

The Evolutionary Feminism of Zhang Kangkang and the Developing Dialogue between Darwinism and Gender Studies

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*Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed,
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Abstract

This dissertation studies the work of Zhang Kangkang (a contemporary Chinese woman writer, 1950-) in the light of evolutionary feminism (also called Darwinian feminism, which studies gender issues from an evolutionary perspective, brings feminist concerns into the fields of evolutionary biology, psychology and sociobiology, and illuminates and rectifies androcentric biases in these fields). I have three main research goals: the first is to present the similarities and congeniality of Zhang and evolutionary feminism, the second to explore whether Zhang has strong feminist concerns, and the third to try to bring Darwinism and feminism together and show their compatibility.

Lying at the intersection of literature, feminist criticism, and evolutionary studies, my approach is based on transcultural and transdisciplinary comparisons. My primary texts include Zhang's writings and the literature on evolutionary feminist theory by scholars including Anne Campbell, Patricia Gowaty, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Barbara Smuts, Griet Vandermassen, and Marlene Zuk. I find that these two textual corpuses converge around five topics: sex differences, the mother-child bond, mating systems, violence, and infanticide. I discuss in depth how Zhang's descriptions of motherhood, love and political activity in China highlight these intersections.

Both Zhang and evolutionary feminists try to uncover the evolved tendencies of sex differences in reproductive interests and strategies, understand women's reproductive behavior, highlight both male and female competitiveness and violence, as well as other predispositions that we may consider morally undesirable. Even Zhang, who has much in common with evolutionary insights, several times disproves or even tries to deny what she has revealed about female behavior in her stories. But evolutionary theory is descriptive and does not pursue science and value together. On the other hand, while evolutionary theory can describe human origins and propensities, and the roots of gender and social inequality,

solving possible moral dilemmas entails the involvement of ethics, literature, and feminist studies for prescriptive guidance in order to improve our societies and strengthen gender equality.

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Introduction: Three Combinations and Five Meeting Points

This research is a comparative study between Zhang Kangkang and evolutionary feminism, and also an evolutionary (feminist) reading of the oeuvre of Zhang. This juxtaposition of Zhang and evolutionary feminism begets questions about another two seemingly odd and far-fetched combinations: Zhang and feminism, and evolutionary theory and feminism. In this introductory section, I will make it clear why I chose Zhang and evolutionary feminism, and why I assembled these three combinations. Firstly I will briefly introduce Zhang and evolutionary feminism as follows:

Zhang Kangkang, a well-known and prolific Chinese woman writer, was born on July 3, 1950 in Hangzhou (a southern city in China, capital city of Zhejiang Province) and stopped her schooling in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution (the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976)¹ started. She volunteered to go to the Great Northern Wilderness (the northern part of Heilongjiang Province)² in 1969, and worked on a desolate farm for eight years before she went to study in Ha'erbin (the capital city of Heilongjiang) in 1977. After graduation, she joined the Chinese Writers' Association in 1979 and embarked on professional literary composition. She began publishing works in 1972, and now has about five million Chinese characters in print, comprising short novels, novellas, novels, and essays in more than thirty anthologies. She is classified as a national first-level writer, and her works have been translated into English, Japanese, German, French, and Russian.³ Characterized by lively characterization, vivid diction, concerns for

1 文化大革命。

2 北大荒。

3 The English translation of Zhang's novel *The Invisible Companion* by Daniel Bryant is used for reference in this book. Translations of Zhang's other Chinese texts are my own.

humanitarianism and idealism, and a keen grasp of the social mood, her fictions receive both negative and positive attention.

Evolutionary feminism (also called Darwinian feminism) refers to the study of gender issues from an evolutionary perspective, and comprises the works by Anne Campbell, Patricia Gowaty, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Janet Radcliffe Richards, Barbara Smuts, Griet Vandermassen, Marlene Zuk, and others (both female and male scholars). Especially since the beginning of the 1980s, the same time when modern feminist science studies sprang up (Subramaniam 2009: 951), evolutionary feminists have brought feminist concerns into the fields of sociobiology⁴ and evolutionary biology, and illuminated and rectified the androcentric biases in these fields by emphasizing variability and an active female presence. Though speaking from different disciplines, such as evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, and philosophy, they share the belief that “it is only through taking into account our evolved human nature that it will be possible *fully* to understand the sources of women’s oppression” (Vandermassen 2004: 22, italics in original).

The work done by evolutionary feminists have been undertheorized and failed to receive enough attention and recognition within feminist (science) studies. Even in her review article about the development of modern feminist science studies published in 2009, Banu Subramaniam (2009) does not mention at all what has been achieved by evolutionary feminists since the beginning of the 1980s. She points out that defining feminist science studies is difficult, as it is a heterogeneous and amorphous body of work without any official consensus and cohesion. Both feminism and science must be understood in the plural, and feminist science studies implicate multiple analyses of feminisms and practices of

⁴ Sociobiology is a field of scientific study based on the premise that behaviors (social and individual) are at least partly inherited and can be affected by natural selection. It argues that just as selection pressure led to organisms evolving useful ways of interacting with the natural environment, it led to the genetic evolution of advantageous social and individual behaviors. Sociobiologists including Edward O. Wilson, Robert Trivers, George Williams, and Sarah Hrdy thus use evolutionary ideas to explain both animal and, more controversially, human behaviors. The term “sociobiology” can be traced to the 1940s, but the concept gained major recognition only until 1975 with the publication of Wilson’s *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*.

science. But while Subramaniam acknowledges that feminist science studies emerged very firmly grounded in the biological sciences and modern evolutionary theory functions as the unifying theory within the biological sciences, she fails to incorporate evolutionary-oriented feminism into the vibrant and diverse field of modern feminist science studies – this can be regarded as a pitiful loss.

Like Anne Fausto-Sterling, Donna Haraway, Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding, and others, evolutionary feminists have also engaged in narrating “women in the sciences,” advancing feminist critiques of science, and analyzing the culture of science – the three main activities of modern feminist science studies identified by Subramaniam. Only Donna Haraway’s *Primate Vision* (1989) contributes one chapter and several paragraphs to the revelation of the work done by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy and Barbara Smuts, acknowledging that the two have brought female-centered accounts of primate lives and confirmed female agency and female sexual assertiveness. This book by Haraway was written in 1989, with no feminist followers making the similar efforts to summarize evolutionary feminists’ later and further endeavors and insights.

This research of mine will illustrate that Zhang’s views are at odds with mainstream feminism in China,⁵ as well as with constructionist feminism, but fit in with evolutionarily informed feminist formulations. The reason I put Zhang and evolutionary feminism together is, to put it concisely here, their congruity and congeniality. I summarize five meeting points (on sex differences, mother-child bond, mating systems, violence, and infanticide, elaborated respectively in the following chapters) between Zhang and evolutionary feminism, to bring them forward and to highlight their (even spontaneous) coming-together.

Furthermore, I attempt to show that Zhang, feminism, and evolution form the three vertexes of a triangle that I try to draw with three lines, each

5 By labeling them mainstream feminists, I refer to the feminist researchers in Chinese academia who nevertheless uphold various feminist perspectives and strands, yet all generally ignore Zhang’s feminist concerns.

connecting a discordant yet compatible couple. Corresponding to these three combinations, I have three main research goals in mind when conducting this research, which lies at the intersection of literature, feminist criticism, and evolutionary studies: the first is to present the similarities and congeniality of Zhang and evolutionary feminism, the second to prove that Zhang does have strong feminist concerns, and the third to offer a new effort to bring Darwinism and feminism together and show their compatibility and mutualism.

1.1 Zhang and evolutionary feminism

This combination of Zhang Kangkang and evolutionary feminism causes uneasy feelings because evidently I try to mingle literature/humanities and evolution-based natural science studies. The two have been insulated and regarded as incongruous and incompatible since the end of 1950s. One is believed to be imaginary, artistic, and aesthetic with the predominance of qualitative, interpretative methods, while the other precise, matter-of-fact, and sometimes flat, dull, yet enjoying the purity of rational thought with a focus on quantitative, probability methods (Bleie 2003: 177). Early scholarship in women's studies has further cemented this binary in the development of the sex-gender binary (Subramaniam 2009: 968-9). But since the 1970s, the boundaries between scientific and cultural studies and, by extension, their goals and focuses, have no longer been considered as clear-cut; the cultural aspects of science and technology have increasingly gained attention from feminist scholars (Oikkonen 2010: 9-11). By comparing Zhang and evolutionary feminism, my research also studies how cultural discourses and scientific undertakings intersect and intertwine.

As a representative of a group of contemporary Chinese women writers, Zhang constantly changes her point of view as the time advances, from a loyal follower of the Cultural Revolution to a defender of idealism in the 1980s, and to a sober observer of the implementation of the market economy since the 1990s – herself a story of evolution. In her texts, she

indicates her genuine belief in the scientific value of Darwin's theory of evolution, and implies in a novel that evolutionary theory cannot be overthrown (Zhang 1996ff: 361). Evolutionary terms such as "gene," "inheritance," "natural selection," "variation," and "mutation" frequently appear in her works. Certainly, she applies scientific terms in her own subjective and artistic manner. For example, she (1996j: 59; 1996y: 43; 2007a: 1; 2009a: 197, 296; 2009b: 356) writes that "the genes of men and women are fundamentally unfair," that she inherited her family's obstinacy and bookishness, that "a nation without a religious spirit does not have the genes of confession," that "the genes for regarding rats as ancient enemies surge forward in the blood of eagles ... as well as of cats," and that, written in a tongue-in-cheek tone, the Chinese diet of porridge "is inherited from our ancestors' genes of porridge-eating."⁶ The narrative manner and "consanguineous discourse" of her novel *Scarlet Cinnabar* (1995) are considered "rooted in genes and based on telepathy" (Zhang 1996q: 402).⁷

Historically, the travelling of evolution theory in China began at the end of the 19th century when China was in jeopardy and turbulence and its people in destitution and distress. In 1895, Yan Fu translated Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* into Chinese, and opened Chinese

6 “男女的遗传基因就不公平；”“一个缺乏宗教精神的民族，是没有‘忏悔’的遗传基因的；”“老鹰……如同猫，血管里奔腾着视耗子为世仇的遗传基因；”“我们喝粥是因为祖先遗传的粥的基因。”

7 “血缘话语；”“植根于遗传基因、心灵感应基础上的。”

From “my” angle, the novel *Scarlet Cinnabar* narrates the history of Zhang's family. The narrator “I” is described as “existing in her parents' bodies ever since they were born, growing with them into an invisible particle of life's original shape, quietly waiting in the abdomens and patiently accompanying him and her all along,” and “moving silently in the passage composed of genes, chromosomes, and other various hereditary units” until one day her parents finally meet. “I ... am created by her and the other man, and become a new life.” “Connecting him and her, and combining the two into one, I continue their lives” (Zhang 2009a: 1-2, 87). As Zhang (2002a: 124) says, “I think there does exist a natural, physiological, and fontal connection between one and his/her parents. When introduced into literature, this inherent connection engenders the particular narrative manner of *Scarlet Cinnabar*.” (“从你的父母出生起，你就存在于他们的体内。他们渐渐长大，而你也渐渐成熟，成为一粒看不见的生命原形，始终静候腹腔之中，耐心陪伴着他或她；”“我在这条由生命基因、染色体和其他种种遗传因子组成的通道里默默来去。”“我……被她和另一个男人共同创造，成为一个新的生命。”“是将他和她，合二而一，将他们的生命重新组合，然后延续下去。”“我觉得人跟父母之间确实存在天然的、生理与本源的联系，这种内在的联系被引进‘文学’，产生了《赤》中独特的叙述方式。”)

academics' minds to evolutionary theory. Yan's translation (entitled *Theory of Natural Selection*),⁸ half of which consists of his own wordings, actually leans toward Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism. There are conspicuous differences between Darwin's evolutionary biology and Social Darwinism, a point I will address soon. But the Social Darwinian ideas of "competition," "struggle for existence," "survival of the fittest," and "progressiveness", which Yan Fu brought to China, greatly stimulated Chinese intellectuals at that time, who deeply realized that China needed changes and reforms, both gradual evolution and radical revolution, in order to survive and revive in the world against foreign incursion and ruthless international competition. Social Darwinism thereafter has had a significant influence on Chinese society, politics, and philosophy, and on Chinese people's world view and thoughts (Pusey 1983; Wu 2005). The imprint of Social Darwinism is manifest when Zhang (2007a: 225) reveals the deprivation of individuals' choices during the Cultural Revolution: "The so-called innate human rights and survival of the fittest in natural selection – competition ensued from selection and progressiveness from competition – are objective laws of human societies."⁹

As such, Zhang's evolutionary views ought to have been influenced by earlier scientific writings that reinforced the gender hierarchy in which women were seen as weaker, less evolved, and less intelligent, more sexually passive, yet more responsible than men for the reproductive realm. Well into the 1980s, gender and sexuality in official discourse in China were still narrowly construed by these skewed and outdated articulations. But Zhang later questions and overthrows them, as evolutionary feminists have also done. Zhang's charges are leveled particularly at the tendency during the Maoist period of overt disregard for human nature and women's specificities which, she thinks, are irreducible and knowable through scientific investigation. Furthermore, she fervently embraces women's assertiveness and autonomy in sexuality, finance, and mentality. Throughout this book, I will analyze on which points Zhang's views are in line with those of evolutionary feminism, as well as where

8 严复《天演论》。

9 "所谓天赋人权，物竞天择——由选择而竞争，由竞争而发展，是人类社会的客观规律。"

they appear to diverge.

1.2 Zhang and mainstream feminism

This second combination seems awkward because, among all contemporary Chinese women writers, Zhang may be the last one whom researchers would link with a feminist writer. Zhang is considered as belonging to the very orthodox writing, always occupying the literary center stage since the publication of her debut novel, *The Demarcation*, (unfortunately) a work of propaganda, at the age of twenty-five in 1975. She is the deputy chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association in Heilongjiang province. Her works have won many national prizes and awards, have been published again and again (no problem with censorship), and have been incorporated into school textbooks. It is understandable that feminist researchers in China would disregard or avoid her works. She is often criticized for a lack of gender consciousness or for having an unstable gender standpoint (Zhang 2002h: 79). On the other hand, more than once, Zhang straightforwardly states that she dislikes feminist ideas. For her, they are saber-rattling, ultra, and parochial. She often argues against the idea that feminist researchers frame her works, and is reluctant to be called a feminist, or even a *woman*, writer.

There are also historical reasons for the schism between Zhang and mainstream feminism in China. Feminism was introduced into China at the beginning of the 1980s,¹⁰ a time when Chinese intellectuals had just been freed from the durance of Chinese Marxism and the Maoism cult during the Cultural Revolution. Any ism with an ideological tint appeared frightening for them. Zhang was not the only female writer who shunned the title of feminist or female writers at that time. Other distinguished female writers, such as Wang Anyi and Liu Suola, also took a similarly indifferent or even antagonistic attitude towards the newly transplanted

10 Western feminism was first introduced into China by male activists and intellectuals at the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

feminist ideas, in sharp contrast with the enthusiasm of a few female researchers. These researchers often consciously uplifted those female writers whose works concentrate on revealing sex asymmetries under patriarchy, and dismissed or depreciated others, in order to further spread feminist theories in China. But many writers, including Zhang, at the beginning of the 1980s still identified with “the bigger world,”¹¹ namely, the broader political and social environment, rather than the purportedly narrower gender-related scope with a focus on women’s life experiences. They did not admit that they took a gender-distinctive standpoint in their writings – a kind of overcorrect stance and overreaction to feminist criticism, and also a compromise, an acquiescence with the dominant statist ideology that subordinates women’s issues to those of the society and the nation. While this stance also implies a conciliatory intention to mollify the gender division and tension caused by radical feminist arguments, feminist researchers often label their writings as imitating male grand narration.

While other Chinese female writers have gradually accepted and internalized feminist ideas since the late 1980s, Zhang lagged behind. Much like the Polish-American woman writer Francine du Plessix Gray, who indicates in her *Soviet Women: Walking the Tightrope* (1990) that the entire female population in Russia vigorously repudiates Western feminism, Zhang disbelieves in feminism’s fundamental salvation function for Chinese women in general and for the changes in the persistent gendered division of labor in particular. Furthermore, Zhang (1996f: 197-8; 2002c: 60; 2002h: 80) is especially against the Procrustean constraints set by a certain theory’s standards of criticism, and questions: “Does literature come out of a person’s inner heart, or follow a certain theory?”; “Are

11 Zhang was actually among the first Chinese intellectuals who faced and spoke out about women’s problems after the Cultural Revolution in China. In 1985, she brought forward the idea of women’s “two worlds”: an internal emotional world and an outer social world, and claimed that women need both of these two worlds. She (1990b: 285; 1995b: 352) also implies that women writers can transcend the narrower circles of gender issues – “traditional women’s writing aiming to narrate women’s suffering, struggle for women’s rights, and defy the male-centered society,” and describe social, historical problems with “a deeper connotation and broader content” in the second grander world. (“传统意义上的女性文学——以诉说女人苦难、争取女性权利、反抗男性中心社会为己任；”“有更深的内蕴，更大的容量。”)

suffering women and women's suffering the only and permanent topics of women's writing?"; "Do we really need an 'ism' to frame women's writing?".¹² She (2002h: 84) argues that women's writing should not be confined to a close territory divided from the literary field commonly enjoyed by men and women, and should not establish its own rules, judgment systems, and standards of criticism, as the Paralympic Games do. She (2002f: 47) absolutely agrees that a woman should have a room of her own so she can always come back to herself, but this room must have doors and windows so that she can go out and have a broader, further vision. Zhang's mistrust of feminism is mainly targeted at radical feminism. As she (2002h: 81) says, "Radical feminism is a hypercorrection of male-centered traditional culture. Her progressiveness has brought mighty impacts on the social value systems, but at the same time she enters a dilemma and a paradoxical circle, unable to find an exit."¹³ Zhang (1985a: 192; 1995b: 350; 1996n: 226) argues that women's emancipation is not about isolated "women's problems," and not only about sexual inequality and sexual politics, but has to embed itself in all other social dimensions, such as political regimes, legal systems, economic structures, scientific and technological development, and individual mentality.

Like science, feminism is a multiplicity of thoughts with multiple political and philosophical programs, each with an implicit assumption of human nature that is partially guided by its political motives. Anne Campbell (2002: 30; 2006: 63-8) points out that as many as nine different strands of feminisms have been identified, but academic feminists can be broadly categorized into social constructionists¹⁴ and liberals. The former emphasizes locality, cultural variability and negotiable, situated, provisional, and nongeneralizable womanhood or manhood, and is reluctant to resort to biological causality, to the universal human nature or

12 “文学究竟是从人的心底产生，还是服从于某种理论？”“我们真的需要一种所谓的‘主义’来框定女性写作吗？”“不幸的女人和女人的不幸——难道这就是女性文学、女性作家们永恒的主题？”

13 “极端的女性主义是一种对以男性为中心的传统文化的矫枉过正，她的进步性为社会价值体系带来了强大冲击，但与此同时，也进入了无法找到出口的怪圈。”

14 Social constructionism in feminist studies will be further addressed in 1.3 and Chapter 2.

common humanity, to the origins of everyday discourse, and to the value of science for solving human problems. In contrast, Campbell continues to write, liberal feminists argue for “the advantages of psychological androgyny, the establishment of a gender-blind society with equal opportunities for men and women, and are unique among other feminists in continuing to accept traditional scientific method.”

I would argue that Zhang falls into the category of liberal feminism, which believes in the possibility of objectiveness-oriented and value-free scientific knowledge when most of other feminists continue to regard objectivity, neutrality, and purity are merely the cloak of the sciences. Evelyn Fox Keller (1982: 593-4) states that by rejecting objectivity as a masculine ideal, feminist critique has exacerbated the very problem it wished to solve as it asserted the ideological opposition between male objectivity and female subjectivity. Instead, she continues, feminism should, first of all, “reconceptualize objectivity as a dialectical process so as to allow for the possibility of distinguishing the objective effort from the objectivist illusion.” Furthermore, Donna Haraway (1996: 254) points out that feminist objectivity is also “about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of the object.”

These points of view imply that science involves a set of historical ongoing practices that accumulates objective efforts in continuously striving to manifest and surpass its “situatedness” (Haraway 1991: 183) or its embedment in its political and cultural times. They also indicate that science itself is not bad, but science alone cannot be “an impartial arbiter of questions about human nature and about our relation to the rest of the natural world” (Longino 1990: 15; Keller and Longino 1996; Harding 1986). Other intellectual pursuits by feminists, philosophers, ethicists, and others are needed to redress the potential biases and limits in scientific inquiries and to prevent the misguidance of scientific aspirations and misuse of scientific results – “the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position” (Haraway 1996: 259).

Ullica Segerstråle (2006: 122) points out that the sociobiology debate or

controversy since 1975 in fact represented “a clash between two total scientific-cum-moral worldviews.” The central question is “the nature of science and the moral responsibility of the scientists, especially when it came to ‘telling the truth’ about the biological foundation of human nature.” She proceeds to the two strategies for evolutionary biologists or two visions of science, the normative/prescriptive and the objectivist/descriptive one:

The normative alternative is utility-oriented, based on the belief that evolutionary biological claims will directly affect the actions of people or policy makers, in the short or the long run. It sees evolutionary biology as a type of applied science. In contrast, the objectivist alternative is connected to a vision of evolutionary biology as pure science: knowledge that does not necessarily have consequences, mere wonder at the workings of nature. (Segerstråle 2006: 133)

The former – pursuing science and value together, or using evolutionary arguments to justify the status quo, to buttress social inequality in gender, class, and race – is not what evolutionary feminists intend to do. Evolutionary feminists make objective efforts in uncovering the workings of nature from both an evolutionary and a feminist perspective. In the following chapters, I will show Zhang’s evolutionary feminist proclivity and her belief in both apolitical, objectivity-striving descriptions presented by evolutionary-grounded natural science and prescriptive implications literature can supply.

1.3 Evolutionary theory and constructionist feminism

This third combination between evolutionary theory and (constructionist) feminism seems uncomfortable because a group of feminist scholars and (both male and female) scientists have already tried to bring these two heterogeneous perspectives together, yet with disappointingly little success (Wilson 2005: vii). The rift between them, which has lasted for

more than a century, has still not been mended. The term “evolutionary feminism” came through long-term tough and self-striving efforts. Constructionist feminism and evolutionary theory “have remained more than merely isolated. Adherents of one sometimes display outright hostility to the other perspective in the belief that the two are inherently antithetical,” and the two have marched along “in their parallel paths, failing to intersect” (Buss and Malamuth 1996: 3-4).

The resistance on the part of constructionist feminists to evolutionary theory, and their suspicion of the thought of resorting to the science of biology for information that bears on the human condition, are to some extent understandable, if not only short-sighted or obstinate. There are a couple of historical, academic, and practical reasons for the schism between evolutionarily guided biology and constructionist feminism:

(1) The early literature of evolutionary biology and sociobiology was highly sexist and built on the patriarchal assumptions that have confined women to their “natural” roles as mothers and subordinates to men. As Sarah Hrdy (1999b: 534) analyzes, it has taken a long time to correct these errors and biases, to widen the evolutionary paradigm to include and equally treat both sexes, and to prove that evolutionary models and biological accounts of human nature do not need to be reductive or deterministic. But by the time this happened, evolutionary theory had already fallen into disrepute, and feminists had already been convinced that what evolutionists offered was flawed, essentialistic, and deterministic, and that evolutionary studies (or the whole scientific enterprise in general) have been male-governed to buttress the status quo, to maintain the dichotomy of normal, advanced, superior male and variant, less-cerebral, inferior female, and to dominate both women and nature. Thus “[n]atural selection, and with it the most powerful and comprehensive theory available” for understanding human nature, was turned down, as social scientists and feminists have traced another itinerary. That path, Hrdy continues to point out, led away from science, and “led them to reject biology altogether and construct alternative origin stories, their own versions of wishful thinking about socially constructed men and women.”

