</sup>.

This is the reason that "Aspirations" has been chosen for this study - it excited such interest and strong reactions from the public. It was undeniably good entertainment value. For a start, it was a mainland drama series in which politics took a back seat. In fact, most of the main political events which occurred during the period in

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<sup>2</sup>The influence of "Aspirations" was felt even outside China, where people had not even seen the series. When the series was screened in China, Chinese students at the University of Hawaii organised a discussion group to talk about issues raised by the series.

which it is set are alluded to only indirectly, if at all. It is mainly by the events that occur in the series (going 'down to the countryside' to work, workers and high school students studying to take the tertiary entrance exams, individuals opening private market stalls) that the political climate and the time of the action can be guessed at. This was very unusual in a Chinese drama, as a political message was usually referred to explicitly. In "Aspirations", however, the moral values of truth, goodness and beauty were portrayed as more important than mere politics, and the focus of the plot was completely on ethical dilemmas, drawn out through meticulous attention to detail in the personal lives of the characters. The personal relationships of the characters take precedence over any other aspect of their lives.

The debate surrounding "Aspirations" went further than just reactions to plot lines or comments on characters. It delved into the very heart of what it is to be Chinese - how one behaves in society, how one thinks of others and reacts to them, why one acts in one way and not in another - in short, one's moral values. The creators of "Aspirations" set out to create a drama with discernibly Chinese characteristics, in contrast with the large volume of television programs which came from overseas, from Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as from other countries in foreign languages. In doing so, they created a story which was set amongst ordinary people, the *laobaixing* or common people of the *hutong*, the lanes and alleyways where, traditionally, the *laobaixing* had lived. The characters depicted were ordinary people, and the scenes took place in their homes and workplaces, in the rooms and courtyards and doorways where people act out their lives. One of the methods used to create realistic scenes was the use of ordinary spoken language in dialogues rather than more formal speech. Particular attention was paid to this aspect of the production, and this was appreciated by the audience. The language used in the dialogue was very popular with the audience, who enjoyed hearing their own language in a drama. It was particularly popular with Beijingers, who enjoyed hearing the *Beijingshua* or Beijing brand of Mandarin spoken on screen, not only with the distinctive rolling 'r' accent of the

capital, but with the patois of the capital's slang woven into the fabric of the dialogue. All of this went towards creating a realistic picture of 'Beijingers' - a very seductive picture, which touched a chord in many people. Once they could relate closely to the characters on the screen, they wanted it to be a two-way dialogue. They wanted to discuss the characters, express their own views on the characters' morality, and have their voices heard. Everyone felt capable of commenting on the events which took place on the screen week after week, because the period depicted - the Cultural Revolution, the seventies, and the beginning of the reforms in the eighties was a period that the audience were all very familiar with, and all but the youngest had lived through. The audience could think of people who they knew who reminded them of the characters on the screen, and they could feel an empathy with the trials and tribulations of the characters' lives.

Because "Aspirations" caused such a sensation when first broadcast, it polarised points of view about the main characters and their choices. The series served as a catalyst for public opinion. As such, some background is necessary. When it was first broadcast by China Central Television (CCTV) in late 1990, Beijing was undergoing the after-effects of the student demonstrations and the Tiananmen Square incident the previous summer. After the demonstrations of the spring and summer of 1989, which carried a feeling of hope for the future, the subsequent crackdown when the army entered the city brought a reversal of popular feeling. The atmosphere of mutual concern and shared goals of April and May 1989 was replaced by one of distrust and the careful mouthing of the official line on the demonstrations. Under the surface bitterness and frustration simmered, along with grief and anger. The economic changes and inflation which had been a source of discontent prior to the demonstrations the previous year were still in existence in 1990, but the city of Beijing was as if bound and in mourning, with its spiritual heart, Tiananmen Square, closed to the public, and under constant military guard. There was scant emotional outlet and people retreated

for support to their families or closest and most trusted friends. It was into such an atmosphere that "Aspirations" came.

"Aspirations" was the holder of three 'firsts'<sup>3</sup>. It was the first Chinese-made soap opera, it was the longest Chinese-made television series, and it was the first television series which crossed social barriers. It was appreciated and enjoyed both by people from the working class and by intellectuals, an unusual feat for a television drama in China. Previously, "River Elogy" (*Heshang*) had been very popular, but mainly so with intellectuals and overseas Chinese, not with ordinary working class Chinese, because "River Elogy" explored China's heritage and cultural values in an analytical fashion. "River Elogy" was not very popular with workers because it took a negative view of traditional Chinese culture, and of popular culture, and because it was not in the conventional style of a dramatic series. All three elements mentioned above contributed to the popularity of "Aspirations", but its popularity across class barriers was important because this demonstrated that "Aspirations" had something which was nearly impossible to achieve in China - something which could appeal to workers and intellectuals alike. The last time that this had happened had been during the demonstrations of April and May 1989 when the workers of the city had shown their support for the students who marched and went on hunger strike, with workers going out on strike and marching in support of the students' demands for political change.

The title of the series, *Kewang* in Chinese, encompasses the meanings of yearnings or longings, although "Aspirations" has been used here as the standard English translation. The series portrays the dissatisfactions of the characters, their hopes and longings for the future, and their own searches for personal happiness. The title underlines the fact that the series is about people who are unhappy with their lives

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<sup>3</sup>"Zhongguo di yi bu shineiju de chuxian yiweizhe shenmo?" (What are the implications of the emergence of China's first soap opera?), Wang Yunman, "Kewang' juzu gonggao"(Collected articles on "Kewang").

and are trying to change them, and how difficult this is for each of them to do. Because all of the characters in the drama are linked together in a web of relationships from which they cannot extricate themselves, their efforts to achieve personal happiness are constantly thwarted or compromised by someone else in their sphere preventing them from attaining that which they are yearning for, that which they believe would make them whole, and make their lives complete. Perhaps it is a metaphor for the fact that ideals of happiness are unattainable, as reality prevents people from achieving the realisation of their illusions.

There needs to be a brief explanation of the plot before the discussion of the characters in the drama can take place, and the debate which they inspired can be examined. The plot is in essence a simple one. It is the story of two families, the Wang and the Liu families, and the ways in which their lives intertwine. A more detailed account of the plot and the storyline in each episode can be found in the Plot Summary in Appendix One. The story begins in 1967. The Cultural Revolution is in full swing, and Wang Husheng, a university student, is working at a workshop as an apprentice, with Liu Huifang as his superior. Huifang lives with her mother and sister in an old single storey dwelling on a small *hutong* or laneway in the older part of Beijing. It is expected that she will marry Song Dacheng, whom she was originally apprenticed to at the factory, and who has helped her family out a lot over the intervening years. Husheng falls in love with Huifang and wants to marry her. She eventually agrees, despite the fact that all of her family and friends are against the idea. On a day trip to the countryside near Beijing with school friends, Huifang's younger sister Yanzi finds an abandoned baby and brings her home. Huifang takes the baby with her when she marries Husheng, but he never really accepts the child. This is the beginning of the story, and the rest of the plot covers the variety of ways that the lives of the Wang and Liu families intersect, and the ways that the characters deal with the problems and practical difficulties in their lives. The Wangs are intellectuals while the Lius are an ordinary working class family, and there is always friction between them.

Liu Huifang suffers much throughout the drama at the hands of the Wangs, and her sister-in-law Wang Yaru is the cause of a lot of her suffering.

The fact that this recent period of history had had such a dramatic effect on the lives of so many of the audience only added to its popularity. "Aspirations" looked at the Cultural Revolution, but not from a political perspective. Political changes were not directly alluded to, but their effects were absorbed by the characters. "Aspirations" concentrated on the effects which the policies of the Cultural Revolution had on the personal lives of people at that time. This is something which almost all of the audience could relate to. During the Cultural Revolution, the personal was political. Private lives were invaded and examined for any evidence of personal feeling which would contradict the public goals of the leadership.

"Aspirations" applauded traditional Chinese morality, in the figure of its heroine, Liu Huifang. Huifang did not give up her views on right and wrong although urged to do so by others. She maintained her kindheartedness and sympathy for others in the face of her own problems, not allowing herself to be swayed from her own moral values, which were the traditional Chinese values of truth, goodness and beauty. This trait, however, implicitly denied the validity of the socialist morality which, since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, had replaced traditional Chinese morality. This issue was the source of some debate over "Aspirations". Traditional morality with its humanistic vein of charity and tolerance clashed with socialist morality on a number of fronts. Traditional moral values helped to maintain the social status quo by emphasising people's different roles in society and adherence to those roles. Obedience to the older generation was important, as was the careful delineation of male and female roles, and the family was central. The ideals of socialist morality, however, were all about breaking down barriers such as these which had hobbled China for so long. Gender barriers were also being challenged, with women encouraged to work in factories and with heavy machinery, and men encouraged to share domestic tasks.

During the seventies, "Iron Girl Brigades" became female role models<sup>4</sup>. These were brigades of young women who took on heavy jobs previously considered unsuitable for women. They were enthusiastic and energetic about their work, and completed seemingly impossible tasks. The "Iron Girl Brigades" in the late seventies became objects of ridicule as relics of values held in the Cultural Revolution. Another of the debates inspired by "Aspirations", was the debate about the position of women in contemporary Chinese society. This is the subject which shall be explored in this thesis.

The depiction of intellectuals in the series caused some debate, with some saying that intellectuals were portrayed in too negative a light, and that it was unrealistic to paint them as the selfish, vindictive individuals who appeared in "Aspirations". The other issue which polarised opinion was the depiction of female characters in the series. There are several female characters, but two stand out. Liu Huifang is the heroine of the piece, and she embodies the qualities of traditional virtuous Chinese womanhood. She is kind-hearted, warm, and generous, a thoughtful and hard-working mother. Wang Yaru on the other hand is depicted as bad-tempered with a very short fuse, selfish, single, immoral, highly educated, and an unnatural woman. Yaru becomes unnatural because she is a woman who lacks the traditionally admired feminine virtues of kindness and selflessness, both of which are embodied by Liu Huifang.

In this thesis, "Aspirations" shall be examined for the evidence that it provides on attitudes to the question of woman's place in modern Chinese society. What is the ideal modern Chinese woman, which qualities are seen to be desirable in her, and which are not? These are questions produced by "Aspirations". This thesis shall address the issue of how the two main female characters in "Aspirations" are portrayed, their personal qualities, and the reactions they display towards various events in the

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<sup>4</sup>Honig, Emily and Hershatter, Gail; Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s, 1988, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, pp. 23-25.

drama. How they react in a crisis is particularly interesting because these actions have long-lasting effects, with repercussions still occurring years afterwards.

To understand how a television drama could contribute to such a debate, the drama must be placed in its historical context. The tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 came to an official close in 1976 with the death of Chairman Mao and the arrest of the Gang of Four. The Open Door policy of 1979 led to the reform era of the eighties. New economic policies put in place during the eighties intended to modernise China's economy and invigorate the marketplace took longer than expected to produce their effects for urban workers. The monthly wage didn't stretch as far in the late eighties as it had done before. The marketplace, however, was full of a wide variety of goods as well as a choice of quality, for a price. Those who were self-employed in small businesses flourished in this climate and became quite wealthy compared to those who worked in the State sector. This created inequalities and social tensions, as well as dissatisfaction with the pace of change. This is the period of time covered by "Aspirations", the late sixties to the eighties in China, a time of rapid social change and political upheaval. Under such conditions, both men's and women's social roles were changing. Modern ideals were sometimes seen to be lacking in the positive qualities of traditional ways, and lacking the virtues of traditional morality. This is the crux of the matter in "Aspirations", as Liu Huifang embodies those qualities traditionally held to be virtues in women. However, she does not enter into society and work, instead retreating back to the family hearth when childcare responsibilities overwhelm her. Wang Yaru, on the other hand, as a surgeon is making a contribution to society, but her moral values do not encompass those of the traditional wife and mother.

The concept for the drama was devised and written by a small group of male writers. Most of the latter half of the fifty episodes were written as filming was taking place, so there was a lot of input from the director and the actors. As a dramatic work it



was naturally informed by the attitudes of those involved in writing the plot, directing and acting in it. The fact that it provoked such a storm of public comment is ample evidence that it hit the right note with the audience.

The next two chapters will address the portrayal of the characters in the drama, in particular the two main characters, Liu Huifang and Wang Yaru. These two are joined together by a complex set of relationships and are never friends. In a way they are two faces of the same coin, their personalities in opposition to one another. Huifang is painted as the good woman and Yaru as the evil one, with little if anything to redeem her. The dramatic style called for the bad and good characters to be very clearly defined. Chapter Four will discuss some of the other female characters and their portrayal, and how their actions affect Huifang and Yaru. Chapter Five will draw together audience reaction and conclusions on the subject of how the female characters are portrayed in "Aspirations".