In the meantime, even though evolutionists have been developing a more multifaceted and evenhanded view of human nature, evolutionary theory remains outside of constructionist feminists' vision.

“The persistent essentialism and latent sexism of mainstream scientific approaches to human evolution and reproduction are discouraging, no doubt,” but “there is a certain absurdity in objecting to the notion of nature or biology itself, if this is (even in part) what and where we are” (Kawash 2011: 990; Grosz 1999: 31). Furthermore, as Hrdy (1999b: 534) believes, science would eventually weed out sexism; then the scientific assumption or justification of the biological nature of dominant males and inferior females would become an imaginary and groundless fear.

(2) Darwin's ideas have long been misused by many to biologize and naturalize the power of the elite through studies of sex and racial differences. Social Darwinism is one example. It is an ideological doctrine that tries to justify social inequality between sexes, classes, and races as products of natural and sexual selection, and has less to do with Darwin than many people seem to think. Its leading theorist, Herbert Spencer, proclaimed that progress was inherent in evolution – something that Darwin did not agree with. Spencer implied that taking measures to reduce social inequality meant “impeding the progress of the species and hence should be avoided” (Vandermassen 2004: 10; 2005: 64). By contrast, Darwin's works refuse to assume that any evolutionary process can be equated with development or progress, as evolution is fundamentally anti-teleological and mindless, “has no foresight – it is not headed towards perfection,” and pushes towards an unpredictable future with no real direction and no particular destination or goal (Myra 2004: 226; see also Grosz 1999, Zuk 2002). But “Spencer's validation of the status quo had far broader popular and political appeal than Darwin's more nihilistic perspective ever could,” and has been more influential (Hrdy 1999b: 15). The early twentieth century racial theory inspired by social Darwinism incurred disastrous political implications (Bleie 2003: 159). But although biology has great potential for harming women and other marginalized groups of people, this is owing to the misuse of the science, not the

science itself.

(3) Evolutionary analyses have also been widely misconceived. One widespread misconception and unnecessary worry about evolutionary theory among feminists is that “biology is destiny.” According to this anti-essentialist and anti-determinist view, “if even a portion of the human male’s dominance is ascribed to evolutionary causes, an intolerable status quo will have to be condoned as fundamentally unalterable” (Hrdy 1999a: 2). In her attack on adaptationist explanations of sex differences, Anne Innis Dagg (1999) asserts that there is little hope of changing society if social behavior is considered as a genetic trait. Lesley Rogers (1999: 56) also evidently shares this anxiety, as she phrases that “[f]inding a biological cause for differences sets the difference in stone.” Both Dagg and Rogers maintain a false duality between intrinsic, invariant, irremediable biological predispositions and extrinsic, contingent, remediable social influences (Daly and Wilson 1996: 24). Even people from the scientific community “incorrectly assume that human sex differences that have biological origins are unchangeable” (Geary 1998: 330).

In chapter 2, I will elaborate on the idea that evolutionary theory has always tried to identify “the situational factors that predispose members of a particular society toward or away from” a certain behavior (Smuts 1996: 232). As an interactionist approach combining genes and environment, nature and nurture, innate and acquired, and emphasizing both internal and environmental input for the development, activation, and expression of behaviors, evolutionary theory does not at all presume inherent rigidity or genetic predeterminism. On the contrary, “developmentally, experientially, and circumstantially contingent variation” is precisely what evolutionary biological theories are about (Daly and Wilson 1996: 24). And suffice it to say here that “to dismiss any biologically based explanation as chauvinistic claptrap” in order to avoid biological determinism will cause greater loss and give biological dispositions more power than they deserve (Zuk 2002: 189).

Biological determinism implicates another anxiety and misconception about evolutionary theory: naturalistic fallacy, which refers to the belief that all things natural are automatically good, right, and morally acceptable, and thus mistakes what *is* for what *should be* (Campbell 2002; Vandermassen 2005; Ingo, Mize, and Pratarelli 2007). Evolutionary theory is descriptive, not prescriptive. Natural selection has neither morals nor values, and is indifferent to human ethical or philosophical concerns. Feminist scholars who have unknowingly applied the naturalistic fallacy simply misunderstand the implications of biological explanations of behaviors. This to some extent also accounts for the insulation of feminism – actually the humanities and social science in general – from evolution-grounded natural science, as mentioned above. Evolutionary studies and feminism operate on different planes: The former is a scientific discipline and “primarily concerned with describing and explaining *what exists*,” while the latter shares with the former “a concern with describing and explaining what exists, but it also carries a social and political agenda. Hence, feminism is partly concerned with what *ought to exist*” (Buss and Malamuth 1996: 3, italics in original).

(4) Feminists often charge that “[e]volutionary theory does not resonate with women’s experience,” and that it invents convenient, plausible, and unverifiable “just-so” stories about how adaptations occurred (Campbell 2002: 22, 24). It is true that evolutionary theory engages in studying how the body and mind have been shaped in the environment of evolutionary adaptation (the context of early humans in which behaviors evolved approximately 100,000 years ago), and framing hypotheses in terms of ultimate or fundamental explanations rather than the proximate causal mechanisms that are the usual concerns of feminists or social scientists (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991: 649). Evolutionists state that we all descend from a small number of Africans, the modern *Homo sapiens*, who were the only extant species of the five-million-year-old hominid and left the continent around 100,000 years ago (Campbell 2002: 23).¹⁵ An

15 When insightfully revealing that evolutionary psychologists may have overemphasized sex and sexuality in their account of human evolution and have normalized heterosexuality, Venla Oikkonen (2010: 7, 30) almost overthrows the whole evolutionary premises, stating that this trajectory of an unbroken line of human descent

examination of human origins and human nature from a fundamental level will benefit feminist politics, rather than impeding its progress.

Furthermore, although evolutionary analyses are essentially about reproductive success, it is incorrect to assume that the body and mind of human beings or any other species were designed to maximize their genetic legacy, their fitness – “the representation of an individual’s genes (relative to unrelated individuals) in future generations” (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991: 648). In other words, evolutionists are misunderstood to claim that fitness itself is what people and other animals consciously strive for. Organisms do not always know the (evolutionary) reasons for their behaviors, and are not presumed to act purposefully and run around to achieve the goal of fitness (Pratto 1996: 200). In actuality, “fitness consequences are properly invoked not as direct objectives or motivators, but as explanations of why certain proximal objectives and motivators have evolved to play their particular roles in the causal control of behavior” (Daly and Wilson 1996: 23).

(5) Feminists also object to the whole notion of animal analogies to human behaviors, and state that “any comparison between our behavior and that of lower animals is unjustified, demeaning and reductionist” (Campbell 2002: 2). In a more dispassionate and fair-minded way, pro-feminist evolutionary biologist Marlene Zuk (2002: 94-105, 208) qualifies the comparative studies between humans and non-humans. She states that humans are subject to selection in the same ways as other organisms, so non-humans are “potentially relevant” to understanding certain aspects of human biology and behaviors, but simplistically using non-human

“is not really a trajectory at all.” It is the “same sex” and “a self-replicating narrative loop,” she writes, that maintain the plausibility of evolutionary explanations of human history. She overlooks the fact that evolutionists do not conceptualize sex as a static and fixed act or category, but recognize that (1) sex is individually variant and circumstantially contingent, and embodies a range of different forms and practices; (2) sex itself is a product of selection and subject to evolutionary changes as a changing category of practices and meanings; (3) the significance of the cultural aspects of sex and sexuality predisposes sex and sexuality to social and cultural configuration as well; (4) there are various connections between sex and reproduction, in which sex can be reproductively (or mentally) functional and instrumental or not; and (5) reproductive fitness itself is not what human beings and other organisms consciously strive for, a point I will soon explain.

behaviors as role models to justify our own and to guide our ethics is profoundly precarious and misleading. Zuk also strongly argues against the idea of a *scala naturae*, or a scale of nature, a hierarchical classification scheme for organisms with humans on the top of the phylogenetic scale over other “lower” animals. Challenging the assumption of human exceptionalism and supremacy, Griet Vandermassen (2005: 85; see also Weinstein 2010: 168-70) writes that “[t]o set humans apart from even our closest animal relatives as the one species that is exempt from the influences of biology is to suggest that we do indeed possess a defining ‘essence’ and that it is defined by our unique and miraculous freedom from biology. The result is an ideological outlook eerily similar to that of religious creationism.”

(6) Since the 20th century, the questioning of foundational scientific truths and objective efforts has become a quintessential sign of the postmodern. After postmodernism “put the entire edifice of knowledge into question,” linked “scientific knowledge primarily to the exercise of power,” and rejected any “totalizing” metanarratives, any “grand theory (feminist theory excepted),” any attempt at universality and generality, and “any objective set of truths” (“men’s oppression of women as a historical truth” excluded) (Campbell 2002: 22; Vandermassen 2005: 13), feminism turned more indifferent or antagonistic to evolution-influenced science studies, especially to evolutionary psychology, whose interests include the discovery of pan-human traits, often at the expense of playing down variability and flexibility, cultural differences, and individual variances.

There is, however, a diversity of feminist perspectives and theories, and not all of them take an antiscientific stance. Furthermore, it is critical to note that feminism and evolutionary statements, despite their relative insularity from each other, actually converge on many key points and interests. For instance, both feminism and evolutionary theory focus on power and sex, and confront the issues such as the gender gap in power, male control of female sexuality, and unsteady sisterhood or female solidarity. Contrary to the popular belief, these paradigms are not necessarily at odds with each other (Smuts 1995; Pratto 1996; Buss 1996).

The mutual compatibility of feminism and evolutionary theory makes the two's connection and integration not only possible but beneficial to both.

On the one hand, as scientific enterprise is socially embedded and potentially prejudiced, feminist criticisms of and contributions to scientific disciplines can help to improve the scientific level of the disciplines and redress male biases in them. For example, Patricia Gowaty's (2003) article analyzes how feminist concerns have put evolutionary biology onto a more rightful track. The impacts of feminism have led to more women studying and contributing to biology and a widening of the theoretical framework to include female interests and strategies (Vandermassen 2005: 74). As Zhang Kangkang (2002g: 138) says, "A female angle of view cannot contain everything, but conduces to the excavation of human nature."¹⁶ Furthermore, feminism is helpful and conducive to "the construction of a realistic program of social reform," since evolutionary explanations, unlike most feminist approaches, are non-ideological, only descriptive, and do not prescribe to what extent we want to, or ought to, endorse or change our evolved predispositions in ways that are socially and individually beneficial (Hrdy 1999a: 331; Vandermassen 2005: 2).

On the other hand, evolutionary intellectual resources can provide feminism with a deeper comprehension of human nature and behaviors to both attain its aims and to refine its goals. Vandermassen (2004: 20; 2005: 179, 195) points out that feminists are missing a unifying framework, and "advocates embracing an evolutionary conceptual framework for the understanding of sexual conflicts and human affairs more generally." She writes that "[t]he more we get to know about the underlying mechanisms of human behavior, the more we can learn about how to control it," and to design interventions to either magnify or attenuate it. Elizabeth Wilson (2002: 285, italics in original) argues that biology can be not only the *object* of feminist criticism, but also "a *source* for theoretically and politically astute accounts of subjectivity, identity and embodiment." Modern evolutionary theory, as the unifying theory within the biological sciences and as a scientifically defensible knowledge of how human nature

¹⁶ "女性视角并不能包容一切, 但有助于对人性的开掘。"

evolved, of human needs and propensities, facilitates the foundation of firm ethical standards and efficient action. Elizabeth Grosz (1999: 8-10) argues that evolutionary profound and complex account of beings' incessant self-transformation, self-overcoming, and open-ended becoming can be of great value for feminists in facing their own limitations and new situations and contexts, and in transforming existing social relations and their concomitant value systems. If feminists were to overcome their "biophobia"¹⁷ and look beyond culture at the possible underlying biological motivations of human behaviors, "women would be able to deconstruct the roots of their oppression" (Ingo, Mize, and Pratarelli 2007).

In sum, "a theoretical synthesis and practical partnership of feminism and evolutionism would ... lead to the betterment of society for men and women alike" (Studd 1996: 86). It means that neither partner can benefit from trying to subsume the other, and that severing the ties is counterproductive for both (Zuk 2002: 212). As voiced by evolutionary feminists: "Darwinian feminism is an oxymoron no longer" (Zuk 2002: 200).

17 Often juxtaposed with anti-biologism or social constructionism in feminist studies, biophobia generally refers to the claim that feminists do not engage with such factors as biology, matter, corporeality or the physical in their theorizations, but turn to social-cultural factors convinced as the main, if not the sole, determinant of behavior, as Noela Davis (2009) summarizes. Early feminist criticisms of sociobiology and biological determinism are taken as exemplary of a feminist biophobia. This feminist stance remains committed to the conventional dualistic reasoning, that is, a conceptual separation of the biological from the social, and suggests that mutable, various cultural elements can overwrite physicality of the body, which is regarded as a fixed, rigid, and passive site awaiting cultural infiltration, inscriptions, and animation (see the discussion about biophobia in feminist studies in Ahmed 2008 and Davis 2009).

Evolutionary feminism recognizes humans as biological beings, part of, and not divorced from, nature, and theorizes an entanglement and non-separability of the biological with/in sociality. The accusation that sits at the pinnacle of feminist biophobia and constructionist objections to an evolutionarily-informed feminism is political (Campbell 2006: 80), and this political aversion to biology largely springs from the mistaken belief that genetically influenced traits are unalterable.

1.4 Materials and methods

This research of mine is a comparative study between Zhang Kangkang and evolutionary feminism, as mentioned at the beginning of the introduction. My primary texts include Zhang's novels, novellas, and essays – about five million Chinese characters in print, and the literature on evolutionary feminism theory by Anne Campbell, Patricia Gowaty, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, Barbara Smuts, Griet Vandermassen, Marlene Zuk, and others. These scholars have a common interest in synthesizing the evolutionary perspective and feminist concerns in their writings.

Though engaging in both literary criticism and evolutionary studies, this study is not involved in the investigation of the evolution of human literary expression – one salient subject of Literary Darwinism. Literary Darwinism (also called Darwinian Literary Studies) is a branch of literary criticism that studies literature in the context of evolution. Rallying around Edward O. Wilson's advocacy of "consilience" among all the branches of learning, literary Darwinists, such as Brian Boyd, Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, David Sloan Wilson, Peter Swirski, and Marcus Nordlund, use concepts from evolutionary theories to formulate principles of literary theory and interpret literary texts. They investigate interactions between human nature and artistic expressions including literature and its oral antecedents, and concentrate on relations between genetically transmitted dispositions and specific cultural configurations. While some literary Darwinists enthusiastically claim that all cultural/literary phenomena can be put under the umbrella of evolutionary interpretive framework and champion the use of literature as a database of human nature, others applaud the analytic insights of this new field yet warn that evolution is only one of human sciences that are needed to achieve a consilient literary scholarship (Pinker 2007: 164). Considering that this research of mine also employs evolutionary terms and formulations to analyze literary texts, it can be regarded as a Darwinian literary study.

My principle object or the method employed in this research is to apply evolutionary theory to Zhang's literary texts, with reservations, as the

complexity of the relation between the real world and the fictional world should not be reduced and simplified. While using evolutionary principles to interpret literary texts is illuminating, this Darwinian literary approach of mine can be problematic on many grounds: *Firstly*, the application of evolutionary theory on human behavior about real people to novelistic texts about imaginative approximations of real people is still debatable (see, for example, Kramnick 2011); *Secondly*, this research only engages in a single authorship instead of a vast literary corpus; *Thirdly*, the comparative method I employ might mask and obscure the dynamic relation between ultimate causes and a distinctive cultural situation as it is played out in the work of a particular author. Yet limited or anecdotal as they can be in revealing human nature in reality, the literary texts by Zhang, in a certain representative way, depict the joy and sorrow, the dilemmas and strategies, in human life experiences. The behavioral diversity described in her stories can be interpreted through an evolutionary lens.

I have read through Zhang's oeuvre and the literature on evolutionary feminism, and found that the two particularly converge around five topics, while leaving other points and most of their divergence or non-intersection untouched. In the following chapters, as well as in many subchapters, generally, I will first bring in evolutionary feminist theory, and then relevant Zhang's texts and particular cultural background. Or I will follow the other way around – first author overview and then moving into theoretical formulation. Next, around Zhang's literary descriptions, I will present evolutionary interpretation and criticism. Comparison is my basic research method, and I concentrate more on analogy and similarities than on contrast and differences. In their book on the theory of comparative literature, Yue et al. (1999: 112) point out that there are two basic methods in comparative literature studies: (French) “influence research” and (American) “parallel research.”¹⁸ Both methods emphasize analogy and commonalities between the two comparatums. But while the former is pursued with the precondition that one comparatum had influenced the other or that the two had actual contact, the later explores the affinity of

18 “影响研究”和“平行研究”。

the two comparatums that are from different cultural background and have not had any factual contact or communication earlier. This thesis of mine is a parallel research by comparing Zhang and evolutionary feminism, the two comparatums that have not intersected and met so far.

My research can also be categorized as an “illumination research” (Yue et al. 1999: 134),¹⁹ as it employs Western evolutionary feminism theory to illuminate or interpret a Chinese writer’s texts. While qualitative analysis is pursued far more than quantitative, text analysis is a key tool. Using theory from one cultural background to analyze literary texts from another culture entails misreading or eisegesis, but can also lead to innovative insights and promote cultural dialogues by transcending the limits of a national literary criticism (Yue et al. 1999: 160-3). It is challenging and risky, but also tempting and worthwhile.

My intention is not only to list the messages conveyed by Zhang and evolutionary feminists, but to show how the two’s viewpoints come into congruity and affinity on certain common themes through different ways of articulation – literary narrative and theoretical formulation. In other words, this research is to study how Zhang and evolutionary feminism happen to coincide with each other, how they meet by chance on some issues about which they are jointly concerned and to which they give their answers respectively. But to find the affinity of their answers is not the ultimate goal of the comparison, which anyway inevitably also reveals many of their discrepancies and contradictions. Yue et al. (1999: 80) point out that one ultimate goal of comparison is to achieve a cultural dialogue, and this dialogue ought to be equal and two-way. For instance, this thesis can be a revisionist employment of evolutionary feminism, and will show that (Zhang’s) literary texts can be complementary and enriching for evolution-grounded (feminism) theory.

Another ultimate goal, according to Yue et al. (1999: 14), is to search for answers to “the most all-pervading and most basic questions” that we from different cultures and societies and from different historical periods

19 “阐发研究”。

commonly face, and “to seek the most basic commonness and consensus that benefit our common life ... in the dynamic communication and understanding.”²⁰ This goal can effectively go beyond the danger and dilemma of both cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Actually, acknowledging the common aspects of human beings in different cultures is the exact reason why two comparatums can ever be put together and compared in comparative literature (Yue et al. 1999: 10, 20, 90).

My comparative work is trans-cultural, as well as transdisciplinary. Yue et al. (1999: 18, 32) define comparative literature as “trans-cultural and transdisciplinary literary research” which contributes to the mutual penetration and integration of different disciplines by transcending the limits and confinement of a single discipline.²¹ Transdisciplinarity is also essential throughout this whole book, in answer to Yue et al.’s call for a transdisciplinary direction in the development of comparative literature. Evolution, feminism, and Zhang are separated across cultures and all fall into different disciplinary scopes, and I will illustrate both the convergence and divergence or conflicts between Zhang and evolutionary feminism, and between the two parties in the other two combinations, all from distinctive, if not totally isolated, disciplines. Flexibly cruising along the triangle lines formed by Zhang, feminism, and evolution, I try to bring these three research objects into dialogue and connection in the search for the common voices. As Yue et al. (1999: 72) summarizes, “Comparative literature with its transcultural and transdisciplinary vision inherently connotes a theoretical impulse that quests after universality.”²² Meanwhile, I am deeply aware of the challenges transdisciplinarity can bring. Jules Law’s article (2000) presents a very dim picture of transdisciplinarity, and discloses the danger and costs a “trans” approach involving politics and (discredited) scientific theories has caused.

In the context of the continuous controversies evolutionary feminism confronts, this research employs a controversial theory (evolutionary

20 “最普遍的最根本的一些问题；”“在动态的沟通和理解中，寻求有益于共同生活……的最基本的共识”。

21 “跨文化与跨学科的文学研究”。

22 “比较文学所具有的跨文化与跨学科的视野本身就内在地隐含着寻找普遍性的理论冲动”。

feminism), engages in a controversial standpoint (reading Zhang Kangkang from an evolutionary perspective and comparing them), and is concerned with a set of controversial topics (sex differences, the mother-child bond, mating systems, violence, and infanticide). Steering a research course among these controversies and complications is fraught with challenges and risks, but it turns out that in my research, a trans-cultural and transdisciplinary comparison is, at least for myself, beneficial, illuminating, and liberating. In a cautious yet sincere celebration of comparative and transdisciplinary studies, I felicitate myself that the choice of my entanglement in these seemingly doubtful combinations and controversial issues leads to a gradually maturing and elevating intellectual journey.

1.5 Five topics

The five meeting points between Zhang and evolutionary feminism I have summarized will be elaborated respectively in the following five chapters, to reconcile the three uneasy combinations and realize my three ambitions:

- (1) Sex differences;
- (2) Mother-child bond;
- (3) Human mating systems;
- (4) The eruption of violence during the Cultural Revolution;
- (5) Infanticide and the birth control policy.

The five chapters can be read in any order, but there is a rationale for the order I have adopted. The chapter on sex differences is placed first as sex differences, among all these topics, seem to be the most debated within feminist discussions. Furthermore, as the book develops with each of these meeting points opening out, the topics become more and more repulsive, with infanticide being the most aversive.

Chapter 2, “Sex differences: Inherited or acquired? Mutable or immutable?”, will address the following questions: Are sex differences

congenital or learned? Is their existence a transient event or immutable? Will the recognition of biological underpinning of sex differences from an evolutionary perspective be biologically reductive and essentialistic, and lead to biological determinism and reassert patriarchal containment of women? How does Zhang echo (and diverge from) evolutionary feminism on this issue of sex differences? Why and how have they been criticized? How can I present their counterarguments? And what is the future of sex differences from an evolutionary perspective?

Chapter 3, “Absent or ambivalent mothers and avoidant children,” is an evolutionary reading of Zhang’s maternal stories including her own life stories, and also, first of all, begs and confronts the question: Will this way of reading be biologically reductive or essentialize mothers? In addition, the chapter dedicates itself to the issues of the dilemma confronted by physically absent and/or emotionally detached mothers, their strategies and tradeoffs, various mother-child conflicts, the ill consequences of insensitive and unpredictable mothering during childhood, maternal guilt, and young children’s counterstrategies to negotiate their survival and well-being.

Chapter 4, “Human mating systems,” will try to answer the questions: How do Zhang and evolutionary feminism approach the issues of the potent force of female choice, and the counteraction between female solidarity and female intrasexual competition? Why does Zhang often sigh about the hard-to-communicate and impossible-to-connect insulation between men and women? In which aspects do the sexes’ mating preferences and strategies diverge, and in which aspects they converge? And what are the evolutionary answers to Zhang’s puzzle about women’s persistent dependence in today’s circumstances?

Chapter 5, “Reproduction, kinship, and violence during the Cultural Revolution,” deals with the issues of the overflow of violence during the Cultural Revolution in China from an evolutionary perspective, and tries to explain why violence could be increased to such a particularly high level in this particular historical period in China. I will employ

evolutionists' analyses on kin selection and reciprocal altruism, modules of human sociality, male intrasexual competition, and women's competitive nature to attend to the question.

Chapter 6, "Infanticide and the birth control policy," cautiously addresses the repugnant topic of infanticide under the birth control policy in China, and is guided by the inquiries: Is Zhang's story about male or female infanticide? If it is a male infanticide, how does it reflect intersexual conflicts? Is it adaptive or pathological? Besides the evolutionary perspective, is an ethical standpoint needed to view the phenomena? If it is a female infanticide, is it by female(s) other than the mother or by the mother herself? Is it "unnatural" or "natural" discriminative parental commitment? And how do parents react to avoid (male) infanticidal threats? How do Zhang and evolutionary theory elucidate the problems of son preference and female-selective infanticide?

Sex Differences: Inherited or Acquired? Mutable or Immutable?²³

2.1 Introduction

The nationwide attempt at reforming human nature by trying to erase sex differences and driving men and women to conformity and homology during the Cultural Revolution in China engendered several consequences, one of which was a decade-long myth of gender equality. In this “sexless” decade, gender equality was maintained by tacitly designating male standard as the norm to which women should aspire. Women were treated unequally in the name of equality, feeling guilty of their sex-typical appearances and behaviors, and having to shed off their femininity and specificities. Equality became “a vacuous, or rather, a formal concept” in one decade of desexualization and de-individualization, since “difference cannot be readily accommodated in a system that reduces all difference to distinction and all identity to sameness,” as Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 50-4) analyzes the “serious drawbacks” that the political agenda of egalitarian feminism entailed. Egalitarian feminists, Grosz writes, claimed that women should be as able as men to do what men do, and that gender inequality resulted from culture not nature, from social construction not biological determinants. If social roles were readjusted or restructured and the two sexes re-socialized, men and women could be rendered equal and all behavioral sex differences be eliminated. In this sense, the ambition to remake humanity and eradicate sex differences during the Cultural Revolution represents a strong version of egalitarian feminism and social constructionism.²⁴ All these three – the Cultural Revolution, egalitarian

23 There are a couple of phrases referring to the differences between the (at least two) sexes: sex difference(s), gender difference(s), and sexual difference(s). In this dissertation, I will stick to the usage of “sex differences” in the plural form, to indicate that there is more than one difference between the sexes.

24 Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis in *The Second Sex* is one important stimulant to the emergence of current

feminism, and social constructionism – have tried, but failed, to theorize and realize sexual and reproductive equality.

The explanation of sex differences – the lingering puzzle within feminism – is at the core of evolutionary feminist theory. Instead of reducing sex differences to biological preformation and reasserting patriarchal containment of women, evolutionary feminism recognizes the biological infrastructure of sex differences in humans and other species, and unravels not only why and how these differences exist, but what they are, from a fundamental, ultimate level (Trivers 1972; Pratto 1996; Campbell 1999, 2002; Hopcroft 2002; Vandermassen 2004, 2005).

Often echoing evolutionary feminism at a distance, Zhang Kangkang acknowledges sex differences as manifestations of inherent, genetically transmitted predispositions. Scattered in her essays and the novel, *Women on the Edge* (2006), her views on sex differences suggest that, because there are inherited dispositions that shape and delimit men's and women's responses to the variations in the environment, their minds cannot be inscribed at will by upbringing, socializing or political ideologies such as those prevailed during the Cultural Revolution in China (Richards 2000; Vandermassen 2005; Fruehwald 2011).

theories of the social construction of perceived sex differences, as Sandra Harding (1986: 126-35) summarizes. Harding proceeds to the statement that very little in the forms of human gender and sexual identities, practices, desires or roles is given by nature. Furthermore, she argues that the scientific world view has played a particular role in shaping both sex and gender – the sex/gender dualism, and that the focus of the most radical of feminist critique of science is its challenge to biological determinism. She proposes that we should grasp the “innate plasticity” of both sex and gender in human species, and that women's place in the sex/gender system is socially constructed, and so is men's (for this social constructionist view on sex differences, see also, for example, Fausto-Sterling 1987).

Judith Butler's (1993, 1997) account is not a naive or extreme social constructionist rendering, “as she is not suggesting that there is a willful construction of the world by an authorial human subjectivity. But it is social constructionist nevertheless, in that nature and biology are *not* entangled within the performative production of subjectivity” (Davis 2009: 77, italics in original). In other words, “Butler retains a strict division between biology and culture ... The physical is, and remains, outside the social ... and Butler accounts for our ongoing performative enactment of subjectivity in purely cultural terms” (Davis 2009: 78).

These ideas of Zhang and evolutionary feminism would be discounted as reductionist, essentialist, and determinist assessments of “female nature.” Both of the two have been subject to wide-ranging criticisms and hostility from feminists. But they do not at all presume inherent rigidity or genetic determinism. Right on the contrary, circumstantially contingent variation is precisely what evolutionary theory aims at uncovering. As an interactionist approach, it emphasizes both ultimate (evolved, phylogenetic) and proximate (immediate, situational) influences on human attributes and behaviors, and uncovers how evolution, environment, culture, and ontogeny are interconnected (Daly and Wilson 1996, Pratto 1996; Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 1999, 2002; Bleie 2003). Yet in spite of recent dramatic socio-ecological changes, adaptations that have evolved and formed in the past may still linger in the present (Tooby and Cosmides 1990). The differences between the sexes are also not extinct, yet they may already be non-adaptive or ill-adaptive, and subject to both natural and social punishment, as shown in Zhang’s novel *Women on the Edge*. Understanding the evolutionary forces behind sex differences, far from condemning us to unalterable sexual roles fixed by nature, enables us to recognize both the persistence and mutability of sex forms and differences.

2.2 A troubled past

The belief that sex differences are, by and large, socially imposed and culturally structured is rather appealing, as it allows us to recognize the injustice and empowers us to challenge the injustice, and it can create an illusion of control and (fast) change (Hurley 2002). Defenders of the patriarchal system, as well as many early evolutionists, considered that women were by nature passive, compliant, nurturing, and less intelligent. The division and inequalities between the sexes reflected the “natural” differences between the sexes, thus conformed with and were conducive to (human) nature, and should not be tampered with. In place of this “naturalist” constraint of women, proponents of feminism of equality and social constructionism affirmed women’s potential for equal intelligence,

ability, and social values. They stated that the reason why women were not regarded as men's equals was the result of patriarchal ideologies, discriminatory socialization, and enculturation practices and role-playing, and thus could be changed with social and civic reorganization (Grosz 1995: 50, see also Hrdy 1999b, Vandermassen 2004, 2005).

Zhang (2002c: 59) also writes that "the rebellion against the traditional idea of 'male superiority and female inferiority' in the feudal history has urged us to strive for 'gender sameness' in personality and status," and the Cultural Revolution is one of these efforts.²⁵ Yet in many texts, she recalls her experiences during the Cultural Revolution with anguish and remorse, reveals the profound contradictions between women's emancipation movements, social/political demands, and human nature in this decade, and feels released that the construction of "gender sameness" has been overridden and discarded:

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the legislation protected women's basic rights in employment, reproduction, and so on. ... Women's status all of a sudden became "supreme."... By the 1970s, the so-called gender equality was utterly politicized. On the surface, contemporary Chinese women were beneficiaries of this "national policy," but psychologically were harmed by its desexualization. When "equality" meant abrogating differences, it reached another extreme. ... For a very long period of time, we have wished that we were as strong and tough as men, and thought that the ideal and hallmark of gender equality was equal pay for equal work. We even felt ashamed of our femininity and proud of being hard and rough. ... Numbers of female drilling crews, miners, and firewomen emerged as the time required. When women appeared in literary works, they are belligerent and fierce with heavily featured faces, only talking about revolution and nothing about love. Masculinized, they like to face the powder but not to powder their faces. This kind of image was considered as the sign of women's emancipation, yet actually of a greater retrogression. It was a serious distortion of

25 "对于封建历史上'男尊女卑'的传统观念的反抗,曾经催生了我们对'男女都一样'的人格地位平等的渴望。"

human nature. ... China has almost experienced an age without women. The lesson is weighty and painful. (Zhang 1996d: 194-5; 1996g: 208; 2002c: 59; 2002h: 83, sentences and paragraphs reordered)²⁶

Zhang indicates that, though politically attractive, the idea of nearly limitless malleability of human nature is untenable. On the one hand, the arguments of egalitarian treatment of the sexes challenged patriarchal assumptions and undermined the misapplication of biology that devalued women. On the other hand, they are insufficient to “ensure women’s freedom from sexual oppression” (Grosz 1995: 51). They neglect “the materiality of the doer – in other words, that the doer has a material body,” and assume that the body is only a vehicle, never the active operator, static and irremediable, contrasting with cultural influences that are extrinsic, variant, and changeable (Daly and Wilson 1996: 24; Hird 2004: 223, 224; Vandermassen 2005: 96). Furthermore, egalitarian feminism and socialization theories fail to explain the same general pattern of gender roles and sex-typical behaviors found across diverse cultures and through time – even when sex differences were spurned and suffocated by ruthless political forces during the Cultural Revolution in China where women, for example, still assumed the main workload of childcare and domestic labor.

But the search for biologically-based sex differences becomes ideologically suspect and even terrifying to feminist-oriented women. Indeed, if women’s social roles and gender inequality are dictated by nature and considered to be irresistible and hard-to-change, feminism of equality and social constructionism would become impossible. Thus “the only acceptable account” of the distinction between men and women for some feminists is the one that acknowledges the culturally-mediated and

26 “新中国建立后，以立法保障了妇女就业生育等基本权利。…… 妇女的地位突然变得‘至高无上’。…… 到 20 世纪 70 年代，所谓的男女平等被完全政治化了。中国当代女性在表面上是这种‘国策’的受益者，但在心理上却是非性化的受害者。‘平等’到取消差异，走向另一个极端。…… 在很长很长一段时间里，我们希望自己成为像男人一样强悍有力的人；我们把同工同酬当成男女平等的理想标志；我们甚至以自己的女性特征为耻、以冷酷粗暴为荣。…… 大批女钻井队员、女消防队员、女矿工应运而生。出现在文学作品中的她们，都是些浓眉大眼、气势汹汹，只谈革命不谈爱情，不爱红妆爱武装的男性化的女人。这样的形象被当成妇女解放的标志，实际上却是一次更大的倒退。这是对于人性的严重歪曲。…… 中国几乎经历了一个没有女人的时代。教训沉重而惨痛。”

plastic nature of sex differences. As Campbell (2002: 1) writes:

Women's studies became steeped in a politically-driven rejection of essentialism (the idea that the sexes differ at a fundamental psychological level) and committed on the one hand to social constructionism (there is no objective truth "out there," only negotiable subjective representations) and on the other to extreme environmentalism (all sex differences result from factors external to the person). Neither road has taken us very far towards an accurate understanding of why men and women differ.

Biophobia and the remarkable appeal of the constructionist strand have prevented researchers from recognizing the innate human dispositions underlying individual variations and differentiating effects of environments, and segregated humanities and social sciences from natural sciences since the 1970s (Richards 2000: 67; Bleie 2003: 153).

2.3 A feminism of difference

During the 1980s, feminism based on the acknowledgement of women's specificities emerged (Grosz 1995: 53).²⁷ Evolutionary feminism can be regarded as a feminism of difference, revealing the biological infrastructure of sex differences and seeking to unravel not only why and how these differences exist, but what exactly they are. It suggests that sex differences – which are "at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction" (Kristeva 1981: 21) – may have an evolved basis rather than being caused purely by culturally specific conditions (Campbell 2002; Hopcroft 2002; Vandermassen 2005).

The theory of sexual selection initially proposed by Darwin (1871)²⁸ and

27 Samira Kawash (2011: 972) argues that "[b]y the late 1990s, however, 'difference feminism' had been eclipsed and was no long a serious topic of discussion" in feminist studies due to postmodernist and poststructuralist accounts of gender and power.

28 Sex differences derive from sexual rather than natural selection, and manifest only in domains in which men

further developed by Trivers (1972)²⁹ has been applied most extensively to account for sex differences in evolutionary arguments. In 1948, English geneticist Angus Bateman reported a stronger relationship between mating and reproductive success in male fruit flies compared with females, and suggested that in most species variability in reproductive success, or reproductive variance, is greater in males than in females. Bateman's principle anticipated and is consistent with Robert Trivers's theory of parental investment – in most species females are a limiting factor over which males will compete. The idea behind the Bateman-Trivers theory is that females invest more energy and resources into gametes and offspring than males, so they are typically choosier in the mating market than males. This conventional view of promiscuous, indiscriminating males and coy, choosy females has been applied to human species as well. Having different reproductive interests and strategies, women and men have evolved not only the obvious physiological (anatomical and morphological) sexual dimorphism, but psychological and behavioral asymmetries (Trivers 1972; Pratto 1996; Vandermassen 2005). Starting from the different gamete sizes (the sizes and consequently energetic costs of sperm versus egg cells) and internal fertilization, and extending through gestation, lactation, and nurturing, women devote more of their total reproductive efforts to parental efforts. On the other hand, the investment minimum is markedly lower for fathers than for mothers. This principle of anisogamy, on which Trivers's parental investment theory is based, accounts for a series of physical and behavioral sex asymmetries (Trivers 1972; Vandermassen 2004: 18; Campbell 2006; for a review of current approaches and criticisms of Trivers, see Kokko and Jennions 2008, Brown, Laland, and Mulder 2009; also Hrdy 1986, Zuk 2002, and Gowaty 2003, an issue I will address later in 2.5).

and women faced sex-specific reproductive problems, not in domains in which men and women “were confronted the same problems of survival, such as finding food, keeping warm, and avoiding predators” (Vandermassen 2005: 159).

²⁹ Trivers's development of sexual selection in parental investment theory has been employed by many evolutionary scientists. The central argument is that the sex that invests more in the offspring will be the choosier one when selecting mates.

According to Trivers, because of the different amount of parental investment, women become the limited resource for reproduction and thus become the choosier sex in humans. Men compete more intensely for sexual access to women than the other way around. They have been under selection pressure to achieve and maintain social dominance over other people, especially other men, and to attract and keep desirable mates. The achievement of these goals “was almost certainly facilitated by coalition-based male-male competition” (Geary 1998: 302). By contrast, women have been more motivated to fine-tune the dynamics of many one-on-one social relationships with other women, their mates, and their children to create a social support network within which they raised their children. Furthermore, the rise of patrilocal residence in the course of history “means that females transfer from their home group and lose the advantages of living with genetic relatives” (Campbell 2002: 116). Thus while men could more easily form alliance by remaining among their patrilineal kin to be able to constrain women’s reproductive choices and coerce men in other groups, it was all the more crucial for women to establish friendly relationships (Smuts 1995; Hrdy 1999a: xxiv-xxvi; Hrdy 1999b: 251-4; Vandermassen 2005: 169, 185-6). Another point worthy of being mentioned is that, due to concealed ovulation and internal fertilization, men have developed a proclivity to the exertion of sexual control over women to ensure the certainty of their paternity (Trivers 1972; Pratto 1996; Vandermassen 2004, 2005).

As a result, selection favored male physical traits such as enlarged body size and weaponry, and male psychological dispositions towards competition, risk taking, object- and achievement-orientation, and independence, while women typically score higher on qualities such as tender-mindedness, nurturance, compassion, and communality to accommodate child-rearing activities. A distinction between masculinity/agency and femininity/communion has been found to be largely invariant over age, educational level, and nationality (Pratto 1996; Geary 1998: 186; Eagly and Wood 1999: 413; Campbell 1999: 208; 2002: 104, 137).

2.4 Zhang's genetic-oriented views

The progress in feminisms of equity and difference resembles the evolution of the mindset of contemporary Chinese women writers, with Zhang Kangkang as a good representative. Zhang's attention to sex differences also took a winding path, but eventually led to her cognition of women's specificities. She eulogizes "iron girls"³⁰ in her earlier work. But after Mao's death, she was among the first writers to call for liberation from dogmatic thinking and awoke from the myth of gender equality in the lunatic "sexless" decade. Yet at the beginning of the 1980s, she still felt awkward with her identity as a *woman* writer, and identifies more with the dominant statist ideology than with the newly introduced Western feminist ideas. Chinese feminist researchers point out that her gender consciousness has been weakly or confusingly expressed in her works (Zhang 2002c: 63).

Zhang (2002b: 94) argues, "Most of our time was spent under conditions of no human dignity. It is impossible to talk about women's dignity when human beings were bereft of dignity, let alone feminism;" "Human beings are the first, and gender the second;" "My desire to defy the old regime is far stronger than my defiance of men."³¹ Thus she (2002c: 56) often claims that she is not writing about women or women's issues, neither about men, but about humans or "MAN," and insists that she could adopt or has adopted a gender-neutral standpoint: "I'm first a writer; then I'm a woman writer."³² These formulations put issues of gender equality under

30 "铁姑娘。"

31 "我们大部分时间是在人的尊严都没有的情况下生长的, 当人的尊严都没有的时候是谈不上女性尊严的, 何谈女性主义?" "人是第一的, 性别是第二的;" "我对旧体制的反抗欲望要远远大于我对于男性的反抗。"

32 "大写的人;" "我首先是一个作家, 然后我才是一个女作家。"

Zhang (2002h: 82) argues, "Because what I have written is about 'human beings,' about the survival and spiritual crisis that men and women in this world commonly confront, ... about the predicament that men and women commonly face, such as human rights, humanism, equality, and freedom. That men and women are both 'human beings' is a basic commonness. And it is an indisputable fact that theoretically, there is never 'male humanism' or 'female humanism.' In my concern about 'human beings' and 'human nature,' women are not the

the agenda of striving for human rights, and actually continue the tradition of subordinating women's fate to that of the nation, which began at the start of the 20th century in China. Liberating women from oppression has been regarded as an integral part of liberating the nation from its humiliating weakness, and the implementation of gender equality efforts would be deferred whenever raising the status of women was perceived to threaten the status of the nation or the ruling party's interests (Hershatter 2004: 1028-9).

When Grosz (1995: 51-2) points out one disadvantage of egalitarian feminism, she writes, "The struggles of women against patriarchy are too easily identified with a movement or reaction against a general 'dehumanization'," and "[s]truggles for equality between the sexes are easily reduced to struggles around a more generalized and neutralized social justice. In its beginning, the women's movements ... aspired to a universalized humanism, and an identification with the values, norms, goals, and methods devised and validated by men."³³ In this sense, Zhang

second sex, but juxtaposed with men as one of the subitems under the mother-item 'human beings'." ("因为我写的是'人'的问题, 是这个世界上男人和女人所面临的共同的生存和精神的危机..... 是男人和女人共同面对的困境, 比如人权、人道、平等和自由等等。无论男人还是女人都是'人', 这是一个共同的基本点。在理论上从来没有产生过'男性人道主义'和'女性人道主义', 更是一个不争的事实。在我所关注的'人'和'人类'精神中, 女人并不是第二性, 而是'人'的母项之下, 与男人并列的两个子项之一。")

But as Li Xiaojiang (Zhang 2002c: 53, 71) points out, the way Zhang peels off women and women's issues from human beings is the foundation of the desexualization of the Cultural Revolution. Li further asserts that the stance of gender neutrality that Zhang thinks she can adopt or has adopted is never existent, and that it is different when men and women both claim that they adopt a neutral standpoint: While men's stance is a deviation from the male-centered position, women's can be an acquiescence to androcentrism.

33 Suvi Ronkainen (2001) also reveals the similar problem with gender-neutrality institutionalized in the Finnish welfare state practices and advanced by Finnish feminism as egalitarian politics. Ronkainen calls it "the rhetoric of normative individualism," which treats individuals without particularities, differences, bodies, gender, and locality. At the same time, "a super-ideology of equality" was promoted with the belief that women's position can be solved within wider social and political reforms. Equality was extended to include the equality of humankind as a whole, between classes and races, as well as between men and women. Sex differences consequently became hidden, silenced, and denied, as sexual neutrality was made the explicit ideal. This can be seductive and empowering for individual women because it opened possibilities and agency for them, but femininity, gendered embodiment and experiences (especially gendered experiences of victimization) became marginalized, privatized, rejected, unspeakable, and antithetical to the subjecthood represented by the abstract, gender-neutral normative individualism.

has gone in the same direction as egalitarian feminism did, when she places the struggle for human dignity against the old regime above the fulfillment of women's dignity.

But Zhang's viewpoint has, in any case, altered to a great extent. She (2002f: 39) straightforwardly states, "We should come back to women ourselves, we should have womanhood, and we should have female consciousness,"³⁴ and writes:

The abolition of sex differences resulting from "gender sameness" [(during the Cultural Revolution)] led us to recover women's specificities or "gender differentiation." ... In these years, old, middle-aged, and young Chinese women were awakened, only to be enlightened that they didn't know at all what women are and how to be a woman. ... Women have repeated the slogan of "gender equality" for decades. Impassioned, vehement, and justified as they are, they denuded their nature in those inane and inordinate dreams and in a hypercorrect way. They were willing to have their softness, beauty, and freedom injured and forfeited by a lie concocted by men and women together. ... Snuffing out women's naturally-endowed beauty and tender disposition was the same as ending our lives. ... And women became a mark indistinctive from men; women's misery worsened. ... Only since the 1979 reform policy, did we begin to set women's issues right. ... Go back to "women." To be a genuine woman, a good woman, an integrated woman, and a happy woman is the aim of awakened women of today. Thus began the arousal of dressing, bodily ornaments, emotions, occupation-selection, visages, wallets, cosmetics, and sex ... Since the 1990s, women's writing has exerted itself to describe and manifest those "different" life genes of men and women. (Zhang 1996d: 195; 1995b: 348; 2002h: 83-4; 2007i: 252, last ellipsis in original, sentences and paragraphs reordered)³⁵

34 "我们要回到女人自身，我们要有女人味，我们要有女性意识。"

35 "“一样”所造成的取消男女差异的后果，导致我们又想找回‘男女不一样’的女性特质。……这些年来，觉醒了的老中青三代中国女人们，大彻大悟地发现自己原来根本不懂得女人是什么。甚至可以说根本不知道应该怎样做女人，……女人们已经重复了几十年的‘男女平

It is evident that female nature in Zhang's view features feminine beauty and tenderness. Darwin (1998 [1871]: 583-4) states this idea as well: "Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness." But by redressing Darwin's Victorian-era-restricted androcentric biases, evolutionary feminists point out that females can be as competitive, aggressive, violent, and self-centered as males are (in Chapter 5, I will address the issue of women's aggressiveness and violence further).

The point where Zhang converges with evolutionary feminism is that she believes that sex differences are innate and genetically transmitted. She (2002h: 80) says, "In my view, gender is undoubtedly inborn and a matter of fact. The ability and manner of women to experience the world are determined and transmitted by genes. They are transcendental, and not acquired or imported by rationality."³⁶ In this way, she explains, though very briefly and not systematically, why men and women differ in a similar way as evolutionary theory does by invoking distal causes in primeval time: Sex-specific evolved dispositions have been built into the human species through genetically mediated adaptation over human evolutionary history.