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GOOD WOMAN - LIU HUIFANG

Liu Huifang is the main character in "Aspirations". She is from a working class family in Beijing, a person who suffers much due to the actions of others, and who apparently has little or no ambition. Most of her suffering is caused by her husband Wang Husheng, and by his sister Wang Yaru. Is Huifang a tragic victim? In some ways she is; for instance when her marriage breaks up, this is in part due to Yaru preventing her from moving into the Wang family home. However, at other times Huifang does exhibit her own strength of mind, such as when she decides to marry the intellectual Husheng, against the wishes of all of her friends and family. This is not the behaviour of a victim. However, Huifang was, to some extent, caving in to pressure from Husheng, who pursued a relentless campaign to persuade her to agree to marry him, eventually playing on her pity - she couldn't bear to see him sent out to the far north-western province of Xinjiang to work like his classmates. She agrees to marry him so that he will keep his Beijing *hukou* or residence permit. Huifang was also swayed by her sense of duty to Husheng's mother, to whom Huifang had given a promise that she would look after Husheng.

Huifang cannot see the whole picture of what is going on in her life, but only what is directly in front of her own eyes. Huifang never realises that Yaru wants to break up her marriage to Husheng, instead she always respects the wishes of *Dajie* or elder sister as she calls Yaru. Huifang only attributes good motives to people's actions towards her, for instance at the time when Wang Zitao, (Yaru and Husheng's father) returns to Beijing to live after being detained in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Yaru and Husheng both move back into the two storey Wang family home, and Huifang stays with Liu Dama at her old home until her father-in-law returns. Huifang expected to move into the family home then, but Yaru tells Huifang that her

father (Wang Zitao) does not want Huifang's daughter Liu Xiaofang to come and live with them because she is not surnamed Wang. In truth, Wang Zitao is wondering why Huifang has not yet moved in, and asks Yaru why. Because Yaru knew that Huifang would be unlikely to speak directly to Wang Zitao as she had not yet met him, Yaru feels safe in using this underhand method of keeping Huifang out of the Wang home and causing problems in her marriage to Husheng. Yaru would prefer to have Xiao Zhuxin, Husheng's former girlfriend, as a sister-in-law, and will do anything to try to achieve her end. Huifang believes what Yaru tells her, and so for the sake of harmony in the Wang family, she remains at her mother's small, two-roomed home with Xiaofang. Yaru believes that as an uneducated worker, Huifang is not good enough for her brother, and would like to see Huifang out of the Wang family.

Huifang helps those who need it, and does all that she can for them, all the while placing her own needs last. She does this numerous times, including the following two instances. When her younger sister Yanzi brings home the foundling baby from her day in the countryside with her schoolfriends, Huifang takes over the care of the baby. When her mother complains about the trouble of looking after a baby, Huifang even submits to her mother's demand that she take the baby with her as a condition of her being allowed to marry Husheng. This ensured that there would be a source of friction between Huifang and Husheng from the start, because Husheng did not want to look after the baby which was not his. He did not at that stage know that the baby was actually Yaru's, and so was his own niece. Husheng's attitude is in stark contrast to Huifang's, who only sees that the baby is in need of care, and so wants to give it what it needs. She places the needs of the orphaned child above the wishes of her fiancé, Husheng, and above her own desire for a happy, untroubled marriage.

On another occasion, some seven years later, Liu Xiaofang is crippled after falling down a hole on a construction site. The accident was indirectly caused by Yaru, (who is the child's natural mother, although neither of them know that fact at the time).

Xiaofang had gone to the Wang home after school because she wanted to see her grandfather, whom she had never met. Yaru refused to let the child in to the Wang house to see her grandfather, and sent her home by herself. Xiaofang lost her way, and when night fell and a storm began, Huifang went looking for her. Just when Huifang found her on a construction site, the girl fell down a hole. The accident caused Xiaofang to lose the use of her legs, which meant an added burden for Huifang, who now had a lot more work to do in caring for her. The burden of looking after the wheelchair-bound child was so much that Huifang, who was by this time back living with her mother after having divorced her husband, had to give up her job so as to be able to spend time caring for Xiaofang. In this instance, again, Huifang has placed the needs of the child above her own, being willing to sacrifice her own job and the satisfaction of fulfilling her duties to society so as to spend all of her time at home. The loss of her job also places them in extreme financial difficulty. However, Huifang does it anyway because that is what is best for the child. She also places no blame on Yaru, who has caused the child to get lost in the first place by shutting her out of the Wang family home. Such extreme degrees of selflessness on Huifang's part are just what makes her such a paragon of traditional female morality. It seems that when things are so bad that she is made to suffer extraordinarily for the actions of others, when she is most passive and submissive, then she is most feminine, epitomising the traditional feminine virtues of gentleness, steadiness or passivity, and meekness. Also, those who seem to be the source of all of her suffering are the Wang family, although she herself never blames them. Huifang never brings misfortune to herself, she is always the victim of someone else's bad deeds, always suffering without complaint.

The source of much of Huifang's burden is Wang Yaru herself. Yaru takes on something of the wicked stepmother role in this drama. The baby that Yanzi finds in the countryside is actually Yaru's illegitimate child, born after she had decided to seduce the unsuspecting Luo Gang. The result of this caving in to physical desire and the allure of "western" ideas of love and romance is that Yaru finds herself pregnant

and unmarried. In order to have the baby, she has to take her best friend, Tian Li, who also happens to be a gynaecologist, into her confidence. So indirectly, Yaru causes much of Huifang's suffering because Huifang is bringing up Yaru's daughter. Due to Xiaofang's accident Huifang gives up her job, and because Xiaofang is not surnamed Wang, Huifang does not move into her husband's family home.

The essence of this discussion is what the series portrays as 'a good woman'. The authors of "Aspirations" chose to give Liu Huifang what are the traditional virtues of a Chinese woman - selflessness, humility, charity, kind-heartedness, and obedience. Huifang is always respectful of the older generation, obeys her mother, is generous and thoughtful. Her generosity is shown by the way she agrees to keep Xiaofang as her own daughter, and won't allow her to be adopted by a family whom she thinks would mistreat the child. Huifang suffers as a consequence of her goodness, which brings us to another of the qualities which make up the "good woman". She must suffer, and without complaint. Huifang suffers injustice frequently, and often at the hands of someone else. Husheng causes her a lot of suffering while they are married, because he always does or says the wrong thing in front of her mother, Liu Dama. Although Husheng tries to do the right thing, he can never do anything right in her eyes because Liu Dama wanted the capable Song Dacheng as her son-in-law instead of him. For instance, the first time he visits Huifang's home, he volunteers to help Dacheng fix their roof - but he falls off the ladder, injuring his foot, and has to be taken home. His selfishness also puts him in Liu Dama's bad books.

One of the interesting things about Huifang is her rather unusual social position. When trying to decide which of her two suitors to marry, Huifang did not have a father or any adult male figure to advise her. In such a situation, her male supervisor at work may have been able to take a paternal role, but in this case her supervisor was Song Dacheng, one of her suitors. Huifang's choice was to break with tradition, disobey her mother's wishes and to marry Husheng, not Song Dacheng who her mother wanted her

to marry. This appears to be the gesture of a modern woman, breaking with feudal tradition and choosing her own marriage partner. However, Huifang was in part at least marrying Husheng to help him stay in Beijing, which makes this another instance of her sacrificing herself for the good of someone else, in this case, Husheng. These two sides to her decision to marry Husheng instead of Dacheng are emblematic of the contradictions in her character, which make her an ambiguous figure in many ways.

Huifang returns in the early seventies to the traditionally female enclave of the home once she gives up her job at the workshop. She does this in order to devote herself to her 'highest' function - that of mother. Not only that, but her life is beset by problems - financial problems, lack of job-related securities such as medical insurance and bonuses, a broken marriage, not to mention a lack of the greater social awareness which is an adjunct of being in the workforce. Her world has been reduced to that of the home circle, and yet Huifang is always cheerful, never complaining of her burdens. That is another of her virtues - forbearance. She is prepared to uncomplainingly tolerate suffering for the sake of others. In Huifang is a figure who has virtually rejected the public values of socialist personal relations, instead returning to the old traditional values of the 'former', pre-Communist society.

Huifang is in many ways a "throwback" to an earlier time in Chinese history. Since the fifties, the numbers of working women had increased so much that by the seventies they had become a significant component of the labour force<sup>11</sup>. By this time, the static view of the relationship between sex and class which always placed female interests subordinate to class interests was increasingly questioned. The "criticize Lin Biao and Confucius" campaign which began in 1973 until the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 was characterised by intense efforts to analyse the origins and development of an ideological system which demanded the oppression of women. By

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<sup>11</sup>This paragraph based on "Theoretical and Political Developments from the Post-Cultural Revolution to 1976" in Phyllis Andors, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women 1949-1980, Indiana University Press Bloomington, Wheatsheaf Books Sussex, 1983; pp.124-129.

the seventies, institutional and ideological developments, with significant economic growth, had weakened, and in some cases eliminated, some of the structural obstacles to women's participation in social and economic life outside the home. Liu Shaoqi, one of the political leaders who was disgraced and killed during the Cultural Revolution, and after 1972 Lin Biao, were both supposed to have advocated the continued oppression of women. Both supposedly advocated the primacy of family ties and the importance of women's family responsibilities, and in this way they supported the Confucian system which had for so long kept women tied to the home and obstructed their full participation in the workforce. As Confucianism was presumed to be responsible for attitudes which kept women in the home and out of the economically significant world of production, the critique of Confucianism naturally led to criticism of one of its main tenets - male supremacy. A legacy of the feudal system, and thoroughly upheld by Confucianists as the basis of class society, patriarchy was clearly in conflict with the egalitarian relationships between men and women which was associated with socialism. Women's role in the home and the household division of labour was being questioned. Some of the outcomes of the "criticize Lin Biao and Confucius" campaign were as follows:

1. Destroy the idea that women are useless and replace it with the idea that women "hold up half the sky" and must struggle bravely to play their part.
2. Destroy the feudal mentality that described women as "good mothers" and justified feudal oppression. New women "revolutionary proletarians" were necessary.
3. Destroy the mentality of dependence and subordination to men and create the determination to be free.
4. Smash the concepts of the bourgeois good life and develop proletarian ideals.

5. Smash the concept of narrow family self-interest and cultivate the proletarian attitude of the nation as family<sup>12</sup>.

Huifang is the embodiment of the opposite of all of these aims. She relinquishes her job in the paid workforce so as to devote all of her time to being a "good mother" at home. Prior to this, she subordinated herself to Wang Husheng and married him mainly because she was worn down by his relentless entreaties, and to the detriment of her relations with her own family. Huifang is frequently referred to as "petty bourgeois" by Wang Yaru, and as Yaru is depicted as the freakish opposite of feminine virtue, this charge becomes by default a desirable characteristic. By giving up her job, Huifang abandons her obligations to the nation in order to concentrate fully on her own family and her role as a mother, because by this stage she is no longer Husheng's wife. She embodies all that is in opposition to the gains of the Chinese women's movement since 1949. As such, she revivifies the Confucian concepts of a woman's place in society.

Huifang is very passive, accepting calamity and resolving to live with adverse circumstances, rather than try to change them or remove herself from them. She exemplifies a belief system which in the eighties and nineties is almost an anachronism. The lack of regard for material wellbeing, the selflessness which she constantly exhibits are not the hallmarks of nineties Chinese youth. In the generation represented by Xiaofang and Dongdong, a form of 'individualism' is highlighted in surveys in the eighties of youth attitudes<sup>13</sup>. Childhood socialisation in collectivist values was ineffective, or was being eroded by Western bourgeois-liberal values. With the variety of political campaigns which have occurred in China in the last twenty or more years, it is little wonder that '80s youth rejected the moral values of their elders. Whilst youth are often the subjects of the moralising of their elders decrying the breakdown of

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<sup>12</sup>Andors, Phyllis, The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women 1949-1980, Indiana University Press Bloomington, Wheatsheaf Books Sussex, 1983; p. 129.

<sup>13</sup>Stanley Rosen, "Political Education and Student Response" in Education in Mainland China, p.372



society's moral values since their own younger days, in the Chinese context there is a lot of food for thought. The monochromatic blue of workers' jackets and trousers of the late sixties were being replaced in the nineties by the latest in Western-style clothing even to European designers setting up shop in Wangfujing, Beijing's busy main shopping street. This is only one of the more obvious of the changes since that time. Willingness to endure self-sacrifice for the sake of others without complaint is no longer the way to survive life in the city. Whilst Mao was alive, and was worshipped almost like a deity, most city dwellers worked in state-owned factories, organisations or enterprises. The state provided jobs, housing, medical care, education and rebates on the costs of essentials such as grain, cooking oil, cloth etc. The country was also virtually self-sufficient, rejecting any sort of trade or exchange with countries which did not adhere to the ideological 'purity' of its own interpretation of communism. "Aspirations" illustrates these changes without referring to them overtly - they are the subtle backdrop to the personal changes occurring in the characters' lives. The drama's success lies in the fact that it concentrates on personalities and the domestic trivia of everyday life.