In a conversation with Li Xiaojiang, a pioneer feminist researcher in China, Zhang (2002c: 59-60) argues: "I feel that I have always identified with 'female consciousness' instinctively. It is inborn and intact, flowing in my blood and becoming part of the concept of 'human being.' ... 'Gender equality' is my standpoint, and 'gender differentiation' my mental

等', 可谓慷慨激昂又正词严, 却又恰恰在那些空洞而紊乱的梦想中, 矫枉过正地剥蚀了自己的天性; 用男人和女人共同编织的谎言, 心甘情愿地损伤了、丧失了女人的温柔美丽和自由。..... 如果扼杀大自然赋予我们的女性美和女人的柔韧温婉的天性, 无异于扼杀我们的生命。..... 女人成为一个与男人无差别的符号, 女人的不幸愈加深重。..... 到了一九七九年改革开放以来, 女性问题才开始'拨乱反正'。..... 回到'女人'去。做一个真的女人好的女人完整的女人幸福的女人, 是今日中国女人幡然醒悟的奋斗目标。服饰的觉醒情感的觉醒择业的觉醒面容的觉醒还有钱包化妆品和性..... 20 世纪 90 年代以后的女性文本, 开始着力去描述和表现男人和女人'不一样'的那些生命基因。"

36 "在我看来, 性别是一种勿容置疑的先天存在和事实, 女性感知世界的能力和方式由遗传基因决定和传述, 它是先验的, 而不是后天以理性输入的。"

groundwork.”³⁷ Zhang (2002f: 44-5) confesses that she has been feminine since her childhood and never been an “iron girl,” the vogue in 1970s China, and writes: “I have always been docile and girlish. I like dolls ... When I was in the Great Northern Wilderness, though very laborious, I still tried my best to tidy up my plait and collar so I could be prettier. I feel lucky that much of my wonderful nature has not been destroyed by history” at a time when it was difficult even to realize a girl’s smallest wishes.³⁸ She tries to make it clear that “female consciousness” or femininity is in her nature, an element of her life, and not a weapon. Even when interrupted and dampened by a decade of defeminization, it is still an undercurrent and effuses whenever possible. Thus she (2002c: 63) states that it is “indeed a natural process,” a voice that spontaneously emerges from her heart and life, not awakened or inspired by “the clock of feminist criticisms,” that she joined other women writers in describing the awakening of female consciousness at the beginning of the 1980s.³⁹

Zhang first acknowledges the inborn physical differences between men and women. More than once, she (2002b: 85, 102) writes: “It is the inherent elements that determine men’s and women’s material constitution;” “In the whole ecosystem, women are relatively weaker. ... A woman is not strong enough in physique. ... She has many troubles, needs to suckle and take care of children, and so on. These certainly detract from her efforts and energy. ... But men don’t have these problems. This is determined by nature.”⁴⁰ She states that it is almost impossible to deny men’s greater size and strength and women’s childbearing and lactation. Li Xiaojiang also says in the conversation that childbearing, first of all, exposes the fact that “gender sameness” during the Cultural Revolution is

37 “我觉得自己对于‘女性意识’一直有着本能的认可，是与生俱来，没有受到破坏的东西，她流淌在我的血液中，成为‘人’的一个组成部分。……‘男女都一样’是我的基本立场，而‘男女不一样’是我的心理基础。”

38 “我一直是一个很乖的女孩子，有女孩子味，喜欢洋娃娃……在北大荒的时候，尽管很艰苦，我还是会尽量地把辫子梳得好一点，然后就把领子弄一弄，尽量使自己有一点美感。……历史……还没有把我很多很好的天性给消灭掉，我觉得已经很庆幸了。”

39 “确实是一个自然的过程；”“女性批评的闹钟。”

40 “男人和女人物质构造就不同，这是先天因素决定的；”“女人在整个生态系统中，是属于比较弱弱的……她的体能不能够强大……她有许多麻烦，她需要哺乳，需要照顾孩子等等，自然就要分散很多精力……男人就没有这些问题，这是先天所决定的。”

“a huge trap” (Zhang 2002c: 59).⁴¹

Sex differences not only manifest physiologically, Zhang (2002b: 102) indicates, but also in the manner of men’s and women’s thinking and behaviors. Similar to the statement by evolutionary feminism that “[t]here is every reason to think that they [(men and women)] should differ in nurturance, hostility and assertiveness, and they do (Feingold 1994)” (Campbell 2002: 14), Zhang (2002b: 86; 2002b: 84; 2007b: 70)) writes that “comparatively, men care about the outer world, and women about their hearts; they are really distinct,” and that men’s propensity to bellicosity, warfare, and contending for power and profit contrasts with “women’s immanent zeal for consolation and compassion” and a euphemistic way of acting.⁴² She (2002b: 103) discloses in an interview that her husband is feverish about military TV programs, and that her eight-year-old nephew constantly plays with guns and is charmed by movies about warfare, even though he does not really understand them. But “as a woman, generally I am barely interested in war” (Zhang 1994: 71).⁴³ In a couple of essays, she talks invigoratingly about fashion, skin care, and housekeeping, and admits that she keeps all these interests herself. She pays great attention to and ungrudgingly invests in her diet, dressing, and cosmetics, visits beauty parlors regularly, and cleans up and decorates her home with zest. She even feels abashed at her “neuter” voice and thinks that women’s voices should be more tender and delicate, with “a permanent female flavor” (Zhang 1996p : 237).⁴⁴

Zhang (2007f: 16) furthermore shows that “the specific identity of ‘housewife’ is still not completely abolished by the radical women’s revolution in the end,”⁴⁵ and that the Chinese popular magazine, *Good Housewives*,⁴⁶ still occupies a firm footing in the publishing market,

41 “很大的骗局。”

42 “男人比较关心外部世界，女人更关心自己的内心，确实是有区别的。”“女孩儿天生是热衷于安慰别人的。”

43 “作为女人，一般来说我极少对战争发生兴趣。”

44 “中性人的；”“永恒的女性气息。”

45 “经过将近一个世纪的女性解放运动……‘主妇’这一种特定的身份，最终仍然没有被激进的女性革命从此彻底废除。”

46 《好主妇》。

despite “almost one century’s women’s emancipation movements” and women’s achievements in academics, business, and politics recently. Although various strands of feminism have worked energetically to prove that women and men are essentially equivalent in their personalities, behavioral tendencies, and capacities, and “have long tried to deny or minimize these differences” (Vandermassen 2005: 156-8), all labor markets are still highly segregated on gender lines. And within the household, the bulk of domestic tasks and childcare continue to be the purview of women, as Zhang indicates. When some urban women are freed from the boring and time-consuming housework and delegate it to full-time housemaids or hourly workers, it is still “100%” women who take all these jobs (Zhang 1997b: 213; 2006b: 10). Zhang (1997b: 237; 1997c: 244) laments that, only at the expense of other laboring women’s sacrifice, have a group of intellectual women’s emancipation and gender equality yielded initial results, and that women seem to be destined to housemaids.

In the novel, *Women on the Edge*, through the male protagonist’s mouth, Zhang (2006b: 187-8, 271) writes that men and women are interested in different issues – women in collecting resources and in “dead materials,” and men in creating resources and in “living materials” such as women; “men regard the nation and society as their family, and women take the family as the whole world.”⁴⁷ Similarly, evolutionary feminists argue that men are generally more eager and opportunistic in pursuing social status and political power, and more ready than women to sacrifice their family and social relationships to get to the top. In contrast, women are more pacifistic and concerned about attenuating social hierarchies and inequalities, and value family and interpersonal relationships more than men do (Pratto 1996: 214; Geary 1998: 326; Vandermassen 2005: 191, 196).

Zhang further (1996d: 195; 2007i: 272; 2006b: 198) writes that women “don’t have to do the same things as men do, but do the befitting work with the same confidence and competence;” “Women should have, or

47 “死的東西：” “活的東西：” “男人把國當成家，而女人把家當成國。”

originally had, a territory of their own, for example, emotions, hearts, arts, and families. ... Congenitally, women don't like those places [(traditional male-dominated areas, such as politics, high-tech, and wars)]. It is the natural materiality of human nature that makes this pattern;" "The differences between men's and women's interests may be the genetic code that has continued for thousands of years."⁴⁸ She implies that sex segregation in occupation is so obstinately distinct that there may be an innate basis underlying the (annoyingly) persistent gender division of labor, besides the effects of gender socialization and job discrimination.

Zhang's writings indicate that if humans are blank slates and have no inherent needs, if people are malleable and plastic beings with no essential psychological or behavioral make-up, any cultural arrangement and ideological imposition is possible, and the Cultural Revolution would have succeeded in modeling gender identity and blurring sex differences with ease and without bringing any harm or tragedy (Fruehwald 2011; Vandermassen 2005). Both men and women contain "deeply ingrained, genetically induced, residues of our evolutionary past, which are resistant to removal by upbringing," socializing, and ideological brainwashing (Richards 2000: 101).

2.5 Criticisms of and counterarguments by Zhang and evolutionary feminism

Many voices would criticize Zhang's insistence on innate sex differences. For example, Harriet Evans (1995: 359, 360) would argue that it reflects a clear continuity of the official Chinese discourse in the 1950s on naturalized gender hierarchy and biologically determined, appropriate gender attributes and conduct. In Evans's view, they were "legitimized by the so-called scientific authority" to regulate sexual practice and to channel individual energies into working for the collective project of

48 "并不一定要和男子做同样的事情，而是要以与男子同样的自信和才能，去做适合她们做的事情;" "女人应该有，或者原本就有属于自己的一片领地。例如情感、心灵、艺术，还有家庭。…… 女人天生不喜欢那些地方[(那些男人占据统治地位的世袭领地，比如政坛、高科技，还有战争什么的)]，这是人性的自然物质属性使然;" "男人和女人的兴趣差异，大概是一种延续几千年的遗传密码吧。"

national reconstruction. Gail Hershatter (2004: 1016) would state that Zhang's view "underscores the ongoing romance with science" not disrupted by postmodernism. Susan Greenhalgh (2001: 876) would certainly assert that Zhang's version of Chinese feminism of difference reconstructs "a biologically based, essentialistic gender binary that sees women as inherently (physiologically and psychologically) different from men ... sees women as tethered to their reproductive physiologies and destined to give birth ... [and thus] discourage[s] the development of critical perspectives on reproduction" and sexuality.

Within Chinese academia, Zhang's biologically oriented ideas about sex differences encounter dismissal, disregard, and doubts from feminist researchers. At the beginning of the 1980s when Chinese academia was zealous about the introduction and implantation of feminist ideas about gender role-playing, Zhang's belief in the view that "women need to suckle and take care of children; they are born considerate and caring with a weak and effeminate constitution" appeared very out of place (Zhang 1996k: 215).⁴⁹ At the beginning of the 1990s, when Chinese academia still throbbed with excitement from the aftereffect of the arrival of Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Zhang's voices sounded rather antithetical. Her unpopularity among Chinese feminist researchers may derive from here. Feminist readings of Chinese female writers by scholars such as Qiao Yigang (2003), Xi Huiling (2003), Ren Yiming (2004), Yang Lixin (2005), and Yu Dongye (2006), either completely dismiss her, or only very briefly mention her as an important member, or set her as a negative example. In Dai Jinghua's prestigious book (2002), Zhang occupies one whole chapter, but does not enjoy a favorable evaluation, and once even encounters evident misreading.⁵⁰

49 "女人需要哺乳和照料子女，体质柔弱天性温存。"

50 Dai (2007 [2002]: 138) misreads Zhang's novel *Aurora Borealis* (1981), stating that one major character, Fu Yunxiang, counts the number of wonton in his bowl. Actually it is one minor character that does it (Zhang 1996cc: 171-2).

On the other hand, Zhang also protests that feminist researchers frame her works. She is never willing to be called a feminist writer. In her novel, *Women on the Edge*, she directly defies constructionist feminist ideas:

You are self-deceiving. Why don't women have the bravery to ask themselves? Women are not born but nurtured. How on earth has that "nurture" formed then?

Well, well, well. Are we having a seminar? Isn't it boring? (Zhang 2006b: 72-3)⁵¹

Zhang swiftly and playfully dismisses the nature/nurture question. Either she thinks that the quarrel over sex differences itself is less important than identifying with the Confucian idea of "being different yet in harmony" on the issue of sex differences (Zhang 2006b: 198, 368),⁵² or she thinks that the answer is too obvious, as she (2006b: 360) writes later in the novel: "Feminism is a paradox. At the same time when it is used by women as a weapon for self-defense or attack, it can become a tool of women's chronic suicide."⁵³ Elsewhere, she (2007e: 1) brings a similar charge: "With the weapon of feminism in hand, women make themselves more agonized and depressed. This is strange."⁵⁴

Similarly, in the West, feminists involved in the project of distinguishing women's (innate) sex differences from men's have also been subjected to wide-ranging criticisms. First of all, their arguments have been discounted as promoting essentialist, biological reductionist, or genetic determinist assessments of "female nature," "reminiscent of the position of defenders of patriarchy," and accused of "sleeping with the enemy" (Grosz 1995: 53). One example is actually from a Taiwanese scholar, Li Shujing. She (2008: 88-9) writes, "Darwinian evolutionism is used to account for sex

51 "你那是自欺欺人。女人为什么没有勇气问自己? 女人不是天生的而是后天造成的, 请问那个'后天'又究竟是怎么形成的? 得得得, 开研讨会那? 烦不烦啊?"

52 "和而不同。"

53 "女性主义是一个悖论, 它在用作女人自我防卫或进攻武器的同时, 也可以成为一件女性慢性自杀的工具。"

54 "女性有了主义作为武器, 反而将自己弄得更为烦恼苦闷, 这也是奇怪的事情。"

differences between men and women as innate and difficult to change, because these differences are derived from our genes, inherited since high antiquity. This intensifies and consolidates sex differences, and becomes a new excuse for gender discrimination as a kind of soft essentialism.”⁵⁵ Her remarks imply that evolutionary thinking equates genetically transmitted predispositions with inevitable and immutable categories of existence, and presumes biological fatalism: Women’s fate will be sealed at birth and cannot escape from traditional domesticity and femininity due to their evolved, “identity-determining” essence (Gelman and Hirschfeld 1999: 404).

This accusation is true of earlier literature of evolutionary biology and sociobiology, and of Social Darwinism, which stated that females were less evolved and never inherently equal to males, and that subordination of women was not only natural but desirable (Hrdy 1999a: 12; 1999b: 13-4). But *firstly*, with feminisms of difference including evolutionary feminism, as Grosz (1995: 53-4) argues, it is vital to ask how these differences are conceived and, perhaps more importantly, who defines these differences and for whom. For patriarchs, earlier evolutionists, and Social Darwinists, sex differences are modeled on “binary or oppositional structures,” while the politics of feminisms of difference implies the right to define oneself and others according to one’s own interests and perspectives, and avoids taking the male mind and behaviors as superior or the norm.

Secondly, the terms “essentialism,” “biologism,” “naturalism,” and “universalism,” which have been used to level against evolutionary feminism, all refer to the existence of fixed and ahistorical attributes and indicate limits of variations and possibilities of change (Grosz 1995: 47-9). This is utterly incompatible with evolutionary reasoning, which posits continual and endless changes over time.

Thirdly, evolutionary theory proposes that human behaviors, as a result of a complex interaction between inherited dispositions, environmental cues,

55 “以达尔文主义进化论来说明男性跟女性之间的差异是天生且难以改变的，因为这差异源自于我们远古时代就继承而来的基因……强化巩固了性别差异，形成一种软性本质主义 (soft essentialism)，此成为性别歧视的新理由。”

and cultural factors, require environmental input. Thus it offers a possible way of leaving behind the nature-nurture, or of reconceptualizing the biology-socialization axis, a controversy that “has never ended, and everybody still keeps his/her own words” (Li 2008: 87).⁵⁶ The forces of nature and nurture are intricately intertwined, “mutually influential on each other and jointly influential on the nature of the gender gap” (Pratto 1996: 182).⁵⁷ It is, first of all, within social and ecological contexts that innate propensities are expressed, and the impact of socially or culturally transmitted memes can reinforce, amplify or attenuate the innate behavioral predispositions of the sexes. Evolutionary theory recognizes that the “foci of environmental theories – reinforcement, imitation, cognitive schema, and conformity – all modulate our actions” and are all important. Actually, the “evolution, transmission, and selection of socially acquired knowledge (in the form of representations, and memes, or semantic memory modes) has been at the heart of a number of evolutionary formulations” (Campbell 1999: 211; 2002: 7; 2006: 73). As Jerome Barkow (2006: 4) states, “Social-cultural constructionism is ... not only compatible with an evolutionary approach but demanded by it.”

Fourthly, evolutionary reasoning does not emphasize human universals with little scope given for individual variation, phenotypic flexibility, and behavioral plasticity. On the contrary, geneticists attach greater attention to polyphenism (the phenomenon of “environmentally cued alternative phenotypes within the same population”) as a reminder of how much context matters (Hrdy 1999b: 72). Furthermore, human nature in an evolutionary sense refers to a cluster of traits rather than a universal essence. The mixture of components of any individual’s psychology and behavior will be unique as the cluster of the underlying evolved

56 “从来没有止息，大家依然在各说各话。”

57 Contrary to Eagly and Wood’s (1999: 411) statement that “the products of evolution must be distinguished from the products of cultural change,” the environmental and genetic or physiological influences cannot be meaningfully separated, or in other words, “endogenous and exogenous factors cannot necessarily be distinguished from one another” (Barkow 2006: 4). Franklin et al. (2000: 9) state that nature and culture are increasingly isomorphic and acquiring each other’s powers, while their distinctiveness also continues to remain crucial, and that it is “in these processes of overlap and opposition, of borrowing from each other yet remaining distinct” that a set of generative effects can be seen.

mechanisms permits great flexibility and differences (Barkow 2006: 28).

In sum, an evolutionary perspective does not presume inherent rigidity or genetic predeterminism. This unnecessary worry and misconception implicates another anxiety about evolutionary theory – the naturalistic fallacy, an assumption that conflates what is natural and what is morally desirable or ethically justified (Hrdy 1999b: 494; Campbell 2002: 17-20; Zuk 2002: 14-5; Vandermassen 2005: 101), as I analyzed in the introduction. In her attack on adaptationist explanations of sex differences, Anne Innis Dagg (1999) asserts that sexual selection hypothesis resonates with Western culture, in which many people accept male dominance and aggression and condone in part the control of female sexuality by men. In saying so, she commits naturalistic fallacies and transgresses from “is” to “ought,” “from facts to values, from nature to ethics and politics” (Vandermassen 2005: 72). Evolutionary knowledge about human nature is descriptive and not prescriptive, carrying no normative values. Evolution is in itself witless and utterly impartial, and has no inherent moral agenda. Sex differences are recognized within the evolutionary framework “without attaching value to them, and without exaggerating their importance in our daily lives” (Zuk 2002: 198).

The arguments of non-linear biology also oppugn the validity of evolutionary thinking. Myra Hird (2002: 94, 100; 2004: 229) argues that “bacteria, microbes, molecules and inorganic life which exist beneath the surface of our skin” are seldom two-sexed and “take little account of ‘sexual’ differences,” but constantly engage in (non-sexual) reproduction and regeneration. In fact, Hird continues, most of the organisms in four out of the five kingdoms of living beings (bacteria, protists, fungi, plants, and animals, instead of the traditional two-kingdom classification) do not require sex for reproduction. Weinstein (2010: 166, 183) indicates that there is an unbridgeable gap in Elizabeth Grosz, as Grosz reads Darwinian evolution as forever fluid, ongoing, self-overcoming, and unpredictable, but at the same time Grosz staunchly preserves a static, dualistic “fundamental ontology of sexual difference.” Weinstein writes that “if evolution (conceptual or biological) is directed toward unpredictable

futures and is self-overcoming, as Grosz claims, she must also be aware of the fact that creating this tension itself will, in propelling forward, lead toward theoretical extinction of concepts like sexual difference.” Through the use of “non-linear biology,” Hird and Weinstein question the notion of sexual difference and sing a requiem to it.

Certainly, the perspective of a multi-linear biology enriches evolutionary theory and presents evolution as plural parallel systems, rather than as a single, upward-going, bifurcate, tree-like genealogical model. Asexual, parthenogenetic, and bacterial sexes reveal that “there is a nonnegotiable, infinite complexity and multiplicity” of different ways of reproducing in nature (Weinstein 2010: 166). The birth of the cloned Dolly the sheep further proves the ability to switch back and forth between bisexual and asexual forms of reproduction, and challenges the unilinear, bilateral descent (Franklin 2007: 25). The transgenic breed has been celebrated as the emergence of organisms no longer marked by genealogical continuity or lineage, but by being polylineal, composed of multispecies parentage and reconstituting reproduction as human-made production (Haraway 1997; Franklin 2000: 88). It challenges Darwinian ideas of the origin of species and genealogical descent. But the basic elements or units of life still remain, that is, genes, DNA, and body cells, and the basic image of evolutionary tree of life with branches and forks can still be drawn with the alternation of life and death, and of adult bodies and new life forms. The Dolly or oncomouse technique only proves evolutionary random and ceaseless changes with unlimited possibilities when the pattern of plasticity and variation is favored.

Furthermore, both Hird and Weinstein downplay the significance and relevance of reproductive activities and sex differences for today’s humans, especially for women. *Firstly*, Hird (2002: 94) writes that “human bodies are constantly engaged in reproduction and only sometimes (and for a short time) engaged in specifically ‘sexual’ reproduction.” It is true that, compared to the continuous reproduction and regeneration of the numerous bacteria on and under our skin, specific sexual reproduction consumes a shorter time. But an enumeration of time

allocation of mothering clarifies that a successful reproduction of only one child can take a woman at least months to devote herself to pregnancy, months or years to lactation, and years or decades to care and provision. Within the limited life span of a woman, these are not what a phrase like “a short time” can contain and describe. Evolutionary theory also deems that “human females spend a relatively high proportion of their lives in a nonreproductive state” (Sear and Mace 2008: 1). But even during both pre- and post-reproductive periods, women can be involved in very costly reproductive activities and concerns, such as alloparenting⁵⁸ and preventing male infanticide (Hrdy 1999b).

Secondly, sex differences are still a relevant factor for the moment, and difficult to bypass or eliminate, as although theoretically “sexual difference” may be extinct, practically the differences between the sexes that formed and evolved in the past may still linger in the present, as our appetite for sweets does. They do not “cease,” and their existence does not “become real only in the virtuality of the past” as Weinstein (2010: 183) states, a point I will come back to and elaborate on later.

In addition, many statements of multi-linear or non-linear, or “non-Darwinian” biology (Hird 2002) are similar to and in clear resonance with evolutionary feminism (see, for example, Hrdy 1999a, 1999b, Campbell 2002, and Zuk 2002; but Hrdy, Campbell, and Zuk are explicitly Darwinian):

- (1) Challenging the dichotomy of active, competitive male and passive, “coy,” nurturing female;
- (2) Thinking beyond the traditional culture/nature divide;
- (3) Repudiating the notion that the constitution of matter or biological mechanisms is “inert, unchangeable or resistant to socio-historical changes” (Hird 2004: 224), and refuting the idea of the immutability of sexes and sex differences;
- (4) Arguing for various connections between sex and reproduction;

⁵⁸ Alloparenting, in biology and sociology, refers to a system of parenting where individuals other than the actual parents act in a parental role.

- (5) Being skeptical of dogmatic assertions about species- or sex-typical universals, and arguing for the variation and flexibility of phenotypic displays;
- (6) Indicating nature's being witless and anti-teleological, and the absence of telos in evolution, which is mindless, unpredictable, and "not headed towards perfection" (Hird 2004: 226);
- (7) Stating that the "concern with matter in its own right is necessarily apolitical" and morally indifferent (Hird 2004: 225);
- (8) Deconstructing a system of hierarchical relationships between different species;
- (9) Arguing that the existence of a trait does not mean that it was an adaptation in the interests of survival or reproduction, but can also be neutral or even maladaptive (Barkow 2006: 27); and
- (10) Advocating feminist engagement with natural sciences, and pointing out that the reason why many feminists "approach science studies both reluctantly and negatively" is that the primary means through which the study of matter or body has been accessed is considered to be "principally a tool of patriarchy" (Hird 2002: 95)

The feminist critique is often against empirical science per se, and/or ignorant of what is going on and developing in evolutionary biology. More sophisticated criticisms come from within the community of evolutionary biologists. For example, the principle of anisogamy has elicited dissenting commentaries within evolutionary biology. Because of females' comparatively low variance in fertility, the emphasis within evolutionary theory has been on competitive males and nurturing females. But this juxtaposition often stands in the way of the recognition of women's being competitive, dominance-oriented, violent, sexually proprietary, and often non-nurturing as well.⁵⁹ Sarah Hrdy (1986) disagrees that the theory of anisogamy is "sufficient to explain the differing reproductive strategies of male and female" (Arnhart 1993: 309). Marlene Zuk (2002: 198) argues

⁵⁹ Zhang is rather ambivalent towards this less benevolent side of women's nature – highly competitive, strenuously striving for social position, and often less-than-committed to their children. She clearly sees it and describes it in detail, but disapproves of it and tries to deny it by invoking an idealized womanhood (see chapters 3 and 5).

against a strong role of evolutionary biology in explaining sex differences in empathy, dominance-oriented behaviors, and verbal, spatial, and mathematic ability and performance. She states that these sex differences are rather of degree, not of kind, or even non-existent. Patricia Gowaty (2003: 903, 906) indicates that “naturalistic observations [are] inconsistent with parental investment theory,” which contains “intuitively obvious” descriptions of passive, coy, choosy, discriminating females in comparison to eager, competitive, indiscriminating, profligate males, and that there exist “interesting alternative hypotheses ... to explain sex roles differences.” Brown et al’s (2009) article challenges the view that evolutionary theory prescribes stereotyped sex roles in human beings, and argues that human mating strategies are unlikely to conform to a single universal pattern.

Hanna Kokko and Michael Jennions (2008: 919, 923) point out that the recurring hidden, erroneous assumption in the theory of anisogamy is that the initial asymmetry in pre-mating parental investment (egg versus sperm) is assumed to promote even greater divergence in post-mating parental investment: The sex (normally male) that provides less care must automatically evolve to provide even less, and the sex (normally female) ought to be more committed to providing care because they stand to lose a greater initial investment. But “optimal decisions should depend on future pay-offs not past costs.” Therefore “sex role divergence (a shorthand for a tendency for initial investment asymmetries to amplify in a self-reinforcing manner, until distinct sex roles are established)” should not be taken for granted.

All these voices of dissidence within the field of evolutionary biology, however, are more manifestations of the development of the discipline than the overthrow of the basic reasoning. As Hanna Kokko and Michael Jennions (2008: 937) add in their review article, “Past investment does not predict sex roles; multiple mating and sexual selection do.”

Thus despite objections and hostility, evolutionary arguments continue to be a compelling explanation for sex differences. From a fundamental,

ultimate level, evolutionary theory clarifies how, in which ways, and why the sexes differ, and offers an overarching explanatory framework for theories about the role of socializing, which is considered as a direct, proximate, and complementary cause of sex differences.

2.6 The future of sex differences: Changes and delays

The content of this sub-chapter can be summarized well by the following remarks by Roos and Rotkirch (2002): “[O]ne of the more fascinating things in evolution is the extreme timelessness of the change and its unbelievable delays. Our general habitus dates from at least 100 000 years ago, and the changes that have taken place during the past 200 years (i.e., modernisation and postmodernity) have not affected this fundamental habitus – although of course the strategies and means open for us.”

As mentioned before, evolutionary theory endeavors to prove that human behaviors are not impervious to environmental influences, but highly context-sensitive and situation-contingent. Adaptations can only develop when triggered and activated by the right environmental cues and stimuli, and changes in the environment will in the long run cause evolutionary changes (Vandermassen 2005: 98). The “current ecology of human development contrasts markedly with the environment of evolutionary adaptation (i.e., the context of early humans in which behavior evolved)” (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991: 649). In fact, the environment has changed to such a great extent that certain once-adaptive practices in the ancestral environment (e.g., our preference for fats and sweets) become non-adaptive or ill-adaptive in the modern world, as the “mismatch theory” argues (Barkow 2006: 27).

Firstly, as women have been resisting patriarchy and getting more power, there are remarkable changes in gender roles “toward greater equality and less sex segregation,” and women become “more assertive, independent, egotistical, dictatorial, rational, mathematical, and strong” (Diekmann and Eagly 2000: 1185). The conventional pattern of mate value (male

“resource value” versus female “reproductive value”) is out of date (Low 2005: 66), as women increasingly enter into traditionally male-dominated occupations, which are usually associated with various sources of power, such as status, expertise, and resources (Diekman and Eagly 2000: 1178).

Furthermore, some women have already ceased to take male success as the paradigm. The protagonist Zhuo'er and a group of her fellows in Zhang's novel, *Women on the Edge*, are not content with their economic or political self-governance. They would rather give up their occupational success in order to retain the integrity of their selves. That is, they discard what equalitarian feminism has longed and strived for, and return to women's inner desires. As Li Xiaojiang (2003: 38-9) analyzes, “The independence we once had seemed just to be ‘as successful as men.’ For the sake of ‘the same’ success, we have to follow and obey ‘the same’ values and rules of the game, and often have to give up our independent spirit and individual interests.” Thus Zhuo'ers' choice “not only breaks through the last line of defense of male-centered authority, but also transcends the basic criteria of traditional women's self-attestation.”⁶⁰

Secondly, with the modern methods of birth control and women's being even more sexually assertive and autonomous,⁶¹ sex and reproduction are not automatically linked (Vandermassen 2005: 123). About female sexuality, there is always much more than getting inseminated or being preoccupied by reproductive concerns. Zhang's novel, *Women on the Edge*, again illuminates “an attempt to separate out an unrestrained and autonomous female sexuality from women's reproductive functions” (Lloyd 1996: 91). The unfettered and self-affirming sexuality of Zhuo'er

60 “我们曾经的独立，仿佛就是为了‘和男人一样’成功——为了‘一样’的成功，必须追随和遵循‘一样’的价值观念和游戏规则，常常不得不放弃独立的精神和个人志趣。”“不仅突破了男性中心权力的最后一道防线，也超越了传统女性自我求证的基本标准。”

61 Sarah Hrdy (1999a) recounts and affirms females' strong, innate sexual drive and demolishes the myth about sexually passive, compliant, and coy female. She argues that females have evolved to be sexually assertive and adventurous to secure their reproductive advantages, as female promiscuity can manipulate information about paternity to their mates, and thus enlist resources, and protect her offspring from infanticide by strange males. Patriarchal arrangements might have mutilated this originally assertive female sexuality to make its control of women more effective (Smuts 1995). But now with women's independence and sexual autonomy, patriarchal suppression of both female reproductive and non-reproductive sexual activities weakens.

and her fellows is impressive, respectable, and convincing. They do not want to get married, and do not want to be “reproductive machines” (Zhang 2006b: 71).⁶² Sex is to serve their own mental and physical health, and not to attract or keep mates, not to cement or enhance monogamous pair-bonds, not to get impregnated, and not to enlist male help or provision for themselves or their children or serve any other reproductive purposes. In this way, they have both sexuality and fertility in their own hands. The novel offers vivid evidence that women are not doomed to having their sexualities suppressed by men.

In spite of the aforementioned socio-ecological changes, however, evolution occurs slowly; the extraordinary secular trend in evolution means that past adaptations may still linger in the present. The differences between the sexes are not extinct at the present, even if they are already non-adaptive and subject to both natural and social punishment. Weinstein (2010: 175) also suggests that sex differences can be considered “a type of habit-memory;” they are virtual, real, actualized in the present, and future-directed.

The story of the other protagonist Tao Tao in Zhang’s novel, *Women on the Edge*, can offer an example. Tao Tao is intelligent, fortitudinous, and industrious. But she still puts great emphasis on a male mate’s resource value and her own reproductive value (beauty and youth). She even deliberately lowers her own earnings in order to appear as a tractable mate, and is obsessed with her looks and elapsing beauty. Yet women’s beauty and youth are not the only “capital” appreciated by today’s men, and women’s compliance and dependence are no longer valued and favored by today’s men, at least by some men. Tao Tao’s successful status-striving and failed, deplorable love story indicate that women’s resistance of patriarchy has led to the accomplishment of gender equality, at best, only in the realm of public and civic life. In the domestic sphere, equality is still far-off, and “an equality at the level of sexual, and particularly reproductive, relations seems impossible” and untouched by egalitarian programs (Grosz 1995: 52-3). Although Tao Tao has achieved

62 “生育机器。”

occupational success and financial self-sufficiency, her body and mind are still enmeshed in the unequal input by men and women in domestic labor and reproductive efforts, and her sexuality still caters for male needs and desires instead of having her own. If Zhuo'er and her fellows have already gained sexual and reproductive autonomy, most other women including Tao Tao still live under the repression of the development and expression of their individuality and sexuality.

It is “unsettling to ponder the possibility that generations of male domination and clausturation of women have left traces in the human genome” (Hrdy 1999b: 260).⁶³ Zhang (2007n: 285-6) utters her complaints that women's dependence seems everlasting:

When history walks into today, social structures have already been forced to make adjustment and amendment, but women's psyche still has not extricated itself from ... the ancient framework [(of male provision and female adherence)]. Whereupon emerges one strange phenomenon: At the same time when women exclaim to strive for their emancipation, in their inner heart they are actually willing to be weak, dependent accessories to men ... Sometimes women ... think that dependence is in female animals' nature, so women's self-reliance is alienation.⁶⁴

63 From an evolutionary perspective, women's financial dependency and sexual modesty are actually only later “acquisitions in the hominid line (learned, evolved, or both) rather than essential features of female nature” (Hrdy 1981: xxvi). In all nonhuman primates and during most of human evolution, females have been independent and responsible for their own subsistence and done almost all the childcare with very little assistance from males, which was not even a necessity (Miller 2000: 189). Since the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry, however, women were restricted to a small plot of land used for growing or grazing, and lost the ability to forage self-sufficiently as in a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, while men increasingly accumulated and gained control over resources that women need in order to survive and reproduce (Campbell 2002: 246). Thus during the course of human evolution, male monopolization of productive resources, together with patrilocal postmarital residence, well-developed male political alliances, women's collusion in patriarchy, and male control of female sexuality, resulted in inequalities in male wealth and power, and forced women into an entirely new kind of dependency (see Smuts 1995; Chapter 4).

64 “历史走到今天，社会结构虽然已经被迫作了调整，女人的心理却被……[(古老的夫唱妻随)]模式框定难以自拔。于是出现一个奇怪的现象，女人一边高喊着争取妇女解放，可是内心深处，其实恰恰是极甘于依赖、惯于投靠……有时女人……认为依赖是大自然雌性的

That is why such an intelligent and strong-willed woman as Tao Tao would rather give up her spiritual freedom, and willingly “fall into the family and become a sex servant” (Zhang 2007n: 286).⁶⁵ Tao Tao says: “Women must, first of all, have a sense of security” brought by men’s love and protection; “This is decided by women’s physiological specificities; acting against the order of nature definitely does not end well” (Zhang 2006b: 44).⁶⁶ Tao fails to realize that orders of nature are not fixed, but ceaselessly changing. Zhang (1998: 97; 2007n: 286) thereby asserts that “the real obstacle of women’s emancipation is women themselves” and their lingering slavishness.⁶⁷ Socio-environmental changes are still limited, and should be (and are) ongoing to solicit more and greater changes of sex- and environment-specific psychological mechanisms. In this process of transformation and becoming, there is a miscellaneous coexistence of modernity and ancience, relinquishment and lag, as remnants of the evolutionary past continue to react to relevant environmental information within modern social environments, though no longer properly. It is women’s job to overcome both patriarchal containment and their own “psychological demerits formed though the natural mill of genetics and adaptation under thousands of years’ feudal oppression” (Zhang 1996d: 193).⁶⁸

For men (and for society), women’s rise and adoption of male-dominated occupations pose both threats and stimulations. The vigorous, disciplined, dominating, and egocentric male protagonist in *Women on the Edge*, Zheng Dalei, is a man who shows ambivalence toward different women’s different behavioral expressions of a common evolutionary past. He is attracted by Tao Tao’s self-promoting endeavors and professional competence (beneficial to his own business), and her soft, meek temperament and simple social background (easier to control), but soon

动物的天性，所以女人自立便是一种异化。”

65 “沦为家庭和性的奴仆。”

66 “女人首先要有安全感；”“这是女人的生理特性决定的，人一旦违反自然规律肯定没好结果。”

67 “妇女解放真正的障碍在于妇女本身。”

68 “在几千年的封建压迫下，由于遗传和生存适应等自然规律的碾磨，形成的心理缺陷。”

gets wearied of her chronic compliance. Towards Zhuo'er, his feelings of being inspired and repelled by her assertive and unruly style also frequently interweave. These explain that men are also a complex exhibiting "both tradition-maintaining and vogue-pursuing" predispositions (Zhang 2006b: 271).⁶⁹ They are reluctant to give up their privileges and domination, used to being obeyed, but desire to be able to constantly extract vigor, impulse, and passion from women, and cannot be satisfied by a steadily submissive (thus becoming lackluster and insipid for them) companion any more.

Zhuo'er's eventual victory yet withdrawal from the implicit female-female competition between her and Tao Tao means that men and women who retain the traits from the previous environments tend to be disadvantaged and penalized in today's social environment. Zhang (1996d: 193, ellipsis in original) writes, "Many women lack the tenacious will to be self-improving and self-loving, and to shake off their dependence and inertia. They are more interested in their families, husbands, and children than in their own intellectual development ... These, among others, are the reasons why many men despise women. We are crawling in this kind of vicious circle."⁷⁰ Men, as well, are crawling in a vicious circle. If they do not discard their androcentric views and behaviors, they will pay penalties both in the mating (deserted by desirable mates) and the job market (encountering economic losses or demotion), as the novel shows.

Nevertheless, the delay of adaptive features does not at all mean that a change in the status quo is impossible. Natural selection is the active and ever-transforming milieu of evolutionary changes, which are fundamentally open-ended and ceaseless (Grosz 1999: 38). The barnacle, with a multitude of genders and sexes, not only represents evidence of the somatic diversity that nature produces, but a species that is "half way between hermaphrodite form and a form of sexual separation" and "must pass into a bisexual [i.e. separate sexed] species" (Darwin 1848: 140, as

69 "既维护传统又向往时尚的。"

70 "许多妇女缺乏自强自爱的坚韧意志，难以摆脱自己的依附性和惰性，对于家庭、丈夫、孩子的兴趣总是大于自身的智力开发……如此种种，便成为许多男人轻视妇女的理由。我们就是在这样一种恶性循环中爬行。"

cited in Wilson 2002: 283-4). The binary form of sex itself is also “not enduring but an accidental evolutionary event,” open to potentially infinite temporal, historical, and environmental transformations (Weinstein 2010: 175). In other words, Weinstein means that sex differences are also a random event, a transition point, and an intermediary stage, and cannot remain eternal even within the linear evolutionary dynamics of fluid, inconstant changes. For bi-sexual species, since sex in evolutionary biology is defined in terms of gamete sizes and sex differences as different sexes’ properties and strategies correlated with anisogamy, sex differences will disappear when there is no difference in gamete sizes or when there are no consequences of this difference, providing that the time scale of evolutionary unfolding is long enough.

In her literary works, Zhang does not present a clear picture of the future. “Today’s conditions are both evolutionarily novel and extremely variable” (Low 2005: 65), and changes are ongoing all the time. It is still too early to tell what will happen when more women gain full economic and sexual equality (Buss 1996: 314). Zhang does not know what to do with Zhuo’er, and just makes her suddenly vanish at the end of the story. Li Xiaojiang (2003: 41) interprets that Zhuo’er and her fellows “have walked out of history ... and are a ‘transitional’ image in the interim,”⁷¹ yet the writer Zhang herself does not know where Zhuo’ers can and would go.

Zhang admits (2007k: 261, 262) that Zhuo’ers’ anti-tradition and self-will is soul-stirring and a mark of women’s emancipation, but can be very troublesome, dangerous, and destructive to the stability of the family and society, to others, and to themselves. Many of them suffer from insomnia. Some cannot pay back the disastrous expenses of their willful behaviors and have to choose suicide. Zhang writes that their subversive driving force erupts from their ponderous body, from their monthly menstruation, from their tiny womb that has carried and gestated countless human beings, from those rice-shaped eggs that fail to become humans, and from the anxiety resulting from their unfulfilled desires (Zhang 2006b: 238, 245, 254, 361). As they cannot transcend their body and bodily

71 “已经走出了历史……是新旧过渡时期一个‘过渡中’形象。”

circumscriptions, their power is instinctive, limited, extreme or irrational (Zhang 2007k: 261). But one thing is for sure: These women are no longer the prey on the ground; Women and men both fly and chase each other in the sky (Zhang 2006b: 273). Women and their differences from men are changed and changing incessantly.

Understanding the evolutionary rationale behind sex differences, far from condemning us to unalterable sexual roles fixed by nature, enables us to recognize both the persistence and mutability of sex forms and differences. Feminist theory will remain impoverished if it abandons all biological explanations of sex differences, especially the overarching explanatory framework provided by evolutionary theory, for the sake of avoiding biological determinism. Even “most radical and difference feminists remain in the dark” about the underlying ultimate origins of sex differences, which are entirely consistent with feminist politics (Vandermassen 2005: 5). Vandermassen (2005: 149) states that only by correctly understanding the evolutionary forces behind sex differences, can we find ways to reduce sex differences where we consider it a desirable goal. “[J]ust as we can control our innate taste for fats and sweets, we can control any innate gender bias we may have” (Hopcroft 2002: 62). But knowledge of human nature, of human needs and propensities, is indispensable to make efficient ethical or political judgment and decisions.

2.7 Discussion

This chapter has explored the meeting by chance between Zhang Kangkang and evolutionary feminism on the topic of sex differences, while the two also diverge on certain points. Both claim that human sexes have evolved through natural and sexual selection. Both explain why men and women differ by invoking distal causes in evolutionary history. The ultimate roots of sex differences, explained by evolutionary theory, lie in anisogamy, i.e., the sexes’ different gamete sizes, and in the sexes’ differing responses to their different reproductive interests and

requirements. Over the course of human evolution, these sex-specific dispositions have been built into the human species through genetically mediated adaptation.

Saying that many sex differences have an evolved basis does not mean that these differences are fixed and ahistorical traits, and that they will manifest themselves in all people or in all circumstances. Evolutionary theory does not, and ought not to, present a reductive and determinist view of female nature and sex differences. Adaptations are exquisitely sensitive and flexible to environmental variations, and always come with a social context, as evolutionary theory and Zhang's writings indicate. Sex differences are changeable and preventable as the environment and situation vary and change.

Furthermore, evolutionary theory is politically neutral. Saying that many sex differences are rooted in biology does not mean that one sex is superior, or that sex discrimination and sex oppression are justified. Although inquiries into the evolutionary origins of sex differences have, in earlier years, been misused, leading to the justification of the status quo and depreciation of women's identity and agency, it is hard to believe that attempts to change the status quo can be very effective or rightly guided "if we remain ignorant of the sex differences that actually exist, the causal forces that gave rise to them, and the contexts in which they are expressed" (Buss 1996: 306).

Absent or Ambivalent Mothers and Avoidant Children

3.1 Introduction

In her review article, Samira Kawash (2011: 990, 996; see also Ross 1995) points out that motherhood studies have been “fragmented and discontinuous” in feminist research, and that, although Sarah Hrdy’s work (1999b) is “a valuable corrective for anyone who would confuse the existence of a particular maternal behavior with the natural essence of maternity,” it “has had approximately zero impact on feminist studies of motherhood.” This chapter is an attempt to fill this lacuna, employing the findings and arguments by evolutionarily oriented scholars, such as and especially Hrdy, to analyze the maternal stories written by Zhang Kangkang.

This interdisciplinary research attempts to release some of, in my opinion, unnecessary feminist worries about essentialism or biological reductionism when approaching motherhood from an evolutionary perspective. Instead, I will illustrate how an evolutionary perspective may be used to explore the specificities, subjectivity, and agency of mothers and of children as well.

Hrdy (1994, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2009, see also Newson and Richerson 2013) proves that a mother’s commitment to her offspring is contingent on circumstances and complicated by a range of considerations including costs and benefits of raising a child, socioeconomic constraints, maternal age and condition, availability of alloparental support, and the infant’s sex and viability. *Firstly*, the task of rearing slow-maturing and altricial human infants is costly, demanding, prolonged, and often tedious. *Secondly*, engaging in both reproductive and productive undertakings, mothers can hardly be present full-time. It proves to be a necessity that extensive and intensive maternal investment be supplemented by help from one or more

alloparents. While “mothers matter most” (Campbell 2002: 34), mothers are seldom the sole caretakers of their children. Supportive kin and alloparental network, along with well-established child-rearing social systems, make cooperative child-rearing feasible. Zhang herself and mothers in her stories have left their children with others (often the grandparents) for extended periods of time in order to work and fulfill their aspirations without encumbrance.

Motherhood is not a myth, nor exclusively a cultural construct. Instead of serving prime paradigms validating how maternal responses have been socially constructed, both Hrdy’s historical, ethnographic, and demographic case studies and Zhang’s literary stories provide insights into the innate mechanism involved in women’s reproductive calculations that has evolved across a vast span of time and across cultures (Hrdy 2001: 66). Mothers respond to their offspring in variable circumstances with variable levels of maternal commitment. But in the way that mothers optimize maternal care resources to combine and balance production and reproduction, maternal reactions remain generally consistent, even when maternity was ideologically disregarded during the Mao years in China.

Zhang’s writings on motherhood include novels, *The Invisible Companion* (1986), *The Gallery of Love* (1996), and *Women on the Edge* (2006), novellas, *The Colorful Disk* (1995), *An Hourly Worker* (1997), and *Zhima* (2003), and some of her essays about her own maternal experiences. Limited or anecdotal as they can be in revealing human motherhood in reality, these literary texts by Zhang, in a certain representative way, depict the dilemma confronted by physically absent and/or emotionally ambivalent mothers, their strategies and tradeoffs, various mother-child conflicts, the ill consequences of insensitive and unpredictable mothering, maternal guilt, and young children’s counterstrategies to negotiate their survival and well-being. Mothers and children in Zhang’s texts behave in seemingly contradictory manners. The inconsistency suggested by their behavioral diversity is a paradox that can be resolved when viewed through an evolutionary lens.

3.2 Theoretical framework: Mothers, alloparents and attachment patterns

In a review of which kin has aided children's survival in different societies, Sear and Mace (2008: 1, 8, 9, 10) find that potential conflicts between caregivers can lower the quantity and quality of childcare, and that allocarers "differ in whether they are consistently beneficial to children or not." Fathers' investment in young children is facultative and not obligatory, which means that it varies greatly in different households and societies. Grandmothers, owing to their genetic relatedness and postreproductive, postmenopausal status, tend to devote themselves to caring for their grandchildren, as Hrdy (1999b: 273) analyzes. Yet in Zhang's texts and in general, there persistently exists the contrast between maternal and paternal grandmothers – the former incline to be affectionate and altruistic, and the latter callous, advantage taking, and much less reliable. Genetic relatedness alone is an unreliable predictor of maternal, paternal, and alloparental commitment to children. It is rather the frequent proximity to the children and caregivers' benign disposition that elicit and maintain nurturing behaviors and attached emotions.