Since the political leadership changed with the new dynasty after Mao, the faith and obedience which were previously so evident are now, to an extent, being abandoned. Deng Xiaoping's famous saying "To get rich is glorious" was taken up as a signal to make the most of what you had. Entrepreneurs could make a lot of money by charging high prices in the marketplace for goods which were either unavailable in the state sector, or of a higher quality than what was available there. "10 000 yuan households", (households with an annual income of 10 000 yuan), which were widely depicted in the media of the mid-eighties, now hardly even rate a mention as they are no longer unusual. It is from within this era of the promise of personal gain that "Aspirations" was made. Those who have retained their traditional ideals and hopes, such as Huifang, are eulogised. Huifang is clearly depicted as virtuous, but her life is also very hard, and she does not gain any reward for all of her virtue. Huifang is also

just about the most politically inactive character - she seems virtually untouched by Communist rhetoric. She is like a pre-Communist character - none of the injustices suffered by her have made her want to change the way things are, or to seek revenge for the injustices heaped upon her, she simply gets on with her own life without bothering other people. By contrast, the character of Wang Yaru who is depicted as an example of a modern, independent woman, would never put up with any injustice but would take action and do something about it. In fact Yaru goes further than that and actively seeks to interfere in the lives of others - such as her brother's marriage. It seems that there are only these two extreme options available to women, and each has its obvious drawbacks. Huifang's characteristics lead, in the end, to her goodness being recognised by all those around her, even those who have wronged her in the past. Huifang, it seems, never learned the modern moral values embodied in Wang Yaru, but retained what some commentators described as the traditional values of Chinese women, which the other female characters in the series have, to varying degrees, lost. Huifang provides an alternative to the values exhibited by Wang Yaru and Wang Husheng, which are elitist, snobbish and self-serving.

As "Aspirations" shows, although Huifang has to put up with a lot throughout her life, her purity and moral superiority do bring their own rewards in the end. After being hit by a car near the end of the series, Huifang ends up paralysed and unable to move more than her eyelids. She is bedridden for months, but even so her ex-husband has come to realise the error of his ways and wants now to atone for his sins by taking care of her. Luo Gang, who doesn't want to separate his natural daughter Xiaofang from the woman who has brought her up, wants to marry Huifang. And Song Dacheng is finally divorcing Yuejuan because she has gone too far in her accusations of a relationship between himself and his first love, Liu Huifang. It is interesting that when she is completely incapable of any action at all, or even of any reaction, Huifang is courted by three different men who want to take care of her, all for different reasons. While she was in good health but suffering under the burdens of being a divorced

woman with no regular wage to rely on, and a single mother bringing up someone else's child, she was not offered all this help. At her most dependent, Huifang is also at her most desirable.

These examples of some of the incidents in the drama illustrate how Huifang reacts to adverse events in her life. She is unfailingly gentle, passive and resourceful<sup>14</sup>, which are the 'three parts of feminine beauty'. These traditional cultural norms of femininity are very strong and are not easily replaced by political ideals of women's independence and assertiveness. Huifang epitomised the characteristics of the Confucian ideal of femininity, in her actions rejecting any course that would give her any more autonomy or control over her own life. In the next chapter, the discussion shall turn to Huifang's antithesis, Wang Yaru, and her place in the action.

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<sup>14</sup>Xiang Ling, "Shenmo Shi Nuxingmei?" (What is Feminine Beauty?), in Gei Shaonu de Xin (Letters to Young Girls), Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, pp.42-45.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE WICKED SISTER-IN-LAW - WANG YARU

Wang Yaru provides the perfect foil for Liu Huifang. She is outspoken, abrasive and bad-tempered. She has no compassion and is completely self-interested. Apart from this, Yaru dislikes Liu Huifang intensely, as she finds Huifang's passivity annoying. There are also 'class differences' between them, and Yaru's lip curls with contempt when she pronounces the Lius to be 'petty bourgeois'. Yaru is not only an intellectual, but she pursues a career in a very prestigious profession, as a surgeon, a profession few women had penetrated in China in 1967. She is devoted to her career, and consequently neglects her family responsibilities badly. At one point, both Yaru and her brother Husheng are shown to be at work on the eve of Spring Festival, the traditional annual family reunion celebration. Their father becomes very ill, and it is Zhuxin, who has come by to wish him a happy New Year, who finds him alone in the house and saves him. His two heartless children were too busy working to bother about their own father. This is a repetition of a motif for Yaru, who was also unavailable during her own mother's final illness - because that was when she was having her own, illegitimate, baby. In another instance, when Yaru returns to Beijing after spending two years doing research in the United States, she apologises to her father for not bringing him back a gift from her stay in America but she was so busy working that she never had the time to go into a store. This is, at least, unconventional, but also quite unfilial of her to have neglected her obligation to her father.

Yaru also has an illegitimate baby, and is therefore portrayed as immoral. This is shown as the result of her own actions - she was not seduced by Luo Gang, but it was the other way around. Taking the lead in romance is not a virtue traditionally propounded for young Chinese women, and this action, and desire, of Yaru's clearly brands her as un-feminine and lacking in virtue. It is this point which really separates

Yaru from the ideal of traditional, passive, Chinese femininity - she takes the lead, even in romance, usurping the conventional masculine position. Yaru has also failed to marry Luo Gang, her former fiance, making her not only a bad woman, but a bad woman on the loose. This 'extra' knowledge of Xiaofang's parentage serves to prejudice the audience against Yaru. Huifang, on the other hand, is shown repulsing Husheng's embraces before they are married, as any virtuous young Chinese woman would.

Yaru must have been created by the script writers simply to be everything that Huifang is not. Not only is Yaru obviously very intelligent, but she is not about to 'hide her light under a bushel'. She is very straightforward when voicing her thoughts, and is not afraid of the truth. Yaru does not indulge in a search for low-impact ways of phrasing her thoughts, but is quite "un-feminine" in her readiness to speak her mind. Yaru speaks plainly about facts, which is what often irritates those around her. As an example, when she visits Song Dacheng at the factory to try to encourage him to marry Liu Huifang so as to save her brother from lowering himself by doing so, Yaru's obvious impatience with the euphemisms which could have convinced Song Dacheng of her sincerity leave him practically frothing at the mouth. Had she been a little more subtle, he might have tried to help her. With this trait, Yaru represents what is modern and progressive, and it is depicted as jarring and insensitive. She is always a woman of action, fearless and insensitive, taking charge of things instead of waiting for someone else to do so. Yaru actually behaves in ways that are conventionally seen as more masculine, and she epitomises all that is the opposite of traditional feminine virtue.

Yaru despises the Liu family as 'petty bourgeoisie' (*xiao shimin*) and as more interested in their own comfort than anything else - she sees Huifang as having 'married up' by marrying Husheng, and the Lius as benefiting by their association with the more superior, and educated, Wang family. When Huifang's brother returns to

Beijing from the countryside and seeks Yaru's help in securing a job (in exchange for which he will help to return Dongdong to the Wang family), Yaru boldly recounts the details of their clandestine deal in front of his family, earning him their anger.

There is a recurring motif of Yaru rejecting Xiaofang, her own natural daughter. When Yaru prevents Huifang from moving into the Wang home, it is ostensibly because Xiaofang is not a Wang by birth or name, although the audience knows that she is in fact part of the Wang family as she is Yaru's daughter. Yaru is also indirectly responsible for Xiaofang becoming a cripple, as she had turned the child away from the Wang home. Although Yaru is called in to the hospital to operate on her as soon as the child is brought into the emergency room, all of her surgical training and knowledge cannot help her to undo what has been done. Although she may be professionally successful, this cannot help her to fix the failures in her personal life. Yaru is turned into an unnatural and monstrous figure, a mother who tries to, and succeeds in, harming her own child.

Yaru has already been shown to be disliked by her own daughter, Xiaofang. When Yaru first arrives back in Beijing after spending a couple of years in the countryside, she goes to visit her brother Husheng and his family. The first person she meets is Xiaofang, and the child is instantly afraid of her. Later on when Yaru gives her presents, the child refuses to accept. Yaru offers her chocolate to call her "Mama", but the child won't, creating tension and bad feeling in the family. This is an example of Yaru's extreme behaviour, who is obsessed with the loss of her baby. However the fact that the child won't do it says something about her loyalty to Huifang and about her dislike and distrust of Yaru. As Xiaofang is actually Yaru's natural child, this only highlights what an unnatural woman Yaru is. It is implied in the series that the innocence of children allows them to innately discern good people from bad, and Yaru clearly fails this test.

To establish closeness between herself and the child, Huifang not only gives Xiaofang her own surname, Liu, but also her first name. She names the foundling baby "Xiaofang", or "Little Fang", a smaller version of herself. This also accentuates the distance between Huifang and Yaru. Yaru had chosen the name "Luo Dan" for her baby, a homonym for the Chinese name for the French sculptor Rodin. This also highlights another difference between Huifang and Yaru: Huifang gave something of herself, in her name, to the child, whereas Yaru chose a name with foreign intellectual pretensions for the child. The name is actually the key to the child's identity, because Yaru had taken the trouble to embroider the English letters "L.D.", for Luo Dan, onto the baby's blanket. It is only when Luo Gang sees the blanket on the clothesline at the Liu home one day that he realises that Xiaofang is his daughter, Dandan. Yaru is not bound by Chinese practice in baby-naming, which is only an illustration of how she is not bound by Chinese, or natural, laws. Perhaps Yaru's greatest flaw is simply that she is an individual, and represents the new type of socialist woman.

Yaru not only fails in the nurturing mother stakes, she is a washout in the supportive girlfriend department as well. Yaru seemed to have all of the requisite maternal qualities with her baby, however the sudden departure of Luo Gang with the child placed all of her hopes on that future date when they could be re-united. She believes Luo Gang when she receives his letter saying that he has taken the baby to stay with some relatives, never suspecting that he is keeping the truth from her. It is only after Luo Gang has been rehabilitated after the Cultural Revolution and has been back in Beijing for some time that he reluctantly agrees to Tian Li's entreaties to go and see Yaru. When he does confess what has happened, her fury and anguish at his betrayal and his loss of the baby ruin any possibility of their re-union. She cannot forgive him either for losing their baby so many years before, or for never having told her.

This reaction of Yaru's, although apparently justified by circumstances, and fuelled by her thwarted maternal desire to protect her baby, is very un-feminine.

It is almost depicted as un-natural, in that Luo Gang behaves in a very meek way, entreating her to put the past behind them and start anew, whilst Yaru feels nothing but anger and betrayal. She is behaving in a virulent, and therefore "virile", "masculine" manner, whilst Luo Gang is forced into a placatory, emasculated mode of behaviour. Song Dacheng also behaves in a very mild manner towards Huifang when she jilts him, although he does take his feelings out on the furniture which he had been making for their home - he smashes it all to pieces. However, Dacheng's behaviour does not detract from his character because Huifang is clearly sorry for any harm she has done him - she is not wilfully hurting him. Yaru is clearly the designing evil woman, behaving in a very dominant manner, and therefore taking that role from the men whom she deals with.

These qualities in Yaru were not lost to the audience. As one working-class woman remarked to a visitor when the family were watching "Aspirations", "Just look at you intellectuals. The men are selfish, and the women are simply perverted. We working class people are much better, just look at Liu Huifang and Song Dacheng".<sup>1</sup> There is a great difference in the ways that intellectuals and workers are portrayed in "Aspirations". The intellectuals, comprising Husheng, Yaru, Zhuxin and Luo Gang are all depicted as weak or lacking in some way; and Husheng, Zhuxin and Luo Gang are shown as incapable of meeting life's challenges on their own, whilst Yaru lacks femininity. The workers, comprising Huifang, Song Dacheng, Yanzi and Yuejuan are depicted as stronger because they have had to work for what they have got, and they are used to dealing with adversity. They have more of the positive qualities of charity and kindness towards others in the series.

Yaru is decided by the audience to be strange, cold and lonely. However, she really loved Luo Gang, but the problem was that she couldn't forgive him for 'losing' their baby. Perhaps if Huifang had been more diligent about searching for Xiaofang's

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<sup>1</sup>"Wang Yaru 'fanhua' de sikao" (Thoughts on the 'Generalisation' of the Character Wang Yaru", by Li Chaoyuan, in the Tianjin Ribao (Tianjin Daily), 30 January 1991.



natural parents when Yanzi first found the baby, Yaru might not have been as strange and unfeeling as she was. Although it would have been very difficult to find the baby's parents, Huifang doesn't make much effort to do so, and Yaru's bitterness is due in large part to the loss of her baby.<sup>2</sup>

From the other end of the spectrum a scholar was quoted (in the same article) as saying angrily, "It is just too bad that they have depicted all the intellectuals through the characters of Wang Yaru and Wang Husheng, and even worse, set them up as antagonists for Liu Huifang and Song Dacheng. I can't help feeling that treating intellectuals in this way smacks of a backlash of the 'Cultural Revolution' perspective on things."

It is difficult to fathom the intentions of the original 'creators' of the story in displaying intellectuals with such obvious shortcomings as Yaru and Husheng. The writers themselves insisted that they were simply a bunch of guys sitting around bouncing ideas off each other, and that no ulterior motives were behind the characters at all. However, the actress who played Wang Yaru has stated that when she was offered the part, the director only sent her the script for the first fifteen episodes. It is later on that the character really pushes the boundaries, becoming extremely bad-tempered and snarly, with evil intentions to boot. The actress herself steps back from the character when she says that she later asked the director why he had only sent her the scripts for the first fifteen episodes, and he replied that it was because he was afraid that otherwise she wouldn't agree to play the part. The way in which the character is portrayed, although interpreted for the screen by the actress, is ultimately under the control of the director.

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<sup>2</sup>"An Undesirable Figure - Liu Huifang" (Yige bu kequ de renwu - Liu Huifang) by Bai Shan in China Youth News (Beijing) (*Zhongguo Qingnian Bao {Jing}*), 6 January 1991, page 4, in "Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Shubao Ziliao Zhongxin Fuyin Baokan Ziliao".

It is also claimed that there was a 'hidden agenda' in "Aspirations". The idea was to design a backlash against 'high culture' and to depict a reversion to 'popular culture'. With this end in sight, characters with 'higher education and culture' but 'low morals and mean spirits' were intended to show up the working class women who were of 'low education and culture' but 'high in morals and spirit'<sup>3</sup>. That may have been the case - and if so, Yaru is an obvious example of a highly educated character with 'low morals and mean spirits'. Certainly, "River Elegy" which screened in 1988 showed a very controversial view of Chinese culture, taking the intellectual view that China's present problems are due in large part to the errors and excesses of history, and that it is this very history which is holding China back. The view was that China needs to turn outwards from itself, away from its own culture, and towards the West for the way to get back its strength. "Aspirations", on the other hand, applauds traditional Chinese culture, selectively contrasting the most attractive traits of traditional culture such as the gentleness of virtuous women like Liu Huifang, with the worst points in modern life - the independent, unfeminine actions of women like Yaru.

The writers created a character completely lacking in any of the traditional Chinese feminine virtues, whilst combining all of the ugliest of the traits of a progressive, modern woman in Communist China. She has practically no redeeming qualities at all until about episode forty when she begins to soften whilst supervising Xiaofang in her post-operative recovery program to regain the use of her legs. Yaru becomes more human then, to the point where she is willing to give up that which she has yearned for fifteen years - her daughter. She is prepared to allow Xiaofang to go on living with Huifang, even though Yaru has discovered that Xiaofang is the daughter she lost all those years ago. Once she is finally prepared to sacrifice the one thing that she has sought all those years, then the writers are a little more lenient with Yaru.

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<sup>3</sup> Guan Er, "Wang Yaru : jingshen qiangjian de xishengpin" (Wang Yaru : a victim of spiritual rape), originally published in Zhongguo Funu Bao (Chinese Women Newspaper), 8 February 1991.

These examples illustrate the type of person Yaru was depicted as being - selfish, nasty and scheming, with no redeeming qualities. She is very unfeminine in her outspoken behaviour, and therefore she is destined to be always unhappy, always searching for that unattainable goal (the baby). Yaru is also a monstrous figure, in that her own daughter, Xiaofang or Dandan, is frightened of her when she is small, and won't accept a present from Yaru. Yaru causes the child to lose the use of her legs for about seven years, showing what a terrible, unnatural mother she is. All of this places Yaru in opposition to Huifang, the embodiment of feminine virtue. Yaru pays for her independence by being alone and unmarried, a *lao guniang* or spinster. Her fixation on finding her baby, and on longing for the day when they can be re-united points out her strangeness, because she is not living in the present as Huifang always does, but either in the past when she was together with Luo Gang, or in the future when she can be re-united with Luo Dan. In the next chapter, the roles of other characters in the drama shall be discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE OTHER FEMALE CHARACTERS

The other characters which shall be considered are Yuejuan, who is Huifang's best friend; Tian Li, Yaru's colleague and best friend; and Xiao Zhuxin, Husheng's former girlfriend. These characters support the two main characters and have important roles to play in the plot. They also fall further along the spectrum of behaviour, neither reaching the extremes of good or bad epitomised by Huifang and Yaru. As supports to the two main characters, they play important roles in reflecting reactions to the decisions taken by the other characters.

As Huifang's best friend and confidante, Yuejuan is open and honest. However, she does not have the purity of spirit of Huifang, nor does she have very good intuition - surely marrying Dacheng because Huifang has jilted him was never going to get her a devoted husband, but even so she is frequently jealous of what she sees as the 'feelings' between her husband and Huifang. This is a constant source of friction in the marriage.

Although outspokenness is a trait of Yaru's, on the Liu family side several of the women do 'speak their minds' at times. Liu Dama, being the head of the Liu family as well as the most senior member in the absence of Huifang's father (who died while Huifang was in high school), is allowed some of the prerogatives usually considered masculine - she also enjoys stating her wishes, and expects her children to obey. But these are prerogatives brought to her through age. Yanzi, Huifang's younger sister, is frequently brought back into line by her mother for speaking out of turn, and Huifang's best friend Yuejuan also has a demonstrably hot temper. This trait may be attributed more to working-class women than to intellectuals, which would explain why none of

the other women associated with the Wang family - Husheng's mother, his former girlfriend Xiao Zhuxin or Yaru's best friend, Tian Li, display any outspokenness at all.

Tian Li, as Yaru's friend and sole support during the hard times, is quite different. She expends a great deal of effort trying to re-unite Yaru and Luo Gang after he moves back to the capital to live after being released from the labour camp. Her efforts are largely unappreciated by the two parties involved, who both seem reluctant at times. As Yaru's friend, Tian Li wants to see her re-united with Luo Gang, and particularly with Luo Dan so that they can live like a normal family. However, even Tian Li gives up her quest in disgust when she comes upon Huifang and Luo Gang in an embrace, innocent though it was, when Huifang had told him that she wanted to return Xiaofang to her 'real parents'.

Husheng's former girlfriend, Xiao Zhuxin appears almost as saintly as Huifang, cast as she is initially in the role of victim. Husheng has jilted her - and so in a way, Huifang has stolen Husheng away from her. Perhaps that is why Zhuxin seems so unresolved - it is difficult to deal with Huifang having hurt someone else. When Zhuxin returns to Beijing with her father for medical treatment, she stays with Yaru, who is overjoyed to have Zhuxin back in town. The two women reminisce about when they were both students, and the fun they used to have going out with their boyfriends - a far cry from their present lives. Yaru clings to a small pillow that she had sewn for her baby and remembers how it was before the Cultural Revolution broke out and they were all together. Zhuxin is haunted by a piece of western classical music which Husheng gave to her and which they used to listen to together when they were students. Both Yaru and Zhuxin are alone with only memories of happiness. Zhuxin cannot seem to get over Husheng, and eventually Yaru craftily engineers a meeting for them. Zhuxin and Husheng meet often as they are translating a book from English into Chinese together. Although Zhuxin is tempted by Husheng's protestations of love, she cannot bear to wrong Huifang by breaking up her marriage, and so returns to Fujian

province alone. Later on, however, when she returns to Beijing after Husheng and Huifang have separated, she takes an interest in their rather neglected son Dongdong, becoming a surrogate for his absent mother. By living at her mother's home with Xiaofang and not moving into the Wang home, Huifang has separated from Husheng, but she has also in a sense abandoned her own son, Dongdong. Zhuxin teaches Dongdong piano for many years until he becomes so good that he wins first prize in a music competition, even though he did not play the set piece. Even Dongdong says that the two people who care about him most are his grandfather and Auntie Xiao (Zhuxin), notably neither his mother nor his father has shown him as much affection as Wang Zitao and Zhuxin. Zhuxin is depicted as such a tragic figure because of her losses in love and in life, but the actor who played her said that an even greater loss was the loss of the audience's sympathy<sup>29</sup>. Because the character became so pathetic and dependent, the audience lost interest in her. She is an intellectual, and as such cannot seem to come to terms with the concrete realities of her life. She never really gets over Husheng leaving her.

Zhuxin waited around on the edges of the Wang family for more than fifteen years. Because of her romance with Husheng as a student, even several years later she tells him that she is not able to change her feelings like he can - it is almost a rebuke for his fickleness in marrying Huifang so soon after Zhuxin herself had left. Zhuxin spends the years after that time virtually waiting for him, or behaving as if she is tied to him in some way, acting out the Confucian tradition of a woman remaining faithful to one man for life. Zhuxin apparently has no interest in other possible partners, declining Yaru's urging to do something about her *geren wenti* (personal question, or marriage problem), thereby sacrificing any hope of a family life for herself. Although initially rejected by Husheng, this does not prevent her from being a filial daughter-in-law to Husheng's father, helping around the house with cooking and Dongdong's piano lessons, even secretly paying the hospital fees for Xiaofang's operation. Zhuxin acts like the perfect mother to Husheng's son Dongdong, and the perfect

<sup>29</sup>"Xiao Zhuxin - Wu Yuhua" in Tianjin Daily 29 December 1990, quoted in Kewang de Shijie, edited by Tang Dan, Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1991.

daughter-in-law to Wang Zitao, but Huifang is actually in those positions. Zhuxin is presented as an intelligent university graduate, a capable translator and a talented pianist - yet she is unable to solve her *geren wenti*.

In a sense Zhuxin is performing Huifang's role for her in the Wang family. In the same way, Huifang is the mother who has always looked after Xiaofang, although Yaru is her real mother. When Luo Gang starts visiting Xiaofang and eventually proposes to Huifang, Huifang has also usurped Yaru's role as wife and mother to Luo Gang and Xiaofang.

Yuejuan, Huifang's friend and co-worker at the factory is clearer-sighted than Huifang. Yuejuan is depicted as being less selfless than Huifang, with more of an eye out for personal gain. Dacheng, whom she marries on an impulse when Huifang marries Husheng, becomes a henpecked husband always trying to get away from her or leave her behind, with the excuse of work. Yuejuan appears to be completely focused on having a child, which she sees as the only way of binding Dacheng to her and improving the quality of her marriage. Yuejuan suspects that Dacheng's feelings for Huifang are still strong, and is wildly jealous of his contact with the Liu family. Theirs was virtually a marriage of convenience, and the love which Yuejuan longs for does not grow. Dacheng is obviously indifferent to her, and his rejection of her sexually just before he is sent to jail, thus dashing her hopes of falling pregnant, turns her towards the life of a private entrepreneur, at which she is very successful. Yuejuan personifies the materialism of the eighties. After Dacheng goes to jail, she turns away from the Liu family, and spends her time in pursuit of money. She becomes reasonably well-off, but to get there she has abandoned her friends. Yuejuan also suffers from having her maternal desires thwarted by Dacheng, and so she is also incomplete, without the baby she longs for.

It has been asserted that the only area where women's authority is recognised is that of moral policing.<sup>30</sup> Although the remark is directed towards the work of female writers, it could also be applied to "Aspirations". Huifang scolds Husheng on several occasions for his ill-treatment of the children. Both she and Zhuxin, at different times, reject the embraces of Husheng when he is overcome with desire. The one who falls by the wayside in this respect is Yaru, who practically seduces the unassuming Luo Gang. Later on, Tian Li also feels duty-bound to keep an eye on Luo Gang in the absence of Yaru, and is disgusted to happen upon him in an embrace with Huifang. Tian Li is too angry to wait for an explanation. As for Zhuxin, although dumped without ceremony or explanation by Husheng in his lust for Huifang, and desire to keep a Beijing residence permit, Zhuxin does not hold this against him. Instead, when he wants to get back together with her, she leaves him for the sake of his wife and children. Zhuxin's strong moral fibre is not appreciated by Yaru, however, who had arranged several meetings for the pair in order to break up Husheng's marriage to Huifang, earning herself a stern lecture from moral policewoman Tian Li.

The female characters end up being bound into their places, apparently stricken with paralysis when the opportunity arises to make a change in their lives. The striking aspect about each of them is that they all have a regret about the past which hangs around their neck like a millstone. They are victims of the misdeeds of others in large or small measure. All of the characters, both male and female, experience both joy and regret in their lives. However the female characters appear to be judged on their ability to endure suffering, to be patient and kind - the guidelines of femininity. On this basis, Huifang is clearly in a different class to the others. However, she is not fully in control of her own destiny when her life is played out in response to these passive traits.

Illustrations of the various 'aspirations' or longings harboured by the main female characters have been outlined above. Although each of them was unable to fulfil these

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<sup>30</sup>Rosemary Roberts, "Images of Women in the Fiction of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin", *The China Quarterly*, Issue no. 120, p. 803.



aspirations, it seems that they had it in their power to do so, but chose not to. For example, Huifang rejects the stable Dacheng as a husband, but marries Husheng, ending up on her own with a child to rear. In some cases the characters were denied fulfilment by the actions of others, for instance Zhuxin does not marry at all because Huifang marries the man she loves. Yaru has the secret of her daughter's whereabouts kept from her for years after Luo Gang, Tian Li, Zhuxin, Husheng, Huifang and her father know of it. All of the characters are incomplete in some way, and are searching, yearning for, aspiring to, something which will make their lives complete.

Yuejuan is a "rough diamond" - more realistic and down-to-earth than Huifang, and less inclined to give in under pressure. Zhuxin and Tian Li, however, are both very cultured and restrained in their responses to events - in striking contrast to the strident expressiveness of Yaru. Zhuxin, for instance, quietly pays the hospital expenses for Xiaofang's operation when she knows that Huifang can't afford the cost. In another instance, when Husheng is prepared to leave Huifang for her, Zhuxin instead returns to Xiamen, writing to Husheng that she can't bear to hurt Huifang. It is not because she doesn't want to be with him, that she rejects him, but because her moral values will not let her hurt someone who is as good and virtuous as Huifang is. The restraint of Zhuxin and Tian Li only serve to highlight the wilfulness of Yaru, just as the roughness of Yuejuan and Yanzi serves to highlight Huifang's restraint. The supporting characters have important roles to play and they highlight the moral message, which is the desirability of traditional virtues over the modern selfish, uncaring attitude towards others as personified by Yaru.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has looked at the phenomenon that was "Aspirations fever" in 1990 and 1991 when "Aspirations" was first broadcast in China. As a television series, "Aspirations" was a landmark in a number of ways. As the first long Chinese television drama series, it caused comment for that very reason - some people thought it was a bad thing to emulate the Americans in this way by having television series that went on past a few episodes. Sagas such as the American "Days of Our Lives" which went on for ten or twenty years were seen to be excessive, and the way people tuned into them day after day, year after year, rather unhealthy.