Cooperative breeding entails care negotiation and cooperation for children's well-being, yet it makes mother-offspring conflicts conspicuous. Infants "have an innate need for a primary attachment figure in the first years of life, a role that mothers are uniquely qualified to fill, and that human babies deprived of such attachments suffer irreparable damage" (Hrdy 1999a: 24).

The importance of this primary attachment is familiar from Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment.⁷² Except for the statement that mothers should be the exclusive caregivers, the attachment theory is useful in understanding that earlier experiences with inconsistent mothering can convey a long-lasting negative message to the child and lead to insecure

⁷² Not the bonding theory, which has been criticized as a faulty, discredited scientific theory (Adams 1995: 415; Law 2000: 427).

attachment relationships (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991: 653; Belsky, Fish, and Isabella 1991; Belsky et al. 2007). Two categories of insecurely attached children have been identified (Hrdy 1999b: 402): The first are “insecure and ambivalent” about their relationship to their mothers/caregivers. These children focus on their mothers/caregivers but seem hesitant to trust them. The second are the “insecurely and avoidantly attached” children, who sink into a nonchalant and avoidant state after experiencing distress, anxiety, terror, rage or desolation due to their mothers’ disappearance.⁷³ While ambivalent attachment is “an adaptive response to parental *inability* to provide quality caregiving,” avoidant attachment is “an adaptive response to parental *unwillingness* to do so” (Kirkpatrick 2005: 192, italics in original). Zhang’s novels and essays especially depict these young avoidant attached children including her own son.

Absent and ambivalent mothers including Zhang herself are generally harassed by the feeling of guilt, resulting from conditional maternal investment, various parent-offspring conflicts, and the assumptions of the motherhood myth. Maternal guilt has an adaptive value as it functions as a regulator promoting mothers’ investment in children (Rotkirch and Janhunen 2009: 93). So do infants’ and children’s counter strategies. Appearing nonchalant and avoidant, and being self-centered and manipulative, as described in Zhang’s texts, can be two adaptive strategies to protest and reproach a mother’s disengagement, and evoke and deepen her feeling of guilt.

3.3 Conditional maternal commitment

There are two continuums concerning the fluctuation of maternal responsiveness: in emotions, and in practical calculations and actual

⁷³ Researchers also differentiate four types of insecure attachment styles that people may have when parenting and early relationships have not gone well: anxious/preoccupied attachments, anxious/ambivalent attachments, avoidance/dismissing attachments, and avoidant/fearful attachments (see Worden 2009: 68-70).

behaviors. In maternal affective responses to children, the continuum begins from intense attachment to a child, goes through feelings of indifference, intolerance, estrangement, and neglect, and ends with overt hostility toward a child. The continuum of actual behaviors ranges from terminating investment (such as infanticide and abortion) and abandoning children at one extreme to total maternal self-sacrifice at the other; in between lie various strategies and compromises that can reduce the immediate costs or overall outlays of parental efforts (Hrdy 1994: 6-9). In both these continuums, maternal responses are discriminatory, selective, and situation-dependent. Contrasting sharply with the motherhood myth, which depicts all mothers as constantly present and wholeheartedly devoted, “[l]ess-than-fully-committed mothers and mothers who delegate care to others” fall within the spectrums of the two continuums, and are common and normal, if not pathological (Hrdy 1999b: 519).

Deteriorating social and economic conditions are, first of all, the predictors that foresee Xiao Xiao’s retrenchment of maternal solicitude in Zhang’s novel *The Invisible Companion*. The novel is not autobiographical, but the outline of the story basically corresponds to Zhang’s own life experiences: A nineteen-year-old girl is dispatched to the Great Northern Wilderness during the Cultural Revolution in China, gets married with an urban youth who is also from her hometown of Hangzhou in southern China, bears a child two years later, and soon divorces. She sends the one-month-old infant away to the paternal grandparents in the south. In Zhang’s novelistic writings on maternity, it is easy to discern her own personal life stories. Some of her essays also directly recount her real-life experiences about her son’s growing-up and the difficult mother-son relationship.

During the Cultural Revolution, the number of dispossessed and displaced people swelled. A proliferation of people precipitated into dislocation and destitution. Posited in the extremely tough environment in the north during the Cultural Revolution, a twenty-one-year-old novice mother Xiao Xiao seems to have no other option. The young couple finds it difficult even to provide themselves with the bare necessities. The arrival of a child can

only reduce the family to beggarliness. They have to make compromises between their own subsistence needs and the time, energy, and resources required for rearing a child. The scarcity of resources and unavailability of alloparental help invalidate the young couple's parental solicitude. Xiao Xiao, as other mothers would do, elects to delegate the care of her infant to others and reconcile life's necessity with maternity.

The task of combining survival, work, and reproduction in an almost irreconcilable predicament also confronts migrant working mothers in post-Mao China such as Zhima in Zhang's novella *Zhima* and Laidi in *An Hourly Worker*. The increasing mobility of the labor force means that these rural women go far away from home, leaving their supportive kin network. Children are either left behind (often with grandmothers) or moved into the cities. In the latter solution, alloparents move as well. Laidi's husband and Shuanzi's father Lida in Zhang's novella, *On the Golden Mountain in Beijing* (2007), are required to move into the cities to take care of grandchildren so that the mothers are free to go off to work as home servants or nursemaids. The three generations crowd into the squalid urban shantytowns with their glimmer of economic opportunity, cherishing the prospect of a decent future for the children. Mothers like Zhima and Laidi, even if they want to be in physically close contact with their children, do not have the option of staying at home and caring for them. Maternal caregiving task is and has to be delegated in order for the mothers themselves to survive and keep their children alive and prosperous. Laidi's mother-in-law forces her to go to work by beating and scolding her. Pressure on women's "resource value" in addition to their reproductive value makes women feel the need to actively participate in socioeconomic life (Low 2005: 66). Without Laidi's hourly labor, her and her husband's survival, as well as the children's tuition fees, would be problematic. Without Zhima's productive value, the family would perpetually struggle in insolvency and indigence.

But to combine productive and reproductive lives, these migrant mothers have to leave their children behind or send them away, tortured by the pangs of prolonged separation. Everything Zhima does in her host home

reminds her of her left-behind children. Unable to see them even once in four years, Laidi cries their names in her dream. Unlike Xiao Xiao's temperance and aloofness, Laidi and Zhima indulge themselves in the release of maternal emotions. Years of separation are submerged by yearning tears.

Xiao Xiao's detachment, however, by no means testifies that her maternal responsiveness is "unnatural" or abnormal. She is hesitant to lavish her maternal emotions and mitigates her investment in the newborn also owing to her inclination to realize her ambitions and improve her own lot first, on top of her socioeconomic plight at the time of her childbirth. Women often opt for economic security and upward mobility ahead of having a child. One wife in Zhang's novella, *The Pagoda* (1983), refuses to take the reproductive enterprise because she feels that she has not lived a decent life herself. The importance of such delay is especially critical for women with both ambitions and potentials. Xiao Xiao's baby is conceived due to an unplanned pregnancy. Noticing the pregnancy too late, she is unable to resort to abortion. Her behavioral and emotional reactions to this inopportune birth are understandable from the standpoint of a first-time mother who gives birth at a very young age, without any hands-on experiences of raising a child, under poor circumstances, with very little alloparental support around while preoccupied by her unfulfilled ambitions.

After delivery, the lag of the onset of lactation causes several days' struggling and despondence for both Xiao Xiao and her newborn. Xiao Xiao takes much effort to suckle the baby, hoping that her milk will come in soon and enduring the pain of a famished yet dissatisfied, exasperated baby's sucking. But from the first moment she scrutinizes her newborn, she already psychologically distances herself and her body responds with no milk supply. The baby's wizened and wrinkled face, timid and cautious whining, and listless expression in the eyes, all convey his lack of vigor and viability to her and further repel her. The novel writes:

She turned away to avoid him [(her baby)], overcome by a sudden

feeling almost of revulsion. ... It was nothing at all like in the stories, where the first sight of her child was supposed to fill her with the joy of motherhood. ... What she had instead was a feeling of alienation, of distance. (Zhang 1996a: 178)⁷⁴

What Xiao Xiao sees and why she feels her neonate aversive are conditioned mostly by her circumstances and preferences. Her assessment of the baby's attributes can be read as based not only on his physical appearance and cries, but on her maternal calculations and the emotional ambivalence she feels about investing in him. She is not psychologically and financially ready to be a mother with long-term and heavy dedication to a child's well-being. Even the close physical contact with the baby after birth (actually a painful and discouraged experience) has failed to promote her maternal solicitude. The mental state of a mother confronting unfavorable circumstances and having agendas of her own is anxiety and stressfulness, which can hardly transform a post-partum woman into a full-fledged lactating mother. Motherhood and lactation are periods associated with increased stress and increased stress reactivity, and "stressed mothers are more likely to find infant stimuli (e.g. cries) aversive" (Maestriperi 2011: 526). Xiao Xiao even feels frightened and awkward to hold the baby (Zhang 1996a: 186).

The poor inopportunist-born infant has to be appeased with sugar water and goat's milk, and succumbs to dysentery, before the consigned formula milk powder eventually arrives from his southern grandparents. After one month, the couple sends him away and Xiao Xiao never breastfeeds him again. Yet if breastfeeding is initiated, with the increasing physiological and emotional changes in the mother, the process of bonding with an infant may be facilitated and smoothed (Hrdy 1999b: 472). But wet-nursing and separation discontinue Xiao Xiao's further tactile and emotional experiences with the baby, and become the last straw that determines the failure of her maternal attachment. As Hrdy proves, there is not a "critical period" after birth during which a human mother either once

74 “她转过脸去，躲开了他——一种几近厌恶的心绪突然袭来。……一切并非像小说中所写的那样——她看见婴儿的第一眼，使她充满了做母亲的幸福。……她产生的却是一种陌生的疏离感。”

and for all bonds with her infant or not. The strong emotional tie has to be gradually formed and reinforced in prolonged exposure to and intimate interaction with a child. Six months later, when Xiao Xiao goes to see the baby, she rejoices that she has opted not to breastfeed and sent the baby away swiftly. Now no “maternal feeling” is induced by the forty-minute reunion; she is so “calm, as though she had visited a friend’s baby” (Zhang 1996a: 279).⁷⁵

Less-committed mothers were actually culturally entrenched during the Mao years in China when the myth of gender equality was ideologically propagated. Women were not supposed to exhibit their femininity and were allegedly equal to men in this “sexless” era, dressing, behaving, working, and even thinking all in the unified way, which was taken for granted as male. In these years, “state pronouncements emphasized the obligation and opportunity of all women to contribute to society” and production, as Hershatter (2004: 1013) reviews. At the same time when women emulated men’s achievements in professional life, they still had to fulfill their traditional roles in the family: as housewives doing onerous and remitting housework, and as mothers reproducing and upbringing children. But women’s reproductive efforts and domestic labor were rendered invisible, and mothers’ double burden was “not articulated as a social or political problem.” To be a housewife was not regarded “as a glorified revolutionary role,” and maternity was subsequently devalued, shunned or spurned.⁷⁶

The gender equality myth during the Cultural Revolution was forged partly through the image of “iron girls,” women desexualized and masculinized. In Zhang’s novel, *The Invisible Companion*, Xiao Xiao’s maternal nurturing responsiveness is greatly suppressed by the visit of an “iron girl,” Guo Chunmei, who arrives at the Farm on the same train as

75 “竟然如此平静，像看望一个朋友的孩子。”

76 Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 52) points out one of the “serious drawbacks” egalitarian feminism entailed: “To achieve an equality between the sexes, women’s specific needs and interests – what distinguishes them from men – must be minimized and their commonness or humanity stressed. ... This may ... explain the strong antipathy to maternity amongst a number of egalitarian feminists.”

Xiao Xiao but makes a meteoric rise in rank within two years. Guo's success becomes "a centrifugal force,"⁷⁷ dragging Xiao Xiao away from her family and maternity (Dai 2007: 145). Guo warns that Xiao Xiao has to catch up with the revolutionary trend and should never let motherhood hinder her. In the presence of Guo, Xiao Xiao cannot even pacify her crying baby by picking him up or changing his diaper. "Under Guo's watchful eyes, she felt like she was holding a red-hot coal" (Zhang 1996a: 190).⁷⁸ After Guo's visit and cautionary remarks, the burning desire for better circumstances further pricks Xiao Xiao's ambitions and her undeveloped talent, and alienates her from her baby.

Stereotypically, women's motherhood is viewed as incompatible with their competitiveness and status-striving. It seems that even Zhang tries to dampen women's desire for status improving and wealth gathering. In her novella, *The Milky Way* (1994), the assertive and dominance-oriented mother, Dizong, brings both compelling and repulsive impressions. After having divorced and delegated childcare mainly to her ex-husband, Dizong feels herself thoroughly remoulded without encumbrance. Set as the antagonist to the story's heroin, Tao Tao, in Zhang's novel, *Women on the Edge*, is obviously described as a pushy woman who struggles to change her situation and expends excessive attention and energy in seeking a prosperous and high-status husband. She works and studies industriously, and obsessively searches for and changes boyfriends. From being a lowly typist in a small remote northern town, then a household maid and waitress in Shenzhen, right up to becoming a competent manager in a Beijing bank, she pays out both physically and mentally. Pestered, beaten, and extorted by ex-mates, having unwanted children aborted repeatedly, and working and studying day and night, she exhausts both her bodily and sentimental resources.

Far from conflicting with maternity, however, Tao Tao's ambitious tendencies are inseparably linked with her reproductive interests. Zhang (2007h: 155-6) says that women's career and ambitions are a kite; no

77 "离心力。"

78 "在郭春梅那审视的目光下，她觉得自己像抱着块烧红的煤。"

matter how high and freely it can fly, it is always connected with and controlled by her family and children on the other end of the string. As Tao Tao explains her departure to her hometown boyfriend, “I don’t want my child to be a fisherman, digging holes on this desolate frozen river and smelling like coarse corns once s/he opens her/his mouth to speak.”⁷⁹ After losing her “best child” due to habitual abortion, she mourns, “Can a future mother’s wise plan and calculations be called an ambition? If a woman undergoes and endures so much humiliation and hardship for her future child’s happiness and bright prospects, she should be regarded as a good woman” (Zhang 2006b: 46, 332).⁸⁰

Both mothers’ genetic contribution (bodily resources) and non-genetic endowments (socioeconomic circumstances) have far-reaching consequences for children’s survival and prosperity (Hrdy 1999b: 80). But the construction of an advantageous social niche for both themselves and their children takes time. This is why mothers have to apply themselves to reproductive activities opportunely and prudently, and maternal commitment can flexibly change with maternal age and conditions. The same mother who seems indifferent to the plight of one child now can be profoundly nurturing to another one, born later when she is older and in more auspicious circumstances. Tao Tao, a woman who has unduly chosen abortion several times, desperately tries to retain her last residual reproductive value when she feels that her situation finally allows of maternity. Zhang in her real life, a mother who has reduced the toll of bringing up her infant in order to fulfill her aspiration and talent freely, invested heavily in him years later when she was better off.

3.4 Cooperative breeding systems

That human beings evolved as cooperative breeders has increasingly gained recognition recently. Mothers need to enlist alloparental care from

79 “我不想让我的孩子，日后在这百里地见不着人影的江窟窿里刨鱼，一开口说话就带一股子大馊子味儿。”

80 “一个未来母亲那一点精明的算盘……能算得上是野心么？一个女人若是为了她心目中未来的孩子如此地作践自己，应该算得上是一个真正的好女人了吧。”

fathers, siblings, other kin, or anyone else they can rely upon. As a consequence of this dependency, maternal commitment is contingent on both the mother's own circumstances and social circumstances: availability of support from the social microsystem (family, partner, parents, and relatives) and from the social macrosystem (society and institutions) (Oliverio 1994: 118). Oftentimes mothers face the problem of the scarcity of motivated, reliable, and qualified alloparents or poor social arrangements that can barely accommodate the requirements of communal child-rearing. But if a mother is buttressed by sufficient alloparental help or a well-established communal child-rearing social system, even a very inopportune born child like Xiao Xiao's infant in Zhang's *The Invisible Companion* is wanted and cared for.

Xiao Xiao's story illustrates both the feasibility and necessity of cooperative breeding. Though Xiao Xiao psychologically distances herself from her newborn, her partner fervently adores him and is the primary caregiver. But having no mother's milk and no money to buy formula milk, the couple has to send the one-month-old infant to Xiao Xiao's parents-in-law in the south. The grandparents earnestly welcome and accept their grandson, and soon find a wet nurse for him. Zhang herself, in real life, has also benefited from paid wet-nursing and free "communal suckling" proffered by her mother's women friends when her mother was put into isolation under prolonged interrogation (Zhang 2009a: 92-3). Unlike mothers in the infamous "wet-nursing era,"⁸¹ Xiao Xiao and Zhang's mother have no alternative but wet-nursing, compared with other more dismal choices and outcomes such as malnutrition or even death of the babies and worsened maternal economic destitution or political plight. As Xiao Xiao says, "Without the wet nurse, she and her boy would be at

81 Hrdy (1994: 10, 22) recounts in one article that, at a time in the eighteenth century, ninety-five percent of newborns in urban areas like Paris were sent away to be suckled by wet nurses, a custom that resulted in appallingly high rates of infant mortality. Such lapses in maternal commitment have been widely misinterpreted as "a disguised, nonprosecutable form of infanticide" and become "the prime exhibit in the social constructionist case against the existence of maternal instincts in the human species." But Hrdy analyzes that the use of wet nurses in pre-modern Europe is best understood as a strategy employed by parents to fine-tune their investment in children in line with the specific social and reproductive needs by lowering "the labor-intensive task of nurturing slow-maturing human young."

the end of hope” (Zhang 1996a: 206).⁸² But similar to the “wet-nursing era” mothers, Xiao Xiao delegates the care of her infant to a commercial wet nurse to reduce the immediate costs of parenting. Wet-nursing not only spares her from the drudgery of nursing her baby, but, most importantly, retains her labor and frees her for both subsistence-related and status-enhancing pursuits.

After Xiao Xiao’s child is weaned, he is returned to his paternal grandparents and lives with them for a long period. When Laidi and Zhima are working in the city for years, their children are also taken care of by fathers and, mostly, grandmothers. Grandmothers generally are willing and feel obligated to devote themselves to the caretaking of their grandchildren, even though they are all not well-disposed towards the mothers – their daughters-in-law – in Zhang’s stories. Sharing one-quarter of their genes with the child, grandmothers are supposedly motivated to help. Furthermore, grandmothers whose reproductive career has already ended are predisposed to assisting needy kin, since the benefits provided by her to kin presumably outweigh the costs the help imposes on her, as Hrdy (1999b: 273) analyzes.

Not all grandmothers, however, become altruistic alloparents because of genetic relatedness following their conscious or unconscious cost-to-benefit calculations regarding helping kin. Zhang writes about the contrast between *waipo* (maternal grandmother) and *nainai* (paternal grandmother).⁸³ Her own *waipo* adopted her mother from a foundling home, but treated her mother tenderly and affectionately no less than a biological mother. *Waipo* also dedicated herself to the care of her adoptee’s children, namely, Zhang and her sister (Zhang 1996f: 200). On the contrary, Zhang’s paternal grandmother, despite the blood relatedness and her postreproductive, postmenopausal status, was egotistic, spiteful, and callous towards her grandchildren. She refused to offer any alloparental help for her daughter-in-law, who was encumbered by two little children, even when Zhang’s father, once a very helpful co-caregiver,

82 “没有这个奶妈，儿子和她真是一筹莫展。”

83 外婆 and 奶奶.

was forced to work on a far-away work farm year after year, and her own family was wholly financially dependent on her daughter-in-law (Zhang 2009a: 197). In the novella, *Indra Net* (1987), Zhang (1996ff: 374) writes that she has never acknowledged her grandmother in her heart. In the novella, *The Colorful Disk*, even though the paternal grandmother takes in the grandson Zhong Cong after the parents' divorce and offers significant care, Zhong Cong has been brought up in a rigid and crude way. If it were not for the maternal grandmother's frequent visits bringing love and warmth, Zhong Cong would be dishonest and autistic.

The contrast between maternal and paternal grandmothers, especially Zhang's own adoptive *waipo* and biological *nainai*, reveals that genetic relatedness alone is an unreliable predictor of alloparental and maternal commitment to children. As Zhang (2009a: 233) writes, "*Waipo's* lifelong affection to me makes me intensely abominate the idea that only bloodline or kindred matters."⁸⁴ It seems that, besides the frequent proximity to the child, the rough relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and individual grandmother's personality are significant factors in alloparental care arrangement and quality.

Xiao Xiao's maternal story in *The Invisible Companion*, Zhong Cong's bildungsroman in *The Colorful Disk*, and Zhang's own life experiences illustrate that alloparental nurturing behaviors and attached emotions differ in quantity and quality, and that children manage to do fine by embedding themselves in supportive kin and an alloparental network even if they fail to form any attachment to their mothers. In *The Invisible Companion*, the infant who earlier suffers from starvation, infirmity, and disease is responsibly cared for and brought up despite the failed mother-infant attachment. The once reserved and apathetic child in *The Colorful Disk* gradually opens himself and fares relatively well without his mother's presence. Even though his negative emotionality shows "impressive continuity" throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence, he eventually becomes less negative and more socially oriented with a supportive maternal grandmother and, later, his more attentive mother. Helpful

84 “外婆一生中对我的挚爱，使我一向对唯家族血统之类的观念极其憎恶。”

cooperative breeders serve to “facilitate the self-regulatory capacity” of the child and lead to a positive change in negative emotionality (Belsky, Fish, and Isabella 1991: 422). And “both early and later experiences in the family appear ... influential” on a child’s mental and physical growth (Belsky et al. 2007: 1315).

Zhang (2002b: 88) says that a reasonable and wholesome social system should allow for various different individual wills and choices. Every woman should have the right and possibility to keep her own choice: whether she wants to stay at home with her children, aspires to combining profession and reproduction, or prefers to remain childless. Zhang would agree that “[m]others are important, but they are not the only ones who can provide the caring, nurturing relationship” that children need to survive and grow, and that the caretaking task need to the responsibility of many instead of only one (Vandermassen 2005: 183). The task can be safely delegated to other surrogates, related or unrelated, as long as they are continuously engaged and dedicated. So Xiao Xiao can leave very calmly, even without feeling any “so-called maternal grief,” and be relieved when she sees and hears that her son’s grandparents do dote on him. On two occasions, Xiao Xiao sighs that her son “could grow his teeth without a mother” (Zhang 1996a: 208, 278, 280, 321).⁸⁵

3.5 “Instinctive” maternal calculations

Real-world mothers’ conditional maternal commitment and the idealized, mythologized mothering – a culturally constructed ideology – are at great odds. The immemorial myth also regards motherhood as instinctive and reflexive (Shou 2006: 59). In real life, to become a mother, every woman will undergo a composite of biological changes and responses that accompany pregnancy, parturition or lactation. These changes, however, do not automatically induce motherly devotion and nurturing behaviors. A mother’s commitment to her offspring is contingent on circumstances.

85 “所谓母亲的痛苦。” “没有妈妈也长出了牙齿。”

But instead of divorcing maternal calculations and decisions from biological predispositions and situating them in particular economic and political contexts, sociobiology proves that maternal reactions remain largely consistent throughout human history and across cultures, even when maternity was ideologically disregarded during the Mao years in China. Certainly non-nurturing mothers such as Xiao Xiao undermine the “essentialist” argument about mothers who are automatically, genetically preprogrammed to nurture every baby they produce. But the retrenchment of Xiao Xiao’s maternal commitment should be better interpreted as resulting from her “instinctive” maternal response as she weighs her life stage, her socioeconomic circumstances, and the requirements of maternal input, rather than being ascribed to the cultural construct – an attitude peculiar to a particular period in China.

In all known human societies, mothers assume the primary responsibility for childcare, invest in children the most, and shoulder most of the housework. After participating in socioeconomic life, women become the main carriers of both reproductive and productive workload. As dual-career mothers and the heavily-investing sex, women are supposed to face a reproductive tradeoff harsher than men whose investment input is markedly lower, in order to combine and balance production and reproduction. When Laidi in Zhang’s novella *An Hourly Worker* finishes working and cleaning for sixteen hours for one family after another, rushing around in the huge city of Beijing, she has to do the laundry and tend the hearth at home “to be like a woman” (Zhang 1997c: 281).⁸⁶ She saves her hourly wages to spend on the children’s future education, while every late evening she forgoes a stuff-steam bun, which would allay her hunger, until she gets gastritis. The mental torment and emotional expenses caused by the ruptured mother-child attachment are greater and more painstaking.

Even divorce does not appear to weaken mothers’ solicitude for children. In the novella, *The Colorful Disk*, the mother, after divorce and remarriage, still invests heavily in the child from the previous marriage.

86 “像个女人。”

She spends much time, energy, effort, and resources on his education, hoping for him to grow healthily, both physically and mentally. Meanwhile, the defunct marital relationship greatly estranges the child from his biological father even though the court has granted custody of the child to the father. The father does not keep track of the child's whereabouts, and the child "also does not know at all where he [(the father)] is. He is busy with his own business all the year around" far away, "and never writes me [(the child Zhong Cong)] a letter." Even "when he was at home ... he never took me to a park or theater once" – a very insensitive and uninvolved father after marital dissolution (Zhang 1995a: 115, 135).⁸⁷

Children's survival and well-being are taken into their mothers' consideration all along. Illiterate Laidi's two paragraphs of remarks point to the kernel:

If she [(Laidi)] hadn't gone off to work, perhaps she couldn't even pay the two children's tuition fees. Unable to read, they would be illiterate just like her, and could never have their day. As their mother, wouldn't she repent to death? (Zhang 1997c: 272)

For the youngest sister, there really wasn't any food at home. My [(Laidi's)] mother took her to the road, and said that if somebody picked her up, maybe she would have a chance of survival. (Zhang 1997c: 256)⁸⁸

Whether abandoning them to an unknown destiny (or an illusionary better future) by Laidi's mother in the 1950s, sending them away by Xiao Xiao in the 1960s, leaving the children behind by Laidi and Zhima in the 1990s, or terminating the gestation by Tao Tao in the 2000s, mothers make the decisions in children's interest.

87 “而我也根本不知道他在哪里。他一年四季都在……[(远方)]忙他的生意，他从来没有给我写过一封信。”“爸爸在家的日子……一次也没带我去过公园和剧场。”

88 “如果她不出来做事，两个孩子恐怕连学费都交不起，认不下字，又得像她一样做文盲，他们这一辈子还会有出头之日么？她这个做娘的，不要悔死么。”“最下面还有个妹妹，家里实在没东西给她吃了，我妈把她抱到公路上，说让人捡去，说不定还有条活路。”

3.6 Mother-child conflicts and mothers' guilt

Conditional maternal solicitude leads to various mother-offspring conflicts. Infants need full-time, completely committed, and constantly-in-contact caregivers in order to feel secure and develop normally. Considering the vital, often irreplaceable months or years of breastfeeding, it is convenient and effective for a newborn to form attachment preferentially to the mother, who typically is the first person to come to offer the requisite care. But mothers are often physically and/or emotionally absent. Then the entrusted caretakers can be disqualified or even exploitative. Maternal negligence during childhood may have long-standing and almost irredeemable negative consequences for children's physical and emotional development (Belsky, Fish, and Isabella 1991; Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991; Belsky et al. 2007).

Suckled by an undernourished and non-committed wet-nurse and deprived of maternal love, Xiao Xiao's son is emaciated and downcast. He hardly grows in six months (Zhang 1996a: 278). Ruptured of emotional attachment to their mother, Zhima's children do poorly in school (Zhang 2006a: 473). Obsessed by his parents' divorce and lack of parental supervision, the skinny and maladjusted child, Zhong Cong, performs poorly in his entrance examination and can barely be admitted into an average high school. Mother-infant separation and living with committed yet not-so-well-mannered kin as sources of developmental disturbance also influence his interpersonal social skills. Having "emotional deficiency" and being unable to candidly express his feelings, he feels incompetent and unconfident in social life, and fails to develop the normal capacities for passion and trust in others (Zhang 1995a: 147).⁸⁹ As he doubts, "A strange and remote mother. ... Why does she come to me? Does she really miss me? I don't believe. I can't believe in anything" (Zhang 1995a: 72-3).⁹⁰

89 "情感缺乏症。"

90 "一个陌生的妈妈, 遥远的妈妈,.....她为什么要来找我? 她真的想念我吗? 我不相信。我什么都不相信。"

“With a very unhappy childhood,” Zhang’s own son is “depressed, heavy-hearted, and lonely, always wastes his time and has below-average academic records.” Zhang “has been worried that he has autism or athymia,” and does not expect that, after twenty years, “the scar in his heart is still persistently difficult to heal” (Zhang 2007g: 60, 61, 62).⁹¹ The earlier-established developmental trajectory is surprisingly obstinately maintained.

The sentiments of anxiety, distress, self-contempt, terror, rage or desolation that children sequentially experience after parents’ divorces and mothers’ disappearance are carefully recounted in *The Colorful Disk*. One child has a recurring nightmare and loses all her hair. Zhong Cong feels that nobody can understand what it means to “be scared” if s/he has not experienced parents’ vehement quarrel or breaking up. All these children feel shamed of and chagrined at their families’ “secrets.” Some desperately try to reunite the family, some cling over-tightly to the mother, sensing the loss of security and attachment, and others develop into delinquents – “juvenile thieves” who “are unmotivated to respect ‘authority’ and short on ‘compliance’” (Zhang 1995a: 74-5, 142; Hrdy 2001: 99).

Children vary in their susceptibility to rearing influences and differentially manifest how they are affected (Belsky et al. 2007: 1316, 1318). Sinking into a state of despair and apathy after mothers’ departures is a theme especially elaborated in Zhang’s stories. In *The Invisible Companion*, six months after dispatching her newborn to the wet nurse, Xiao Xiao comes to see her baby, only to find an introverted and apathetic child who disregards her and does not display any distress about her long disappearance and detachment. In *The Colorful Disk*, the maternally deprived child, Zhong Cong, grows into a spineless and apathetic adolescent. Zhang (2002d: 14) says, “In one’s life, family love as a kind of nutrient with long-lasting effectiveness, promotes healthy mental and emotional growth. Those who are devoid of family love ... incline to ...

91 “他的童年过得不快乐，一副郁郁寡欢的样子，心事重重，形影孤单。整天无所事事，学习成绩总是中等偏下。”“担心他会患一种孤独心理症或是情感缺乏症。”“我没有想到时隔那么多年，他心里依然留着那么难以弥合的伤痕。”

apartness or other malformed mentality.”⁹²

These two apathetic children – Xiao Xiao’s son in *The Invisible Companion* and Zhong Cong in *The Colorful Disk* – can be classified as “insecurely and avoidantly attached” children. They seek to elude the mothers upon their short return and negatively consider them as selfish, untrustworthy, and insensitive, but appear unnervingly nonchalant as if they did not care. In *The Invisible Companion*, the baby’s look is “always so vague and elusive,” and his eyes overflow with “an unmistakable indifference and weariness” (Zhang 1996a: 193, 278).⁹³ At seven months old, he reencounters his mother Xiao Xiao. When Xiao Xiao twice reaches out to hold him in her arms, he recoils in languish or fear and moves his head away, avoiding precisely the person who usually is the primary object of desire and attachment. In *The Colorful Disk*, when Zhong Cong is reunited with his mother after eleven years’ separation, he also repeatedly lowers his head to avoid her gaze, and shrinks back to avoid her attempts to hug him or make any other bodily contact. He would not open his mouth to call her “Mama,” and says that “I care nothing about maternal love. I’m used to being alone” (Zhang 1995a: 93, 138).⁹⁴

Under conditions of marital discord and inconsistent rearing, insecurely attached youngsters like those children in *The Colorful Disk* are at greater risk of developing into depressed, self-centered, and skeptical sociopaths (internalizing symptoms), or becoming noncompliant, impulsive, and aggressive (externalizing symptoms) (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991: 652). In terms of children’s subsequent developmental outcomes, mothers who are absent and far less responsive to children’s emotional needs can harm as likely as help their children.

An evolutionary viewpoint of parent-offspring conflicts is helpful in understanding the harm of maternal deprivation. Trivers (1974) proposes

92 “在一生中，家庭的亲情是一种长效营养素，可让人的心智发育健康。……缺乏亲情的人……容易产生……冷漠等畸形心理。”

93 “依然茫茫，依然漠漠；”“明明白白地流泻出……漠然与厌倦。”

94 “我才不在乎母爱不母爱呢，我就习惯一个人。”

that, only sharing one half of their genes, parents and offspring have incongruous interests in many matters (Oliverio 1994: 114). The mother-child dyad is often an imperfect and loosened bond full of disagreement and contradiction, instead of a harmonious unity. Beginning with the “war in the womb,” mother-child conflicts persist (Hrdy 1999b: 388-9, 473). Zhang (1996a: 162, 177, 178) writes in *The Invisible Companion*: “When a woman’s body was possessed by another life, she couldn’t reign herself any more. That life ... forced her to place everything she had at its disposal and service;” “The fetus, to which she has given its life, turned over and became her master.” But the woman, Xiao Xiao, only wishes and is happy to be “freed” after the “bitter struggle” with the developing embryo.⁹⁵ Mothers and children can be so incompatible that it is better for them to separate, to let the other go (Adams 1995).

When resources are scarce, the needs of a mother and her young unavoidably collide. The intensification of mother-offspring conflict occurs in particular when a mother has her own pursuits that can be detrimental to the well-being of her children. This raises again the question of mothers’ subsistence and status-striving ambitions. Implicitly or explicitly intended for the good of offspring, it is not always optimal for them. Often, insecurities among children and stress in the mothers ensue; status and motherhood are not always convergent as expected. In Zhang’s novella, *Red Poppies* (1982), the ambitious woman leader has to rush back to her office and appears undisturbed and carefree in order to maintain her “standing and duty” while her son suffers from serious scarlet fever in the hospital (Zhang 2000a: 38). Zhang herself persistently regrets that her son is lonely and disconsolate due to her absence and status-striving. And it is her “big sorrow”⁹⁶ that they still cannot get along well with each other after he grows up (Zhang 2002b: 82).

Secondly, mother-offspring conflict also intensifies when mothers try to promote their fitness against current children’s will and needs. Allocation

95 “似乎一个人身上附有另一个生命，她便不能够主宰自己了。那个生命……让她交出她的一切来为它服务，受它驱使；” “曾经是她赋予了他生命的胎儿，反过来成了她的主宰。” “她自由了；” “残酷的搏斗。”

96 “很大的遗憾。”

of parental resources and efforts for one offspring can diminish parents' ability to invest in other offspring (Trivers 1972: 67). In *The Colorful Disk*, two children, Li Xiang and Zhong Cong, rather manipulatively seek to extract additional maternal investment at the expense of their future siblings. After Zhong Cong eventually explodes with anger and implies that he does not want a step-sibling, the mother soon chooses abortion to ensure him that there will not be a step-sibling halving his share of maternal love. Herein lies the poignant tension between maternal commitment to these children and frustration at their high demands (Hrdy 1994: 4). What might be considered the optimal behavior from the perspective of these children is definitely not the optimal choice for the mothers. Parent and offspring are expected to disagree over "the altruistic and egoistic tendencies of the offspring as these tendencies affect other relatives" including siblings (Hrdy 1999b: 427).⁹⁷

Thirdly, when mother-child conflict concerns mothers' own emotional needs, more often than not, children are the party that will be sacrificed. Zhang's popular novel *The Gallery of Love* evinces how limited and conditional a mother's self-sacrifice can be. When the mother and her adolescent daughter fall in love with the same man, instead of being self-sacrificing and retreating from the competition, the mother betrays her daughter's trust and love, and cohabits with the man behind the daughter's back. At the same time, the daughter suffers intensely from both lovesickness and maternal deprivation, and loses both her artistic talent and academic performance.

Clearly, Zhang's opinion is that women need not sacrifice their own emotional life for the sake of motherhood: "When traditional 'maternity'

⁹⁷ The altruistic and egoistic tendencies of the offspring certainly affect the parents themselves as well. As recipients of parental altruistic acts and expectation of future repayment, children often forget to return and incline towards egoism. This is why Zhang repeatedly laments children's ungratefulness and unfilialness. Zhang (2007a: 183) also criticizes herself, saying that her parents are always her unswerving supporters, but she betrayed them and hurt them enormously. In the short novel, *The Winter without Snow* (1981), she (1996w: 302) writes that it is ironic that when graduates grab the limited quota of job vacancies in the city, "the reason why they want to stay in the city is not at all for the purpose of their parents, but taking care of parents can be used for everybody's pretext." ("恐怕谁也不是为了父母留城, 可谁都用照顾父母作挡箭牌。")

violently conflicts with women's 'self' ... [women] should revert to independent individuals" (Zhang 2002f: 42; 2007j: 259).⁹⁸ In *The Colorful Disk*, Zhang explores this mother-offspring conflict over mothers' own emotional needs thoroughly and expresses her standpoint through the step-father's mouth:

It is parents' own business whether they divorce or not. You don't have the right to say "should" or "shouldn't." They can't destroy their whole life because of you, as you are not everything that they have ... You wish that parents would sacrifice their happiness for you. This is very selfish...

At that time, I really want to interrupt him and ask: Have they ever thought that without parents, my life will be destroyed as well? They are also very selfish. But I only crustily spit onto the floor. (Zhang 1995a: 166, second ellipsis in original)⁹⁹

For the working mothers split by two pressing and incompatible urges, Zhang (2002b: 82) also gives her answer: "Women themselves are important and shouldn't abnegate themselves for the sake of children."¹⁰⁰ Women who put the interests of children first and give themselves over to caregiving "may succeed as mothers; yet as humans, they are perhaps losers;" it is an "inextricable maze and contradiction" (Zhang 1996f: 199).¹⁰¹ Luo Qian in Zhang's novella *The Pale Mists of Dawn* (1980) and Zhaodi in *A Sojourner* (1997) are the loser-mothers captive to children's needs and interests. Luo Qian forsakes her love and remarries a man with advantageous political status for her children's future, but thereafter lives in profound melancholy and nostalgia for the rest of her life. In *A*

98 "传统的'母性'和女人的'自我'发生了猛烈的冲突.....[(女人)] 应还原成生命独立的个体。"

99 "父母离婚是他们自己的事, 你没有权利说应该和不应该。他们不能为了你, 而毁掉自己的一生, 因为你不是他们的全部.....你希望父母为了你而牺牲自己的幸福, 那样想是很自私的....."

那时, 我真想插嘴问一句, 他们有没有想过, 我没有父母会毁掉我的一生? 他们这样做也很自私。但我只是往地上狠狠吐了一口唾沫。"

100 "女人自己是很重要的, 不能为了孩子而放弃自己。"

101 "作为母亲或许是胜了; 作为人, 或许是输了;" "永远无法摆脱的矛盾。"

Sojourner, considering and caring for her children take precedence over the mother's immediate well-being, but the result is that the mother is enslaved and despised by the whole family in spite of her round-the-clock, arduous, and meticulous service.

Unfortunately, absent and ambivalent mothers are still feeling guilty. “[M]aternal guilt is a common feeling and related to” these various mother-child conflicts (Rotkirch and Janhunen 2009: 93). Zhang (1990a: 42; 2002b: 95-6) herself, rather self-contradictorily, says that she is “ashamed of being such a mother,” and that it pricks her conscience that she has not cared enough for her son and knows little about his inner thoughts because of her absence. She says in an interview: “If I could have brought up my child, I would be very happy,” but then “I wouldn’t have produced so many works;” “I admire those housewives who can sacrifice so much for children,” but “I cannot.”¹⁰² The ambivalence of confirmation and regret of her choice permeates her words. Giving priority to mothers’ own needs and aspirations undesirably results in neglecting children’s emotional needs and the failure of the formation of a mother-child bond. Torn between maternity and vocation, and between unpaid “mother-work” and paid work (Brush 1996: 430), Zhang is not the only mother who is haunted and harassed by the accusatorial doubts. In her *The Gallery of Love*, the cruel choice the mother has made is also fraught with affliction and self-condemnation, even though she thereby possesses the bliss of a man’s love.

Maternal guilt also frequently results from the unrealistically high expectations of the motherhood myth (Rotkirch and Janhunen 2009: 103). As Zhang (1996f: 199) writes, “I’m really not an integrated and standard woman.”¹⁰³ This image of a “standard woman” evokes the motherhood myth that depicts mothers as universally present, nurturing, and benevolent. The differences between unrealistic expectations and actual motherhood induce guilt in Zhang and other absent or ambivalent mothers,

102 “生出几丝惭愧，为我自己这样的母亲；” “如果我能好好地抚养我的孩子，我觉得也是很快乐的；” “就不会有这么多的作品了。”
“我……对做家庭妇女的人有一种敬意。她们能为孩子作出这样的牺牲，而我们不能。”

103 “我实在不是一个完整又标准的女人。”

and plague them. Zhang (2003: 8) actually clearly recognizes this and writes: “Maternal love is restricted ... For a long time, the absolutization of maternal love and overstatement of mothers’ function frequently lead us astray in the process of our inspection of human nature.”¹⁰⁴

Maternal emotions of guilt and shame serve the interest of children and other caregivers as a regulator inhibiting indifference or intolerance and promoting maternal investment in children (Rotkirch and Janhunen 2009: 93). In *The Invisible Companion*, despite the failure of maternal attachment, Xiao Xiao remits more than half of her salary to her child every month. Zhang (2002b: 82) says in an interview that now she always tries her best to satisfy her son’s needs. After living alone for eleven years, she remarried in 1983, but has not had another child. In *The Colorful Disk*, the child Zhong Cong senses that the mother “seems to do her utmost to compensate and remedy something”¹⁰⁵ and carefully prepares for their holiday to make him happy. To further relieve her feeling of guilt, she terminates the pregnancy in order to focus all her maternal care sources on him. Then she caresses his hand (he thus forgives her and accepts her intimacy) and says, “I was not a good mother ... Now it’s possible that I will be better later” (Zhang 1995a: 145, 171).¹⁰⁶ Guilt induces truly great maternal sacrifice in this situation of mother-offspring conflicts over the mother’s own emotional needs and reproductive interests.

3.7 Young children’s strategies

Conditional maternal commitment has produced selection pressures on infants and children to actively elicit maternal or alloparental engagement and ensure it is ongoing. But because maternal ambivalence has been regarded as abnormal or pathological, infants’ counterstrategies have received very little attention (Hrdy 1999b: 533). It is the infant, first and

104 “母爱是有局限性的……长期以来，人们对母爱的绝对化，以及过分夸大母爱的功能，往往令我们在检省人性的过程中误入歧途。”

105 “我觉得她好像是在竭力弥补什么偿还什么。”

106 “妈妈不是个好妈妈……真的，也许我以后会当得好些。”

foremost, who senses how available and committed the mother is (Hrdy 2009: 7). While displaying infantile appealing traits and signaling robustness and viability are adaptive cues to elude maternal care, appearing nonchalant and avoidant or being manipulative can also be adaptive and effective strategies for a child under the circumstances when maternal investment becomes unpredictable (Hrdy 2001: 97, 103).

In *The Invisible Companion*, before Xiao Xiao, the baby is always indifferently lying down there exhibiting his sex, size, and look. Instead of whining pitifully as a needy yet disregarded supplicant as Xiao Xiao expects, the infant chooses not to display his distress. For a mother who is stressed and depressed, advertising vulnerability and emitting distress may be very inappropriate and can further disturb and repulse her, and all the more make her feel “frustrated and fidgeted” (Zhang 1996a: 188).¹⁰⁷ Xiao Xiao’s baby elects to conceal his inner despair, resentment, and extreme anguish, and appear indifferent and avoidant. It is a reaction of despair and a silent demonstration, seemingly weak and feeble, yet potently protesting and reproaching the mother’s disengagement and evoking her feeling of guilt. At the last moment when Xiao Xiao leaves the baby with the wet nurse, he “suddenly opens his eyes” and gives her a “terribly cold,” “frozen” farewell glance, which soundlessly and repeatedly echoes in Xiao Xiao’s mind as the accusation: “You’re a bad mother.”¹⁰⁸ It even becomes her nightmare that her son sprays bullets from an assault rifle on her and heckles her over her maternal “demerits” of not providing milk and care (Zhang 1996b: 207, 384).

In a similar way, the fifteen-year-old Zhong Cong in *The Colorful Disk* also appears avoidant and unconcerned about his mother’s love after experiencing distress, injuries, and resentment. Rather than wretchedly beseeching his mother’s return, he restrains the outburst of his inner sentiments and carefully encloses them with reticence and apartness. Only in his fantasies and dreams, he releases his longing and immerses himself in the flow of mother’s milk and love. In his social life, he also dodges the

107 “不安与烦闷。”

108 “忽地睁开了眼；”“冷气袭人，如结了冰；”“你是个坏妈妈。”

development of intimacy, as “it might be highly adaptive for an avoidantly attached individual to learn to downplay love, to dismiss the importance of close human relationships” (Hrdy 1999b: 525). It would be a self-protective tactic for a despaired person to cope with the uncertainty of affiliation and commitment.

Clinging tightly to the mother is another strategy for immature children who detect the (potential) reduction of maternal solicitude, as “offspring survival is crucially dependent on mother-offspring contact and proximity” (Maestripieri 2011: 523). This strategy is often employed by children whose mother-child relation falls into the category of anxious attachments. For some kids in *The Colorful Disk*, both seeking to remain close all the time and manipulatively monitoring mothers’ sexual and reproductive behaviors, become the central preoccupation in their life after their mothers’ divorces. The child Li Xiang says, “I wouldn’t let my mother get married again. ... If some man comes here, I will keep on kicking doors, closing drawers or throwing pillows away. I will definitely refuse to go to sleep and won’t let them talk. This is my mother and she can’t be anybody else’s” (Zhang 1995: 140). Being self-centered and negligent to the mother’s feelings and needs “might from the developing child’s perspective be a way of making the best of” an unpropitious situation (Hrdy 1999b: 527).

Li Xiang also abets Zhong Cong to be manipulative, exploitative, and self-serving. They take it for granted that their mothers should feel guilty and be willing to do anything to “double expiate”¹⁰⁹ their maternal “wrongs” (Zhang 1995a: 105). Unlike relatively helpless infants, they can present their anger face to face and reprove their mothers fiercely. Zhang’s own son has been brooding on her being away for over twenty years and regarded it as the ultimate source of his unhappiness. He cannot dispel the spite against her and eventually explodes with anger before her (Zhang 2007g: 62). As a result, the maternal guilt is further aroused and deepened, and maternal investment monopolized and reassured. The children gain the upper hand in mother-child conflicts and record complete victory in

109 “加倍补偿。”

the competition with the possible future siblings for maternal care resources.