However "Aspirations " was good entertainment. The viewers got hooked. It was essentially a simple story about a lost baby, but the personal relationships between the Liu and Wang families were most intriguing. The fact that the plot was set during the Cultural Revolution and over the following fifteen years into the Open Door period of the early eighties meant that the audience could readily identify with the problems that the characters had to deal with in their daily lives. The characters were also all readily discernible 'types' representative of types of people that everyone would have met and be able to identify among their acquaintance. The plot deals almost exclusively with personal relationships, with politics not directly referred to. Despite the fact that the fifteen years covered by the drama were turbulent in terms of social and political changes, the focus is strictly on the events in the two families. By doing this, the writers were not only taking an unusual step, but they were transporting the audience back to a time before Communism took hold in China. They presented readily identifiable modern characters, and displayed their interpersonal behaviour, showing practical examples of their moral choices. This focus on morality was not a completely unguided one, as the behaviour that was shown was sharply delineated as good or bad.

This focus has guided the direction of this thesis. After a discussion of the place of "Aspirations" and its historical context, Chapter Two moved to a discussion of criticisms and praise for Liu Huifang. Huifang is presented as the good model to emulate, the one who has high moral standards and who is not afraid of suffering if she has to maintain her standards. However, she is also very caring of others, and unwilling to harm anyone in any way. Chapter Three delivered a discussion of the other side of the coin, Huifang's opposite in every way, the aggressive Wang Yaru. Wang Yaru is painted as strident, demanding and rude in every way possible, the complete opposite of Huifang. Does she deserve her bad reputation? The answer is, on the whole, that she doesn't, because in the end she shows remorse for her previous bad behaviour. Taking care of Xiaofang whilst she is recovering after the operation to restore the use of her legs changes Yaru, who becomes much softer and compassionate then. In particular, Yaru admits that she was very unfair to Huifang, and that Huifang is a much better woman than she herself is - her remorse redeems her. However, by the moral standards espoused in "Aspirations", Yaru is almost unnatural, and definitely un-feminine. By the standards of modern Communist China though, she is an intellectual who has succeeded in a prestigious profession. Chapter Four looked at some of the other female characters, and how they compared to the two main characters.

This thesis looked at a television series, "Aspirations", because of the enormous amount of attention it attracted within China when it was first broadcast in 1990. There were some historical reasons for this interest, but there were also unusual elements in the series itself. Two of the most controversial elements were the treatment of intellectuals and workers in the series; and the position of women, or the type of woman, presented as ideal. This was unusual because opinion was polarised on both of these issues.

Although the debate was only about a television show, a soap opera, some light evening entertainment, "Aspirations" fever' covered more than that. The position of women in Chinese society today is a contentious one. If women have come so far since the Communist 'Liberation' forty-six years ago, why are they still acting like doormats? Is this the ideal Communist woman - a Liu Huifang who has no opinions of her own and martyrs herself for others simply because she cannot find a voice?

On the other hand, the most professionally successful woman in the series (Yaru) is depicted as a heartless monster most of the time; immoral, vindictive, nasty, and all but out of her mind. She is very independent and does not need help from anyone - if she did, she would ask for it.

Huifang has always shouldered the 'cross of sincerity and kind-heartedness'.<sup>35</sup> She is so tolerant and long suffering, silently putting up with ill fortune, that she appears too good to be true. Huifang is the example of the maternal figure who will endure anything for the sake of her child. Hers is such a central figure in the drama that her example of 'eastern virtue' provoked praise, love and esteem beyond measure, and even adoration.<sup>36</sup> However, one critic brings up the interesting point that if all women were like Huifang, how vexing, awkward, painful and unfortunate life with such paragons would be.<sup>37</sup>

Wang Shi, one of the principal adaptors of Li Xiaoming's screenplay, remarks upon the popular reaction to Huifang, which is that she must be a little stupid to put up with all that she does put up with. Wang Shi comes to her defence however, asking how she could *not* be concerned for, giving to and forgiving of her own family and friends.<sup>38</sup> He states that

<sup>35</sup>Peng Jiajin, "Kewang' yu tongsu yishu" ('Earnings' and popular art), Wenlun yuekan (Shijiazhuang) (Shijiazhuang literary theory monthly), 1991, 5, 40-44; in Fuyin baokan ziliao (Photocopied press articles), J8 Dianying dianshi yishu yanjiu (Research into film and television arts) 1991.

<sup>36</sup>He Dong, "Ai qi bu xin, nu qi bu zheng" (Suffering without grief, arguing without anger?-), Zhongguo funu bao (jing) (The Chinese woman newspaper), 1990, 12, 28 in Fuyin baokan ziliao J8 1990.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Wang Shi, "Dianshiju "Kewang" zuotanhui fayan xuan deng" (Selected speeches from the symposium on the television serial "Earnings"), Wenyibao (Literature and art newspaper), 1991, 1,

those around her are not scoundrels, traitors, tyrants or swindlers, and so it is not justified to expect her to act in any other way. He defends her apparent lack of self-consciousness, pointing out the distinction between self-consciousness and selfishness.

This illustrates something perhaps about the insight of the writers in creating a hit television drama, but not about the real position of Chinese women in Mainland Chinese society today. What it does perhaps illustrate is, in the person of Liu Huifang, the pre-Communist, traditional virtues held to be most desirable in Chinese women. This almost Confucian woman in modern China, Huifang, meets an example of a modern, heartless woman, Wang Yaru, but still manages to remain unchanged, untouched by this different value system. Huifang is not only virtuous, she is incorruptible too.

The real conclusion to this story came in the responses of the Chinese audience to "Aspirations". "Aspirations" has been described as, "a history of Huifang's regression from society to her family" who was, "a character fabricated by the authors while gasbagging on their sofas" and a "by no means typical image of to-day's women in China"<sup>39</sup>. It has also been said that, "Those who eulogise Liu Huifang after watching 'Aspirations' are all male. Men seem to yearn for a wife like Liu Huifang. What they are really yearning for is a feudal type of wife"<sup>40</sup> and "If Liu Huifang had had dignity and inner strength, she would not have been able to give up her job, abandoning her responsibilities to the factory and to society"<sup>41</sup>. However, it was also said that Huifang was, "struggling for ... the realisation of the concept of goodness and

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19, 5; in *Fuyin baokan ziliao* (Photocopied press articles), J8 *Dianying dianshi yishu yanjiu* (Research into Film and Television Arts) 1991.

<sup>39</sup>Yuan Xi, in Zhang Zhiying et al, "Nanquan wenhua yunyu chulai de Liu Huifang" (Liu Huifang: Progeny of a Male-dominated Culture), compiled from a selection of readers' letters in *Zhongguo Funu Bao* (Chinese Women Newspaper), 8 February 1991.

<sup>40</sup>Zou Yi, "Liu Huifang, fulian gongzuo de bei'ai", (Liu Huifang: The Sorrow of the Women's Federation), *Zhongguo Funu Bao* (Chinese Women Newspaper), 15 March 1991.

<sup>41</sup>ibid.

self-sacrifice"<sup>42</sup>, and that she is, "in unrelenting pursuit of goodness and love in the world"<sup>43</sup>.

Whatever else she might be, Huifang presented an alternative to the Maoist social norm, an alternative that was very desirable to some people. "People actually yearn for a virtue that can be developed into something better... So they like Liu Huifang, they cry for her, worry about her, and feel anxious for her."<sup>44</sup> As Kai Li, the actress who played Huifang put it, "The greatest gain that I have made from working on this series is the belief that there really are Liu Huifangs in the world."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Sun Zhihua in Li Yiping et al, "Liu Huifang - juyou jianquan renge de xin nuxing" (Liu Huifang - A Modern Woman of Wholesome Character), compiled from a selection of readers' letters in Zhongguo Funu Bao (Chinese Women Newspaper), 8 February 1991.

<sup>43</sup>ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ding Hongchang, "Guanyu Kewang pinglun de pinglun", (A Review of the Commentary on "Aspirations"), Juying Yuebao (Screen Monthly), Jiangsu Province Cultural Bureau, no. 4, 1991.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted in a letter by Zhong Kexin in a letter dated 20 November 1990, reprinted in "Kewang'de Shijie" (The World of 'Aspirations'), edited by Tang Dan, Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1991.

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The major source for this study was a set of videos of the fifty-part television series "Kewang" (Aspirations), directed by Lu Xiaowei, and originally screened in Beijing starting in November 1990. The creators and writers of "Aspirations" included Chen Changben, vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture; Zheng Wanlong, deputy editor of the publication "October"; Zheng Xiaolong, deputy editor of "Literature and Art Newspaper"; Wang Shuo, writer; Li Xiaoming, editor of the Beijing Television Arts Centre; Wang Shi, lecturer at the People's Liberation Army College of Arts, and Zheng Xiaonong, a writer from the Beijing Cultural Palace.



## APPENDIX ONE

## PLOT SUMMARIES

**Episode 1** Early autumn 1969 in Beijing. Liu Huifang is working in a factory with a university student, Wang Husheng, as her apprentice. Liu Dama has invited Song Dacheng to their home for a meal as he is going to fix the roof for them. Husheng arrives just before Dacheng, and decides to help with the work, but he falls off a ladder, injures his foot, and has to be taken home by Dacheng and Huifang.

Wang Yaru announces to her friend Tian Li that she is pregnant and wants to have the baby. She tells her brother that she has to go away for a few months.

Husheng's former girlfriend, Xiao Zhuxin wants to get back together with him, but he is angry at her for having deserted him after the arrest of his father, and he accuses her of not wanting to be tainted by association with a family of 'black elements'.

**Episode 2** Spring 1970. Tian Li visits Yaru, who is staying in her fiance Luo Gang's room. Yaru shows her the baby blanket that she has made with the English initials "L.D." embroidered on it. The initials stand for "Luo Dan", the name that Yaru has chosen for the baby, which is (intentionally) a homonym of the Chinese name for the French sculptor Rodin.

Husheng waits for Huifang on her way home from the factory and takes her to his home, where they find the place in a mess - the "rebels" have just left. Husheng's mother is ill, and Huifang stays to help out and cook her some food. When Huifang gets home, she finds that a marriage go-between has been to talk with their mother. Huifang goes to see Song Dacheng, and tells him that she is very grateful to him and thinks of him as an elder brother, but, she says, in the last couple of years he has changed towards her. Dacheng asks her if she thinks they could live together, and Huifang leaves crying because she can't bring herself to say that she doesn't want to marry him.

Yaru writes to Luo Gang to tell him about the baby. She goes into labour and takes the bus to the hospital, collapsing in pain outside the hospital gates.

**Episode 3** Tian Li and Yaru bring Yaru's baby back from the hospital to Luo Gang's room.

Xiao Zhuxin tells Husheng that her parents have returned to Fujian and that she will be joining them on Sunday. She wants him to go with her and for them to marry.

Liu Dama and Yuejuan pressure Huifang to end her relationship with Husheng, but Huifang keeps seeing him whenever he calls her. Zhuxin waits for Husheng at their old meeting place, but he forgets about their date and fails to turn up because he is so busy trying to find Huifang.

**Episode 4** Luo Gang returns to his room in the middle of the night, and is surprised to find Yaru and the baby there. He narrowly escapes being hit over the head with a blunt object as she at first thought that he was an intruder sneaking in. As they had previously agreed that she was going to have an abortion, he is surprised to see the baby.

Husheng and Yaru's mother's condition worsens and she is taken to hospital.

Yaru leaves their nearly one month old baby with Luo Gang and goes to visit her mother. Luo Gang has not told her that he has escaped from the 'reform through labour' camp and is on the run. A group of "rebels" come looking for him, and Luo Gang leaves the building, taking the baby with him. He writes a letter to Yaru and posts it. Yaru goes back to the family home, but finding it empty, leaves again, missing the return of her mother from the hospital with Husheng and Huifang. Yaru goes back to Luo Gang's room just before the rebels return. At the long distance bus station, Luo Gang asks a peasant woman to hold the baby while he goes to the toilet. The rebels turn up looking for him, and while he is hiding in the toilet the bus leaves with the peasant woman and the baby. The rebels find Luo Gang and take him into custody.

**Episode 5** Yaru receives Luo Gang's letter from Tian Li, saying that he had originally wanted to sever relations with her on returning to Beijing, and has taken the baby to stay with some relatives of his in the countryside. Yaru returns to the Wang family home.

Yanzi goes to the countryside with some school friends, and is tricked by a peasant into holding a baby for him. He never comes back for the baby, and Yanzi brings it home.

Liu Dama scolds her for being so stupid as to bring a foundling baby home.

Husheng's mother dies at home.

**Episode 6** Yaru volunteers to go to Henan as part of a work group so as to be closer to Luo Gang. The Wangs are told that they will have to leave the two storey family home when it is allocated to other families. Husheng is allocated a small, very dilapidated room. While Huifang is helping him to clean the room, Husheng tries to embrace her. She pushes him away, telling him to "calm down", and starts to cry. He returns to the Wang family home, full of self pity about being left alone as his father has been sent to a camp in the countryside, his mother has died, his sister is going to work in another province, and he was rejected by Huifang. Meanwhile, Dacheng is building furniture in his courtyard in preparation for his marriage to Huifang.

**Episode 7** Huifang goes to help the Wangs move out of the family home. Yaru isn't happy about the relationship between Huifang and Husheng because Huifang is an uneducated worker. However, on hearing that this is the girl that her brother loves, she resolves to do all she can to help him. She visits Song Dacheng at the factory to talk to him about it, and tells him that he should not simply be interested in his own happiness but should give way to what is best for others - that is, he should give up Huifang. Dacheng is furious about the way that Yaru spoke to him, and over the fact that she is telling him what to do. Liu Dama, on the other hand, is keen to settle the marriage between Huifang and Dacheng.

After his visit from Yaru, Dacheng goes home and destroys all the furniture that he has been building in preparation for his marriage. Huifang is shocked to discover him doing this.

**Episode 8** The next day. Yaru visits Huifang and tells her how Husheng feels about her. Liu Dama arrives home with Dacheng, but when he sees Yaru there he leaves. Yaru arranges with Huifang to see her at the train station that evening when Yaru boards the train for Henan. Huifang arrives just after the train has left, in time to comfort Husheng who is feeling very sorry for himself now that he is on his own. He walks her home, tells her that he loves her, and that he should soon be allocated a job, after which they will be able to marry. Huifang doesn't answer him. The next day at the workshop Yuejuan tells Huifang that she has heard a rumour that Huifang has broken up with Dacheng and is going to marry Husheng.

**Episode 9** Husheng receives news that he will be sent to work in the northwest provinces unless he has a spouse with a Beijing residence permit, in which case he will be able to stay in Beijing. Huifang feels sorry when she hears that he is going to be sent to the countryside to work, and she agrees to marry him. She wonders how she can make her mother understand her feelings for Husheng, and on arriving home sees Dacheng talking with her mother. Dacheng wants her back, and her mother also wants Huifang to marry Dacheng.

Liu Dama is very abrupt with Husheng. Yuejuan hears of a couple who want to adopt the baby, but on meeting them Huifang, who has taken over primary responsibility for the baby, can't bear to leave her with them.

**Episode 10** In order for Husheng to stay in Beijing, Huifang agrees to marry him. Liu Dama and Yuejuan are shocked to discover Huifang and Husheng embracing in the laneway. The next day Huifang tells Husheng that her mother has agreed to their marriage, but is very angry and won't talk to her.

Yuejuan doesn't like to see Dacheng so unhappy about Huifang's marriage, and they discuss what they can do to keep Huifang in Beijing if Husheng is sent to the countryside. Dacheng gets very drunk. Yuejuan decides that the best thing for him is to marry someone else as quickly as possible so that he can forget about losing Huifang, so she decides to marry him herself, and they become engaged.

**Episode 11** One of the reasons that Liu Dama was unhappy about Huifang's marriage to Husheng was that she wanted Dacheng as a son-in-law; but now that he is going to marry Yuejuan, Liu Dama reluctantly gives her blessing to Huifang and Husheng, on condition that they take the baby with them. Husheng doesn't want to take the baby, but they agree to the condition to make Liu Dama happy.

They have problems registering the marriage because they have the baby with them, and the registrar thinks that they have had an illegitimate child. Husheng takes the baby to the hospital which is nearby, and tells Huifang that he met Tian Li and she agreed to look after the baby. They go and register their marriage. Both are very pleased about having registered their marriage until Huifang finds out that Husheng has simply left the baby unattended in an examination room in the hospital. She rushes off to find the baby, reproaching Husheng for his selfishness. It is a very inauspicious start to their marriage.

**Episode 12** Husheng is jealous when Dacheng comes over to help them paint their new room, because Huifang and Dacheng are having such a good time laughing and talking together. Yuejuan and Dacheng arrange for Husheng to be allocated work in Beijing, so that Huifang will not have to leave the city.

Yuejuan is jealous of the fact that Dacheng has made furniture for Huifang, whilst she has had to buy it. When Dacheng delivers his cupboard to Huifang's home, Husheng tells him that it is ugly, that Huifang doesn't know how to buy things, and suggests that Dacheng take it home instead. It is only when Huifang returns that Husheng

realises that Dacheng made the cupboard himself, and he is full of remorse for what he said.

On the day of Huifang's wedding reception, Liu Dama won't go, and Yuejuan won't let Dacheng go. The baby gets convulsions and Husheng and Huifang take her to the hospital. When they return to their room, they find the presents that their friends have left there for them.

**Episode 13** Huifang is angry with Husheng when she returns to their room one day to find that he has given the baby to a friend of his to adopt. He has bought a lot of food with the money that was given to him in exchange for the baby, and can't understand why Huifang isn't as excited as he is about this. She calls him selfish, even throwing a couple of eggs against the wall in her frustration.

Yuejuan and Dacheng marry.

The baby is returned to Huifang because Husheng's friend's wife is now pregnant with a baby of her own, and they no longer want to adopt one. Tian Li visits Husheng and Huifang at home because they have asked for her help in finding adoptive parents for the baby. She also brings the news that Huifang is pregnant.

**Episode 14** Huifang collapses at work and is rushed to hospital. She is malnourished because Husheng would not pay for any food for baby Xiaofang, and in order to afford the money for milk and medical expenses for Xiaofang, Huifang has been eating less. Both her own health and that of the unborn baby are endangered through malnutrition. Both survive, however, and she later gives birth to a boy, called Wang Dong or Dongdong.

Spring the next year - 1971. Tian Li visits Huifang at home after the baby's birth, which reminds her of when Yaru had her baby (Luo Dan or Dandan). For this reason Tian Li feels especially close to Xiaofang, and wants to become her "adopted mother" - perhaps she intuitively recognises Xiaofang as Dandan.

Yaru returns to Beijing after several years in the countryside. She goes to Husheng's home, where she sees Xiaofang playing outside. She tries to talk to Xiaofang, but the little girl is afraid of her and calls for her mother. Huifang comes out of the house and she is surprised to recognise Yaru.

**Episode 15** Yaru moves into a dormitory room at the hospital. She recounts for Tian Li how, during her time on the Henan medical team, she found Luo Gang in the remote 'reform through labour' camp. He was in chains and surrounded by guards behind a barred fence. He had refused to see her, coldly telling her that he didn't know who she was or anything about a baby. Yaru collapsed in tears outside the fence.

Tian Li encourages Yaru to forget about Luo Gang and the baby and to find someone else and start again. Yaru says that she can't start again for the sake of Dandan, who she is convinced that she will one day be re-united with.

Yaru goes to Husheng's home with gifts for the children, but Xiaofang won't accept hers, and throws it on the floor. Husheng is furious at such disobedience, and gives Huifang a few yuan to take Xiaofang to stay at her grandmother's for a few days. Liu Dama says that all "lao guniang" or "old maids" are a bit strange, and decides to try to find a husband for Yaru.

Yaru decides that Husheng needs to study in his spare time so that his marriage to an uneducated worker doesn't make him slip behind intellectually. She buys him some books to study from, and says that she will take Xiaofang to live with her so that Husheng will have a better study environment at home. Huifang does not agree to giving Xiaofang to Yaru.

**Episode 16** Yaru is upset that she can't have Xiaofang to live with her, because Xiaofang reminds her of her own daughter, Dandan. However, she takes Dongdong to stay with her, and begins to teach him English.

Yuejuan is concerned that after three years of marriage she still isn't pregnant. She asks Huifang to urge Dacheng to go to the hospital for a check-up to see if something is

wrong. When Huifang talks to Dacheng about it, he tells her that he has already been informed by the hospital that Yuejuan can't have children. He asks her to give them Xiaofang as an adopted daughter. Huifang says that she will think about it.

Xiao Zhuxin returns to Beijing from Xiamen, accompanying her father who has come to have medical treatment. She stays in Yaru's room, where she meets Husheng and his son Dongdong. She is surprised at how old Dongdong is, and at how soon after she left Beijing Husheng had married. That night neither Zhuxin nor Yaru can sleep because they are both recalling the past, when they were students and were with their boyfriends, and the future seemed rosy.

Yuejuan hears Liu Dama and Huifang discussing her condition and is distraught to find out that she can't have children.

**Episode 17** Yaru tries to cause trouble between Yuejuan and Dacheng, suggesting that there is some "feeling" between Dacheng and Huifang.

Huifang wants to give Xiaofang to Dacheng and Yuejuan so as to patch up their marriage, but Liu Dama won't agree to it. Huifang finally decides that her maternal instincts are too strong and that she can't part with Xiaofang. She goes to tell Dacheng of her decision. Just as they come to an understanding of each other, Yuejuan arrives to see them clasp hands, and misinterprets the gesture.

Yaru arranges a meeting between the unsuspecting Husheng and Zhuxin because she would like to see them get back together and wants to break up Husheng's marriage to Huifang.

**Episode 18** Yaru tells Husheng that he should sleep at his office so that he will have more time to study foreign languages. Yaru visits Husheng at home on a Sunday, and when she hears Xiaofang call her "Aunty" she wants the little girl to call her "Mama" (although Yaru does not know that Xiaofang is her own child, the little girl reminds her of the baby she lost). Xiaofang won't call Yaru "Mama", so Yaru takes away the chocolate that she has given her and angrily leaves.



Zhuxin is still staying in Yaru's room. She listens to the piano concerto that Husheng once gave her a record of. Yaru suggests to Zhuxin that she should help Husheng to learn English, because Yaru is trying to find excuses for Husheng and Zhuxin to be together.

Liu Dama wonders if Yaru could have had a baby when she hears of what happened between Yaru and Xiaofang. She enlists the help of a matchmaker to find a husband for Yaru.

Husheng invites Yaru to the Liu family home. When Yaru arrives and realises that she has been set up with an introduction to a potential husband, she unceremoniously leaves in disgust.

**Episode 19** In her quest to break up Husheng's marriage and reunite him with Zhuxin, Yaru has asked Tian Li to help her find a job for Zhuxin in Beijing. Yaru tricks Husheng by telling him that she has arranged for an "expert" to help him translate a manuscript from English into Chinese. When he arrives at her room to meet the expert he discovers that it is in fact Zhuxin.

When Tian Li hears from Huifang that Husheng is at Yaru's with an English expert, Tian Li immediately leaves to go and break it up because she knows the history of Zhuxin and Husheng, and because she suspects Yaru's motives. Huifang is studying elementary English by herself at home, in an effort to improve her cultural level.

Meanwhile in Yaru's room, Zhuxin plays the Chopin piano concerto that she and Husheng used to listen to together. She tells Husheng that he could "*jian yi ge, ai yi ge*" (be fickle in love) but that she could not change her feelings as easily as he could. They discuss the past and Husheng is about to kiss her but Zhuxin stops him. Just then Tian Li walks in.

**Episode 20** Husheng and Zhuxin are rekindling their previous relationship. After remonstrating with Yaru for attempting to break up Husheng's marriage, Tian Li tells Huifang not to let her husband go to Yaru's. Early the next morning Zhuxin goes to

visit Husheng but he has already left home. She tells Huifang that she is an old classmate of Husheng's, and Huifang tells her how grateful she is to the English expert for helping Husheng with his English. Zhuxin tells her that Husheng is actually with a former girlfriend when he is with the "English expert". Zhuxin leaves, resolving to return to Fujian because she can't bear to hurt someone who is as good and kind as Huifang is.

Husheng receives Zhuxin's letter telling him that she has left, and he tells Huifang that he can't let Zhuxin go, even if it means that they have to separate or divorce. Huifang moves back to her mother's house and begins divorce proceedings.

Yuejuan and Dacheng have an argument and Yuejuan gets very drunk. Huifang finds her, and Yuejuan tells Huifang that as soon as her divorce from Husheng comes through, Huifang can have Dacheng back.

Husheng writes a repentant letter to Huifang, enclosing the letter that he has received from Zhuxin breaking off with him. Huifang forgives him.

#### **Episode 21** Five years later. (1977)

Luo Gang returns to Beijing, having been released from the "reform through labour" camp. He visits Tian Li at the hospital to ask about Yaru's situation. Luo Gang tells Tian Li that he first wants to prepare everything in Beijing, then he will go to the countryside to bring Dandan back, and then he will see Yaru again. Tian Li passes on the good news to Yaru, who can hardly believe her ears. While Tian Li is telling Luo Gang how much Yaru is looking forward to seeing him and Dandan again, he finally admits that the baby was lost years ago when he was arrested. Several days go by and Yaru can't understand why Luo Gang hasn't been to see her, then Tian Li tells her that the baby was lost.

Luo Gang goes into the countryside to search for Dandan, and finds what he believes is her grave. He returns to Beijing and tells Tian Li that Dandan is dead. Tian Li receives a phone call from Yaru saying that she wants to see Luo Gang. Luo Gang is very happy that she is willing to see him again.

Huifang and Yanzi both start studying for the tertiary entrance exams with Dacheng tutoring them.

**Episode 22** Luo Gang goes to visit Yaru, but she won't speak to him, and won't open the door to him. Tian Li arranges a meeting for them. Luo Gang goes to Yaru's room for a meal. They are finally reunited after seven years, and everything is going well until Luo Gang brings up the subject of Dandan. This enrages Yaru, who says that she wanted to love him, and had told him not to speak of that. She pushes him away and overturns the table of food. When she is alone Yaru again takes up the photo of herself and Luo Gang in happier times, as well as the baby's pillow, implying that she can only live in the past.

Huifang is heartbroken that she has become pregnant again just before the tertiary entrance exams, but Husheng is overjoyed that now she won't be able to go to university and will be a better housewife.

Luo Gang talks to Tian Li about whether Yaru could be mentally unbalanced, which would explain her strange behaviour. Yaru overhears them and is furious.

Huifang plans to have an abortion so that she can get into university. Tian Li advises her to take the exam in a month, and if she does well in it, then to come back for an abortion.

One evening at home, Xiaofang becomes feverish. Huifang carries her to the hospital, and collapses there herself. She has a miscarriage. This dashes her chances of taking the exam. On that day Yaru comes to tell Husheng the good news that their father is being released from detention in the countryside, and will soon be returning to Beijing.

**Episode 23** The Liu family have a celebration for the return of Guoqiang, Huifang's brother.

Yaru tells Husheng that when their father returns they can all move back into the family home, which is being returned to them. She tells him that Liu Xiaofang shouldn't come and live with them unless she takes the surname "Wang". Yaru even has a name

picked out - Wang Dandan, and says that she will look after the child when they are all living together.

Husheng and Huifang go to clean up the Wang family home. Guoqiang, Dacheng, Yuejuan and Yanzi go to help, and Liu Dama brings the children over. In the middle of all this Yaru walks in, very angry to see all the Lius in her family home. She insults them and they all leave.

Yanzi receives news that she has been accepted into the Literature Department at Beijing University.

Huifang, who is still living at her mother's with Xiaofang after Husheng has moved back to the Wang family home, is cooking the welcome banquet for Husheng's father, Wang Zitao, when Xiaofang suddenly arrives. She takes the child home to Liu Dama, missing the return of her father-in-law. When she does arrive back at the Wang home, she is met by Yaru who says that her father agrees with her about Xiaofang not coming to live with them because she does not bear the Wang name. Huifang says that she doesn't want to cause disharmony in the family, and so she and Xiaofang will stay with Liu Dama. This means that Huifang and Husheng will be separated.

**Episode 24** Huifang doesn't know whether to move to the Wangs without Xiaofang or to stay with her mother and separate from Husheng. Dacheng finds her while she is trying to work out what to do, and tries to advise her. He asks her to come and stay at his house with Yuejuan for a few days while he is away. As soon as they arrive at Dacheng's, Guoqiang arrives to tell Huifang that Xiaofang has a fever.

When Huifang doesn't come to live at the Wang home, Wang Zitao goes to the Liu home. Unfortunately, Liu Dama, Huifang and Xiaofang are all out. Huifang's brother Guoqiang uses the opportunity to tell Wang Zitao that they might be able to do a deal together. Guoqiang will help him if Wang Zitao can help to find Guoqiang a job in Beijing.

Liu Dama returns Wang Zitao's visit. Unfortunately, he mistakes her for their new housekeeper, unwittingly insulting her.

**Episode 25** Guoqiang still has not found a job. He goes to the Wang home, and tells Yaru that he could help her over the problem of Xiaofang if she would help him to find a job.

Huifang goes to the kindergarten to pick up Dongdong and bring him back to the Liu home. Yaru is incensed to find that Huifang has taken Dongdong. She surprises the Lius by going there to take him back. Dongdong doesn't want to go with her. Guoqiang arrives back at this moment, and Yaru explains the deal that they had made. The Lius are all very surprised to hear of this, and Guoqiang is very embarrassed. Zhuxin arrives at the Wang home, back from Fujian.

**Episode 26** Dacheng urges Huifang to return to Husheng.

Wang Zitao and Yaru encourage Zhuxin to come and live with them, and Yaru suggests that they buy a piano so that Zhuxin can teach Dongdong to play.

Huifang takes Dongdong to the Wang home but doesn't go inside. She sees Husheng and Zhuxin come out together. Huifang goes to Husheng to talk about their situation, but he is not interested in talking to her. She leaves, and meets Zhuxin arriving. Huifang is crushed and tells Yanzi all about it. Xiaofang overhears them.

At the kindergarten, Xiaofang hides when she sees Husheng come to pick up Dongdong. She follows them back to the Wang home because she wants to see her grandfather, whom she has never seen. When she gets to the house, Yaru tells her that her grandfather is not there, and that she must go home, shutting the door in her face. It grows dark and starts to snow. Xiaofang becomes lost on her way home. Huifang is very worried and goes out to look for her. They find each other in a construction site. Just before they reach each other, Xiaofang falls down a deep hole.

**Episode 27** Yaru is called to the emergency section of the hospital to operate on Xiaofang. After the operation it is apparent that Xiaofang will probably be paralysed. Guoqiang and Yanzi make a complaint to the hospital administration about Yaru, saying

that as she had some responsibility for Xiaofang's accident, she may not have done all that could have been done in the operating room to save her legs.

Husheng goes to see Huifang to enquire about Xiaofang. She reproaches him for not acting like a father, and Guoqiang starts to beat him up.

Yaru arranges for a car to take Huifang and Xiaofang from the hospital to the Wang home, but Huifang refuses, instead taking Xiaofang home to the Lius on Dacheng's flatbed bicycle.

Luo Gang calls Yaru to tell her that he loves her, and she replies that she hates him and hangs up. Luo Gang is sent to teach at Beijing University.

**Episode 28** Zhuxin tells Husheng that she is going to give up the research institute job in Beijing that Wang Zitao arranged for her, and go back to Fujian. She begs Husheng to resolve his differences with Huifang. He tries to stop her from going, and Wang Zitao walks in on them. Wang Zitao resolves to visit the Liu home.

Xiaofang is unable to walk, and needs a wheelchair. Huifang returns the money that Dacheng had given her to buy a wheelchair with.

Yaru moves into the hospital dormitory so that Huifang can move into the Wang home, and so that she won't be the cause of the break-up of Husheng's marriage.

Yuejuan tells Huifang that she has heard that if Huifang has any more time off from work to look after Xiaofang her wages will be docked. Yuejuan also discovers that Huifang has been selling her blood.

Husheng and his father argue about Husheng's treatment of Huifang. Zhuxin visits Huifang with some clothes she has knitted for Xiaofang and says that she would like to see Husheng and Huifang back together again. Huifang visits Wang Zitao and says that she is sorry that she has not looked after Husheng as she promised his mother she would. She also tells him that she wants a separation from Husheng.

**Episode 29** Huifang announces that she wants to divorce Husheng. Spring Festival approaches, and both families want Dongdong with them. Dacheng invites Husheng over for a meal to try to convince him to get back together with Huifang.

Guoqiang and Yanzi bring Dongdong back to the Liu home. Yaru arrives to take Dongdong back to the Wang home, and is insulted by Guoqiang.

Luo Gang arrives at Yaru's office with food to celebrate the Chinese New Year with her. She coldly asks him to leave because she is working.

Zhuxin arrives at the Wang home on the eve of the Chinese New Year to find Wang Zitao alone and ill. She calls Yaru and Husheng home from work. Huifang arrives bringing Dongdong to see his grandfather.

**Episode 30** Luo Gang's novel, *Yinxingshu xia* (Under the Ginkgo Tree) is a great success. He gives a talk to some students, including Yanzi, about it. Huifang recalls that Yaru's former boyfriend was called Luo Gang, but Yanzi initially refuses to believe that it could be the same one. Yanzi suspects that Xiaofang could be the lost baby referred to in the book. Yaru also reads the book and is incensed that Luo Gang has told her story in it. Yanzi arranges to meet Husheng at a coffee shop to give him a copy of the book, and she also takes a copy to Yaru. Husheng challenges Yaru about where she really was all those years before during the Cultural Revolution when their mother was ill, and Yaru was staying in Luo Gang's dormitory.

Dacheng is made deputy director of the factory and offers Huifang a job there, as she has given up work to look after Xiaofang.

**Episode 31** Two years have passed.

Zhuxin, acting like a filial daughter-in-law, goes to the train station to collect Wang Zitao on his return from a trip to Hangzhou, where he visited Zhuxin's mother.

Husheng goes to the school to talk with Dongdong's teacher about Dongdong's low marks. He is very angry with Dongdong for not doing better at school.

Huifang is working from home as a typist. Yanzi starts a literary group at Beijing University and Luo Gang often goes to "study with the students" in the group. Tian Li reproaches Luo Gang for having someone else in his heart, other than Yaru, when she goes to visit him and finds that someone has cleaned his room for him. His 'helper' was Yanzi, who has developed a crush on him.

Dongdong is afraid to ask his father to sign his report card as he has done very badly that term. Xiaofang arrives at the Wang home with Dongdong's report card, and in a fit of anger Husheng slaps Dongdong across the face. Dongdong runs away.

**Episode 32** Zhuxin goes to the Liu home looking for Dongdong and brings Huifang back to the Wang home with her. Husheng tells Huifang that it is all her fault that Dongdong has run off. It is discovered at the Liu home that Xiaofang is not there either. The children are gone for three days and everyone is very worried about them. Yanzi goes to tell Luo Gang what has happened, and tells him all about Xiaofang. He is very moved to hear that Huifang has given up her job and is supporting Xiaofang by herself, and decides to visit the Liu home to meet Huifang.

In despair at how unhappy her daughter Huifang is, Liu Dama goes to the Wang home, loudly laying the blame for her family's problems at the feet of Husheng, Yaru and Zhuxin. Wang Zitao comes down in the midst of the melee to apologise to Liu Dama for not having brought up his son better.

Xiaofang arrives at Dacheng's home. Dacheng goes to fetch Dongdong and bring the two children back to the Liu home.

**Episode 33** Dongdong does not want to leave the Liu home because he is afraid of his father. Wang Zitao arrives with lots of presents for him.

Luo Gang is impressed by what he has heard of Huifang. He develops a very good relationship with Xiaofang and becomes a frequent visitor at the Liu home. He gives Huifang some typing work to do so as to help her out financially.



Dongdong thinks that his mother doesn't like him, until one day she has a talk with him about what has happened in the last few years and convinces him otherwise. Husheng tries to apologise to Dongdong for hitting him but the boy runs off. After intervention from Zhuxin they are reunited again, and Dongdong goes back to live with the Wangs.

**Episode 34** Wang Zitao is pleased with the progress that his son and grandson have made, and asks Husheng to give some money to the Lius to help them out.

The next morning when Luo Gang goes to the Liu home to pick up the teaching material that Huifang has been typing for him, he recognises the baby quilt that was with baby Dandan when he had to leave her at the bus station all those years ago. He immediately turns around and leaves in a hurry. Husheng, who is coming over to give Huifang some money at his father's request, sees Luo Gang leaving the Liu home, is angered by this and leaves without giving the money to Huifang.

**Episode 35** Liu Dama sees that Yanzi has a crush on Luo Gang, but she has her own plans for him. She has decided that Luo Gang would make a good husband for Huifang, and gives them every opportunity to be alone and to get to know each other better.

Tian Li arrives at the Wang home with the news that Yaru has been given approval to study in the United States for two years. She tries to convince Yaru to see Luo Gang before she leaves.

Yuejuan is jealous because Dacheng is spending time with Huifang and trying to get her to come back to the factory. She thinks that their old love may have been rekindled and has an argument with Dacheng. Huifang arrives in the middle of their argument and Yuejuan leaves, with Dacheng telling her not to come back.

**Episode 36** Huifang goes to see Dacheng to try to convince him to overcome his difficulties with Yuejuan. Her mother wants to send Yanzi instead because otherwise people will gossip about her, but Huifang goes anyway.

Luo Gang tells Tian Li that he took Xiaofang to see Yaru but that Yaru wouldn't see the child. Luo Gang tells Tian Li that he thinks Xiaofang is Dandan, the baby he lost.

Luo Gang arrives at the Liu home the next morning, where there is a crisis. Xiaofang refuses to go to school, and Huifang has become angry, even slapping Xiaofang for disobedience. Luo Gang discovers that the reason Xiaofang doesn't want to go to school is that there is a sports carnival on, and Xiaofang doesn't want to go because she is in a wheelchair and can't join in any of the fun. Luo Gang calls the school principal and discovers that there is a "heel and toe" race that she can enter. He buys her a new sports outfit, and goes off happily with Huifang and Xiaofang to attend the school sports carnival.

Husheng has been thinking about his single status and decides that he wants to marry Zhuxin. He goes to her room at lunch time when she is having a nap and leaves a letter with his proposal in it by the bed.

**Episode 37** Husheng goes to Zhuxin's office for her reply to his letter. She tells him that they have both changed and that they can't return to the past. He realises that there is a lot of distance between them now and that they can't go back.

Luo Gang wants to know about Xiaofang's medical history, and as Yaru has it, Tian Li asks Yaru to see Luo Gang before she leaves for the United States.

Yanzi reveals her feelings to Luo Gang and is upset that he does not return them. Her mother tells her that she has plans for Luo Gang and Huifang.

Luo Gang is sure that Xiaofang is his lost daughter Dandan, and asks Huifang to tell him how Xiaofang came to be living with them.

**Episode 38** Wang Zitao plans to have a party to celebrate his seventieth birthday and wants all the family, including Huifang and Luo Gang, to be there.

There is a problem with raw materials at the factory and Dacheng is very busy. Yuejuan wants to help him and is pleased when Guoqiang says that he may be able to use his contacts to help.

Yanzi asks Luo Gang to meet her but he doesn't turn up. She goes to his dormitory to find out why and he says that he was busy. Huifang arrives and Yanzi leaves. Huifang starts talking about when Xiaofang was small, and Luo Gang asks her if the letters "L.D." were on the baby's quilt. Huifang is very surprised and begins to understand.

**Episode 39** Huifang is worried that now that she has found Xiaofang's father, Luo Gang, he will want to take Xiaofang away from her. Luo Gang takes Xiaofang to an amusement park, and when he brings her back he meets Wang Zitao and Dongdong at the Liu home, which is awkward for everyone. Liu Dama is angry with him, particularly when she hears that he used to be Yaru's fiance, and won't let him come back.

At Wang Zitao's birthday dinner everyone feels very awkward. When Luo Gang begins to make a speech to Wang Zitao on behalf of Yaru and himself, Yaru immediately becomes very angry and leaves the table. Luo Gang then says that he will leave, and everyone else leaves too, before even a bite has been eaten.

In order to better understand Xiaofang's condition, Yaru goes to see her at the school one day. She is just in time to see Luo Gang and Huifang taking Xiaofang home together, but hides so that they don't see her.

**Episode 40** Luo Gang tells Tian Li that he has found Dandan, but he is unwilling to "injure the heart of a mother", because Yaru is the doctor responsible for Xiaofang's case, it would place too much pressure on her if she knew that Xiaofang was her own daughter. But Tian Li tells him to tell Yaru as soon as possible so that they can all be reunited as a family.

Huifang goes to talk to Dacheng about her fears that Xiaofang will be taken away by her natural father Luo Gang.

Tian Li has cured Yuejuan, and she now able to have children. However, Dacheng is having problems at the factory and is very busy, working late. Yuejuan wants him to

stay with her, as Tian Li has told her that during the next couple of days she could fall pregnant.

Yaru has to leave early to board her plane to the United States, and leaves a note for her father saying that Luo Gang should find a new family for himself.

Dacheng is arrested for cheating a company out of a lot of money, which is due to the 'help' that he received from Guoqiang in solving the factory's supply problems. He is sentenced to two years in prison.

**Episode 41** Two years later.

Dacheng is released from prison and savours his freedom. The Liu family are very pleased to see him again.

Yaru will soon be returning from the United States. Tian Li goes to tell Luo Gang that he can now be reunited with Yaru and Xiaofang. Luo Gang, however, is unwilling to do anything which might hurt Huifang, as she has looked after Xiaofang for so many years.

Yuejuan has opened a clothing stall as a private entrepreneur. Her relationship with the Lius has soured. Huifang comes to tell her that Dacheng is out of jail and that she should come home, but Yuejuan won't go.

Yaru wants to operate on Xiaofang again with the knowledge that she has gained from her studies in the United States.

Luo Gang comes to talk to her about the operation on Xiaofang, and Yaru seems much gentler than before.

**Episode 42** Liu Dama does not agree to Yaru operating on Xiaofang a second time.

Huifang tells Zhuxin that Yaru is Xiaofang's mother. Zhuxin asks Yaru to go and reassure Liu Dama about the operation, and Yaru agrees. Wang Zitao and Dongdong visit the Liu family, and Liu Dama eventually agrees to the operation.

Zhuxin announces to Husheng that she is going to go and live with an aunt of hers in the United States.

During the operation the hospital runs out of Xiaofang's blood type, and there is a danger that the operation may have to be halted. Luo Gang arrives and donates blood.

When the operation is over, Yaru is wheeled out on a bed, having collapsed due to the pressure.

**Episode 43** Zhuxin tells Yaru that it was Luo Gang who donated blood so that the operation could be completed, and Yaru wonders how he knew that he was Xiaofang's blood type.

When Yanzi goes to pay for Xiaofang's operation, she is told that it has already been paid for. Wang Zitao and Dacheng try to pay for it, but Zhuxin has already paid the bill.

Tian Li tells Yaru why it is that Luo Gang was called to donate blood to Xiaofang during the operation - because he is her father.

**Episode 44** Xiaofang is released from hospital.

There is a dinner at the Wang's to celebrate Yaru's return and Zhuxin's impending trip overseas. Wang Zitao suggests that Xiaofang come and live with them so that Yaru can help her recover, as it will take another year of therapy before she can walk.

Yaru stands by the window looking at the moon and thinking of her daughter Xiaofang.

Yanzi is now a reporter and wants to interview Luo Gang about why he gave blood to Xiaofang.

Yuejuan is again jealous of the relationship between Dacheng and Huifang as Huifang has confided in him about Xiaofang's parentage and her reluctance to be separated from Xiaofang.

Huifang goes to Luo Gang's room to tell him that she wants to give Xiaofang back to her parents - that is, to himself and Yaru. They are both very emotional and embrace.

Just at that moment Tian Li walks in and sees them. She goes straight to Yaru, furious that Luo Gang could think of another woman when Tian Li herself has expended so

much energy trying to get him back together with Yaru. She tells Yaru that Xiaofang is her daughter. Yaru can hardly believe that she has found the child she lost fifteen years before, and begins to cry.

Husheng wants Zhuxin to stay in China and marry him, but she is adamant that she is going to the United States to live.

**Episode 45** Zhuxin meets Luo Gang to try to pressure him into reuniting with Yaru and Xiaofang. He tells her that it is not yet time, because Xiaofang is not yet cured, and because he doesn't want to hurt Huifang by taking her child away from her.

Dongdong is upset that Zhuxin is going overseas, and calls Zhuxin "Mama", which Husheng overhears.

Meanwhile, Huifang has been accepted into the factory. Yaru goes to explain to Liu Dama about the treatment for Xiaofang, and why Xiaofang should stay at the Wang home so that she can undertake a strictly supervised regimen of exercise and massage treatments until she can walk again.

Zhuxin tells Wang Zitao just before she leaves for America that Xiaofang is Yaru and Luo Gang's child. Yaru and Husheng go to the airport with Zhuxin, where Huifang unexpectedly turns up to see Zhuxin off too.

**Episode 46** Huifang takes Xiaofang to live at the Wang family home so that Yaru can help her to regain the use of her legs. Wang Zitao asks Huifang to come and live there too, but owing to the breakdown in her relationship with Husheng, she doesn't go.

Xiaofang overhears Husheng saying that she was a foundling child. Living at the Wang home, she misses Huifang. Huifang convinces Xiaofang to go back to the Wang home so that she can get better quickly. Xiaofang stays with Yaru in her room and slowly regains the ability to walk under a rigorous schedule of exercises and massage supervised by Yaru. Yaru tells Husheng that in the last few months she has seen in Huifang something that she herself lacks.

Husheng goes to see Yuejuan at her clothing stall, and she tells him that Huifang has a relationship with Luo Gang, also that she sees a lot of Dacheng. Husheng is so angry at hearing this that he goes to the Liu home, where Liu Dama and Yanzi throw him out just as Huifang and Dacheng come along. Dacheng lectures Husheng on what a good woman Huifang is, and tells him all that Huifang has given up for his sister's child. This is the first time that Husheng has heard that Xiaofang is Yaru's daughter.

**Episode 47** Husheng goes back to the Liu home to apologise, but Liu Dama won't accept his apology and flings a bucket of water over him.

Dacheng is preparing to go on an overseas business trip, and trying to convince Huifang to come with him. Huifang can't decide whether to go or not because she told Xiaofang that when she was cured she could come and live at the Liu home again. Dacheng reproaches her for thinking only of the child and not of herself. Luo Gang tells Yanzi that he wants to talk to Huifang before she goes overseas because he wants to "look after Xiaofang with her". He writes Huifang a letter saying that if she has no objections, he will notify his work unit of their intention to marry.

Yuejuan discovers that she has at last fallen pregnant.

Huifang goes to see Luo Gang, and tells him that she can't marry him because Yaru has waited fifteen years for her child.

Yaru resolves to let Xiaofang stay with Huifang and Luo Gang.

Husheng, who wants to get back together with Huifang, arranges that Huifang, Xiaofang, Dongdong and himself will all see a play together as a family.

Yuejuan and Dacheng have an argument about his relationship with Huifang. Dacheng hits Yuejuan and she runs frantically out of the house. Huifang, roaming the streets in a daze looking for Yuejuan and thinking of her relationships with Dacheng and Luo Gang, is hit by a car.

**Episode 48** Huifang is in hospital. Luo Gang and Dacheng are both at her bedside.

Tian Li tells Yaru what a good mother Huifang is to have given up so many years of her life for someone else's child. She goes on to say that they all owe Huifang a great debt, and that the only way that Huifang would be happy is if Yaru and Luo Gang marry.

Dacheng gives Yuejuan divorce papers to sign.

Xiaofang confronts Yaru with the fact that she is her daughter, but for Huifang's sake Yaru lies to her and tells Xiaofang that she is actually Huifang's daughter.

Yaru goes to see Luo Gang. He tells her that his heart has died. She says that Xiaofang should have a father and a mother; he says that she has no place in his heart and that she should take Xiaofang.

Guoqiang has a talk with Dacheng to try to stop him from divorcing Yuejuan, telling him that Huifang couldn't accept him if he divorced Yuejuan.

Yaru tells Wang Zitao and Husheng that there is little hope of Huifang getting better, and that she will probably be paralysed.

**Episode 49** On the day that she is to come out of hospital, Huifang is taken away before the Lius can get there. They have no idea where she is or who took her from the hospital.

Yuejuan tells Dacheng she is pregnant, in the hope of saving her marriage, but he doesn't believe her.

Husheng has brought Huifang to the Wang home. He reminisces about the happy times they had together, apologises for his past bad behaviour, and begs her to marry him again. The only movement she makes is to close her eyes, and to shake her head slightly. Husheng cries. Liu Dama comes to the Wang home looking for Huifang. Husheng comes out to beg her forgiveness for past misdemeanours, and she discovers that Huifang is there. There is wailing and crying on all sides when Husheng tells Liu Dama that he wants to get back together with Huifang.



Dongdong is worried because his mother is sick and his parents don't get on, and he refuses to play in the piano competition the next day. Luo Gang convinces him to go in it because he has "the best mother in the world".

Guoqiang is trying to convince Dacheng to get back together with Yuejuan when Tian Li arrives to tell him that Yuejuan is losing the baby.

Zhuxin writes to Husheng telling him that the arrangements are almost complete for Dongdong to come to America to study piano there.

Luo Gang makes sure that Dongdong arrives at the piano competition. Dongdong announces that he wants to play a song for his mother, although he realises that it means he won't win because he isn't playing the set piece. Husheng records his performance for Huifang to hear later, and Dongdong wins the competition.

Luo Gang tells Liu Dama that he wants to look after Huifang's family, and that he has already released their marriage announcement. Huifang tells her mother that Xiaofang is the child that Luo Gang has been searching for fifteen years.

**Episode 50** Yaru tells Husheng that she is prepared to give up Xiaofang and let Huifang keep her. She also tells him that there is no longer any sort of relationship between Luo Gang and herself. Yaru cries to her father and says that she can't let Xiaofang go.

Luo Gang tells Tian Li that he has decided to give Xiaofang to Huifang. Wang Zitao visits the Lius to bring Xiaofang back to them. Huifang tells Xiaofang that she is Yaru and Luo Gang's child and that Huifang is giving her back to them. Xiaofang then bursts into tears and begs Huifang not to disown her.

Yaru is in Luo Gang's room for a meal. He tells her that she is still beautiful and proposes a toast to her and Dandan. She proposes a toast to his and Huifang's future happiness. Then she changes it to a hope that they can both forget the past and drains her glass. He stares at her, and Yaru says that she knows that Huifang could never let Xiaofang go. Xiaofang arrives and embraces Yaru. Luo Gang tells her to go back and

look after Huifang. Xiaofang says that she will go back, but that she also wants to be with her parents.

Huifang gets better with food and gifts from the Wangs, Dacheng and Luo Gang, and is gradually able to work at her typewriter again.

Next summer, Dacheng arrives at the Liu home to tell them that he is going to Europe on business, and they tell him that they are moving as all these hutongs (laneways) are going to be pulled down for apartment buildings.

Zhuxin writes from the United States that she is coming back to China.

Yuejuan goes into hospital - she is pregnant again. Tian Li and Yaru attend her.

Dacheng is told that Yuejuan is seriously ill, and that only the mother or the baby can be saved, but not both. Yuejuan survives, and from her sickbed she tells Dacheng that it is understandable that he loves Huifang as Huifang is so much better than she herself is

Zhuxin arrives at the Liu home to find rubbish scattered about - they have moved. She then goes to the Wang home, and presses the bell.

THE END