3.8 Discussion

A central feminist concern has been “the reduction of women’s bodies and biology to their reproductive capacity. Feminists challenged these reductions as biologically deterministic and pointed to their profound impact on women’s political and economic marginalization” (Subramaniam 2009: 957). This evolutionary reading of Zhang’s maternal stories has aimed to show that an evolutionary biological perspective does not reduce the complexities and specificities of mothering to a simplified functional practice, but on the contrary exposes them. It also indicates that the ideas of the motherhood myth and social constructionism are unable to fully and impartially explain maternal behaviors and emotions.

An evolutionary perspective is conducive to the recognition of human mothers’ conditional commitment to their children and the necessity and feasibility of cooperative child-rearing. Mothering is a demanding and prolonged task and, as dual-career mothers, women have to make tradeoffs between their reproductive efforts and their life stage and conditions, and allocate or withhold maternal resources according to their circumstances. The availability of support from one or more alloparents and/or from a well-established communal child-rearing social system proves to be a necessity. Zhang’s stories illustrate that supportive kin and alloparental networks make cooperative child-rearing feasible, and reveal that acknowledging infants’ and children’s needs does not necessarily enslave mothers.

“[F]ar from *invalidating* the existence of maternal instincts,” Zhang’s maternal stories provide insights into the biological underpinnings of maternal commitment (Hrdy 2001: 66, italics in original). When acknowledging the entanglement of motherhood “in the specific histories and politics of race and class as well as of gender” (Brush 1996: 453), it is

also important to recognize that the ultimate causes underlying mothers' dilemma and calculations remain largely invariable, even though the proximate ones for each maternal tactic and response within the two above-mentioned continuums are contingent and variable. Working and ambitious mothers' anxiety and distress are not new and not particular to one or two historical periods or cultural contexts.

For most of human existence, and long before that, primate mothers have been dual-career mothers, combining productive lives with reproduction and forced to compromise between maternal and infant needs (Hrdy 1999b: 109). In the hunter-gatherer society in which women made a major contribution to food production and the number of calories from women's gathered foods frequently exceeded that from men's hunting, whenever possible mothers temporarily entrusted babies to the care of reliable and willing relatives in order to go foraging freely and efficiently without toting babies (Campbell 2002: 141; Sear and Mace 2008: 1). And just "as European infants were once left in foundling homes or sent to wet nurses at near epidemic levels, today we witness poor mothers from the Philippines, Central and South America, South Africa, Asia leaving children behind to be bottle-fed and somehow cared for by kin while they themselves go far away to work" (Hrdy 1999b: 370). Solutions can differ, but the compromises mothers make and the rudimentary maternal calculations stay remarkably constant.

Nevertheless, absent and ambivalent mothers are often harassed by the feeling of guilt, as a consequence of conditional maternal investment, various parent-offspring conflicts, and the high expectations of good motherhood. Furthermore, conditional maternal commitment has produced infants' and children's counterstrategies to elicit maternal or alloparental engagement. Both maternal guilt and young children's counterstrategies have adaptive values as they regulate and promote maternal investment.

This evolutionary review of mothering in Zhang's writings is rather disturbing. It exposes mothers' oftentimes hard-hearted reproductive calculations, young children's self-centered counterstrategies, and other

predispositions that we may consider politically unattractive and morally undesirable. Evolutionary theory in itself is only descriptive. For a better picture of mothering and of both mothers' and children's well-being, it is significant to recognize that the caretaking task need to be the responsibility of many, and to resort to other human cultural and intellectual resources to ensure that there is sufficient and efficient alloparental support from both the social microsystem (the family and kin) and the social macrosystem (society and institutions).

Human Mating Systems

4.1 Introduction

Relying on Zhang's series, *Summer* (1979), *Go far* (1980), and *The Winter without Snow* (1981), the novellas and novels, *The Right to Love* (1979), *The Pale Mists of Dawn* (1980), *Northern Lights* (1981), *The Whither* (1981), *The Remote Toll* (1981), *The Pagoda* (1983), *The Invisible Companion* (1986), *Blue Collar* (1993), *The Milky Way* (1994), *There Is still One Chance* (1994), *An Hourly Worker* (1997), *Distant Mountain, Nearby Lake* (2000), *Zhima* (2003), and *Women on the Edge* (2006), and some of her essays, this chapter deals with the issues of female choice and female-female competition in sexual selection, differences and congruence in the sexes' mate preferences, and the problem of women's dependency on men.

Darwin (1871) recognizes that female choice has been a potent force in the evolution of sexually selected traits and sex-typical behaviors. Evolutionary feminists trenchantly point out that the agency Darwin conferred to females had been wrongly criticized or ignored for one century before Robert Trivers (1972) finally brought it back to the theoretical foreground (Gowaty 2003: 917). They also reveal that women do bond and form alliances, but their solidarity tends to be based on opportunism and mutual benefits. Beneath their intimacy, there is, implicitly or explicitly expressed, subtle yet intense competition (Hrdy 1999a).

Zhang (1996l, 1997a, 2002b) repeatedly laments the hard-to-communicate and impossible-to-connect insulation between men and women, which, from the evolutionary perspective, can be ultimately traceable to the genetic nonidentity of the two parties and their divergent mating and reproductive preferences and strategies. Besides these differences, there

are also remarkable overlaps and similarities between the sexes' mate preferences. Zhang's stories and evolutionary theory indicate that both men and women actively employ flexible, opportunistic, and mixed mating strategies contingent on variable circumstances and ecological contexts (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Buss 1996; Daly and Wilson 1996; Kenrick, Trost, and Sheets 1996; Studd 1996; Hrdy 1999a; Schmitt, Shackelford, and Buss 2001; Hopcroft 2002; Campbell 2002; Miller 2000; Low 2005; Cohen and Belsky 2008).

Zhang also often deplors women's persistent financial, sexual, and mental dependency on men. From an evolutionary perspective, women's dependency and sexual modesty are only later acquisitions, rather than essential features of female nature. During most of human evolution, females have been independent and responsible for their own subsistence and done almost all the childcare with very little assistance from males. But later, patrilocal postmarital residence, male monopolization of productive resources, well-developed male political alliances, women's collusion in patriarchy, and male control of female sexuality, all together resulted in inequalities in male wealth and power, and forced women into an entirely new kind of dependency (Smuts 1995, 1996; Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 1999, 2002). Nowadays, plenty of women, like their sisters in hunter-gatherer societies and unlike those under patriarchy in the past thousands of years, have again become economically self-sufficient and sexually self-governed. The evolutionary answers to Zhang's puzzle about women's persistent dependence are that women's deference to men has not constantly manifested itself throughout human history, and that a woman's vulnerability or autonomy depends on her direct control of physical resources, the availability of support from her kin and allies, her sexual freedom, and her own mentality.

4.2 Female choice and female-female competition

According to evolutionary theory, sexual selection "can give rise to much faster change than natural selection alone" through the choices of

individual mating preferences (Pratto 1996: 200). Male mate choices “help direct the course of the evolution of female physiology and psychology, since they influence which female characteristics will be able to spread over the next generations. The same holds for women’s partner choices” (Vandermassen 2005: 159-60). In sexual selection, apart from this form of intersexual selection, there is also intrasexual selection/competition, and both are linked. Proponents of the sexual selection theory deem that, in human beings, two out of the four components or driving forces (male-male competition, female-female competition, male choice, and female choice) in sexual selection are particularly important: male-male competition for access to females, and female choice of mating partners (Geary 1998: 54). In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Darwin indicates that through their mate choices, females directed the pathway of evolutionary changes, and that female predilection for particular mates was generally more important than male choice or male intrasexual competition in shaping sexually selected dimorphism within species.

The agency Darwin conferred to females, however, had been wrongly criticized or ignored for one century before Robert Trivers (1972) finally brought it back with his parental investment theory¹¹⁰ (Gowaty 2003: 917; Vandermassen 2004). Zhang Kangkang (1996k: 214) also believes that women’s mate choices stimulate men’s desire for development and promotion, and thus improve men’s quality and accelerate social advancement, an idea that nevertheless leans toward Social Darwinism and naturalistic fallacy.

110 Trivers’s theory proposes that the sex (usually the female), which contributes more and longer to the production and rearing of offspring through initially providing the bigger and more nutrient gamete, internal fertilization and gestation, and then lactation and nurturing, becomes the limiting resource in the mating market and is predicted to be more selective about mating. Male reproductive success tends to be constrained by sexual access to fertile mates, while females are less likely to increase their fitness by mating with multiple males, and their reproductive success is limited by the time, energy, and resources required to raise viable offspring. Mating systems are “the outcome of sexual selection due to the sexes’ differential investment in gametes (anisogamy) and parental care” (Marlowe 2000: 46). Trivers’s theory has continuously been applied, questioned, and modified.

The individual differences in the quality of care and genes that parents provide to their offspring “ensure that all potential mates are not equal, which, in turn, results in competition for the most suitable mate” (Geary 1998: 8). Females compete for the attention of desirable mates just as males do. Since male commitment and control of resources are in limited supply, and females incline to monopolize their mates and steer the mates’ social and material resources toward their offspring, competition among females is inevitable (Richards 2000: 77). “As the disparities in male wealth increase, the tension between women increases also” (Campbell 2002: 192). Therefore, “human mate selection does not follow a strict version of Trivers’s males-compete-and-females-choose model” (Eagly and Wood 1999: 415). Female-female competition and male choice can also be important features of sexual selection, especially in the cases of heavy paternal investment (Geary 1998: 10).

Zhang (1996a: 194) once writes, “Same-sex conflicts are frequently more severe than opposite-sex conflicts.”¹¹¹ She refers to the intensity of both male-male contest and female-female competition. Women do bond and form alliances, as shown in the potent friendship of Tao Tao and Zhuo’er in Zhang’s *Women on the Edge* (2006). After Zhuo’er’s heart-felt help during Tao Tao’s distressing abortion, Tao Tao becomes friendly and generous, sharing time, thoughts, and material resources with Zhuo’er, even “halving every bowl of wonton with Zhuo’er” (Zhang 2006b: 42). For several times, she seeks jobs for Zhuo’er, and helps Zhuo’er get through financial crisis and make a fortune without taking one cent for herself. Zhuo’er admits that “she cannot do without Tao Tao” (Zhang 2006b: 13).¹¹²

Tao Tao’s altruism towards Zhuo’er, however, depends on her trust that Zhuo’er will repay the debts later, and Zhuo’er does so. Tao’s careful and clever selection of an unrelated beneficiary and bosom friend offers an example indicating that women’s solidarity tends to be based on opportunism and mutual benefits. Beneath their intimacy, there is actually

111 “同性之间的矛盾往往比异性之间的矛盾更为严重。”

112 “下一碗混沌也要分给卓尔一半。”“卓尔知道自己是不能没有陶桃的。”

subtle, implicit yet intense competition between them, which further discounts and weakens their affiliation. Zhang (1997a: 132; 2006b: 73, 163) writes, “How nice when women spend time together ... But they have to be highly vigilant all the time. Once an attractive quarry appears in sight, the closely bonded team will fall apart within one moment;” “The real competition happens among women. Women’s rivals are only women themselves;” “Once a battle happens between women, it is a life-and-death one.”¹¹³

Women can compete with indirect aggression (such as gossiping, ostracizing, stigmatizing, and backstabbing), by expressing negative feelings (such as jealousy and resentment), or by focusing on physical appearance (Buss 1996: 307; Campbell 2002: 92; Ingo, Mize, and Pratarelli 2007). Zhang (2006b: 45-6) describes the feeling of jealousy that subtly emerges and drives a wedge between the two female friends in *Women on the Edge*: Tao Tao thinks, “Jealousy between girl friends is as subtle as the colors of eye-shadow, and [Zhuo’er is jealous of her] because Zhuo’er hasn’t met such a wealthy and committed man like Zheng Dalei.”¹¹⁴ Further, Zhang (1996m: 189) writes, “It seems that women are only jealous of women, because generally women’s competitors are only women. ... The feeling of jealousy by no means will resort to actions in the end. Women’s jealousy cannot be eliminated by swords, fists, and duels once and for all. Women only rely on tongues, using rumor, lies, and repeated backbite to kill the opponents numerous times.”¹¹⁵

While female intolerance for other breeding females is a major deterrent to male philandering,¹¹⁶ it also forestalls the emergence of gender equality

113 “女人们在一起的时光是多么好啊……但她们务须时刻提高警惕，一旦视线中出现了摄人的猎物，那支亲密无间的队伍即刻会土崩瓦解。”“真正的竞争是在女人之间进行的。女人的竞争对手，只能是女人自己。”“女人和女人之间一旦发生了战争，便是生死存亡，生命攸关。”

114 “女友之间的嫉妒，微妙得就像眼影的颜色，那是因为卓尔遇不上像郑达磊这样多金而又专情的男人。”

115 “女人似乎从来只嫉妒女人。因为女人的竞争者往往只是女人。……嫉妒之心最后是一定要付诸于行动的，女人的嫉妒无法用剑用拳去一次性决斗排除。女人可依赖的只有舌头，用谣言用谎言用不断重复的谰言，将对方无数遍杀死。”

116 According to evolutionary theory, high paternal investment, the male-male bond, and female-female mutual antagonism are important factors in explaining the evolution from a promiscuous life to the ecologically or

(Hrdy 1999a: 190). One of the chief female intrasexual competitive strategies “is to submit themselves or their kinswomen” to male control, and cooperate in their sex’s oppression (Pratto 1996: 206). When women as members of the subordinate group follow the dominant group’s rules and values, they can be even more male-centered, as Zhang (2000d: 58) states.

4.3 The “battle of the sexes”¹¹⁷

In many texts, Zhang (1996l: 390; 2002b: 102) laments: “Men and women, adoring and guarding against each other, avariciously suckle each other, yet are permanently cut apart into separated units by the ‘sexual ditch’ that can never be overstepped;” “Between them [(men and women)], there is indeed a ravine that is rather difficult to completely fill and level up.”¹¹⁸ Elsewhere, she (1997a: 128) again writes that men and women stand far apart facing each other as if they were each confined in the North and South Poles, or as if they were satellites that blindly circle around an actually non-existent planet in predestined trajectories and can never intersect with the planet or others. Zhang’s novella *The Milky Way* (1994) describes three pairs of couples that disassemble into six solitary individuals, all struggling to connect themselves with a partner, yet frustratingly only begetting more disappointment and weariness. These individuals are never in real contact with each other, as though they were cold, lonely stars in the sky, seemingly densely aggregated, yet each apart from another by a distance of billions of light-years, with only their starlight twinkling towards each other. If there is a connection in love or marriage, it is only as transient as a falling star (Zhang 1996ii: 64; 1997a:

socially imposed monogamous marriage, a panhuman institution of marital alliance in humans, which is the triumph of the compromise over the conflicting reproductive interests of the sexes (Marlowe 2000; Campbell 2002; Low 2005).

117 David Buss’s (1996) article *Sexual Conflict: Evolutionary Insights into Feminism and the “Battle of the Sexes.”*

118 “男人和女人，彼此倾慕又互相戒备；彼此贪婪地吮吸对方，却又永远被无法逾越的那道‘性沟’分割为独立的个体；” “他们之间确实有一种难以沟通的沟壑，完全填平这种沟壑比较困难。”

99-100).

This hard-to-communicate and impossible-to-connect insulation between men and women described by Zhang, from the evolutionary perspective, can be ultimately traceable to men's and women's divergent mating and child-rearing preferences and strategies. Sex differences in parental investment favor different strategies for reproductive success and consequently establish different adaptive mechanisms governing mating behaviors. Evolutionists have listed at least two of these differences:

“[O]ne of the largest and most consistent differences between men and women involved short-term mating orientation” (Schmitt, Shackelford, and Buss 2001: 212). Trivers (1972) argues that parental investment in one offspring usually subtracts from investment available for others, including future offspring, and thus parental efforts subtract from mating efforts (Marlowe 2000: 46). Males usually devote more reproductive efforts to mating and are more eager to mate with multiple fertile partners, striving in both intra- (male competition) and intersexual (female attraction) arenas (Low 2005: 65). In contrast, females are usually more careful to choose mates who seem likely to provide good genes, protection, parental care or resources. And it is to men's advantage in terms of fitness outcomes to “devote a large proportion of their total mating efforts to short-term mating than do women”— that is, to be relatively promiscuous (Buss and Schmitt 1993: 205). Women as heavy parental investors, on the contrary, benefit from devoting a smaller proportion of their mating efforts to short-term mating and a larger proportion to long-term mating. Following Trivers's parental investment theory, sex differences in obligatory parental investment, choosiness in mate-selection, and preferences for mates' quantity versus quality create a widespread conflict of interests between the sexes.

This critique is manifested in the proposal that humans have been mildly polygynous throughout evolutionary history (vom Saal 1994: 53), and in Zhang's (1996hh: 38) conviction that “if there is no restriction of marriage laws, and if men's wallets are always full, I believe plenty of gentlemen

would like to turn forest birds into caged ones.”¹¹⁹ In her novella *The Milky Way*, the two male characters, Lao’an and Xixi, are both interested in seeking sexual variety and novelty. Their strong sex drive, their preference for a large number of sexual partners, their haste and importunateness in seeking sexual intercourse, and their avoidance of commitment all testify men’s evolutionarily predicted polygynous urges, and all repel their female partners. Lao’an says that it entails incomputable loss that a man is fastened by one wife for decades, and Xixi keeps on breaking up with his lovers, as he has no desire to get into the cage of marriage. On the other hand, all the three female characters in the novella wish to find a stable and long-lasting relationship. In post-Mao Chinese context, women can be even more discriminating and patient in seeking a consistent (provisioning) partner with the birth control policy, as their reproductive capacity is reduced to bearing only one or two children within their whole fertile time span. Meanwhile, short-term sexual relationships that save courting delays, can be all the more meaningless and disadvantageous to women, as they can spend a relatively long time to search for a better mate, and if not, may be heavily burdened by raising a child unassisted.

Evolutionary psychologists, however, may have overstressed the philandering tendency of men, as Anne Campbell (2002: 242) states. Or as Schmitt, Shackelford, and Buss (2001: 217-8) explain, their hypothesis of men’s greater proclivity toward short-term mating does not mean that all men are monolithically or constantly seeking short-term mating opportunities, or that all women are exclusively long-term maters. Short-term mating is a natural component of both men’s and women’s sexual strategies, and both sexes have evolved to pursue long-term relationships as well as brief affairs, depending on the circumstances and ecological conditions (Schmitt, Shackelford and Buss 2001: 213; Cohen and Belsky 2008). Many men, such as the third male character in Zhang’s *The Milky Way*, Bugong, would focus on a stable pair-bond, while with women, “it is definitely not the case that they by nature will not become Chen Shimeis”

119 “假如人类没有婚姻法的限制，假如男人的钱包都日日充盈，相信为数不少的先生，喜欢把林中之鸟变成笼中之鸟。”

(Zhang 1996k: 215).¹²⁰ Sarah Hrdy (1999a) provides compelling cases that deconstruct the intuitive, normative claim of sexually passive females and eager males, and proves that females are inclined to actively seek extra-pair relationships in order to acquire high quality genes, to elicit additional male protection or immediate resources, to confuse paternity and minimize the risk of infanticide by unrelated adult males, or to avoid subjecting themselves to one controlling husband.

The difference between men's and women's promiscuity arises in the adaptive benefits that accrue to them respectively. Men's short-term or promiscuous mating strategy is more strongly rooted in their desire for sexual variety, while women pursue short-term mateships to seek a "more outstanding, successful, and wealthy man" (Schmitt, Shackelford, and Buss 2001: 228; Zhang 1996k: 213).¹²¹ Cohen and Belsky's research (2008: 28, 30) reveals that both female and male mate preferences reflect a short-term strategy when resources are relatively "unavailable-unpredictable," and a long-term strategy when resources relatively "available-predictable."

Another general difference between the sexes' mating preferences lies in men's attention on women's youth and beauty and women's emphasis on men's power and provision. As Zhang (1996o: 231; 2002e: 30-1) writes, "There are subtle yet absolute distinctions in the mating criteria when the polar men and women ask each other for ingress;" "When women choose mates, the ultimate criteria are always men's prowess and provision ... The criteria men used to evaluate women are even more eternally changeless ... that is, youth and beauty."¹²² The evolutionary logic behind this sex difference is that the different resources contributed by men

120 “决不意味着女人天生同陈世美无缘。”

Chen Shimei, a proverbial literary figure in traditional Chinese dramas, ungratefully discards his previous wife and remarries the emperor's daughter, becoming a synonym for unfaithful men, love betrayers, players, heartbreakers or libertines.

121 “更出色更成功更有钱的男子。”

122 “两极的男人和女人邀请对方入侵的标准，却有许多绝对而微妙的区别；” “女人择偶时，衡量男人最终的标准始终是男性的强大和给予……男人要求女人的标准更是永远没有改变……那就是年轻和漂亮。”

(indirect resources such as protection and material resources) and women (bodily resources) to the offspring lead to the different features valued by women and men towards the opposite-sex partners. Thus men feel sexually attracted to youth and physical attractiveness that signal potential reproductive capability and genetic quality, whereas women place a relatively greater value on signs of social status and resource-generating prowess in their, often older, male partners (Eagly and Wood 1999: 415).

For men, cross-culturally, age and beauty are rated as the most important concerns, no matter whether mating is short-term or long-term, in relationships with or without interpersonal trust and emotional interdependence involved (Campbell 2002: 120). In Zhang's novel *Women on the Edge*, Zhuo'er's child-like or "cartoon-like" playfulness, curiosity or neophilia, vigor, and high-spiritedness are all youth-indicators and may form one reason why she wins in the implicit female-female competition between her and Tao Tao, the other female protagonist who is nevertheless two years younger and possesses more feminine beauty (Zhang 2006b: 287)¹²³. Neoteny in the appearance of young women advertises women's high fecundity and may promote men's "protective, supportive and monitoring tendencies" (Hopcroft 2002: 49). However, men worldwide "are more willing to make sacrifices for, invest in, and take risks for more physically attractive women" (Pratto 1996: 201). Zheng Dalei in *Women on the Edge* confesses that his reason for divorce is his ex-wife's physical unattractiveness, and Tao Tao's appeal is her being a sylph and belle.

Male preference for young and beautiful women is so blatant that it is "a male conspiracy to keep women weak and unsure by making them obsessed with their physical appearance" (Vandermassen 2005: 150). In *Women on the Edge*, elapsing youth and beauty haunts Tao Tao and plunges her into interminable panic and depression. She devotes almost all her spare time to her dressing, makeup, skin care and figure shaping, yet still feels vulnerable, even due to her unpolished nails.

Tao Tao fails to realize that it is her diligence, intelligence, and

123 "类似卡通。"

professional competence, besides her beauty and gentleness, that initially attract Zheng Dalei. Darwin (1871) argues that, compared to early humans who followed instinctive passions, modern men show greater foresight and reason in mating behaviors, and are largely attracted by the mental charms of women, by their wealth, and especially by their social position. That is, in today's society, women's mate value shifts "from pure reproductive value to a mixture of resource and reproductive value" (Low 2005: 66); women's intelligence, social status, and resource-accrual ability are of as great relevance to their reproductive fitness as their physical conditions.

Li Po in Zhang's novel *Distant Mountain, Nearby Lake* (2000) only chooses a woman who is an equal in intellectual spiritual pursuits, and Guo Lishu in Zhang's novel *The Pale Mists of Dawn* (1980) only considers Mei Mei's courtship and marries her after he knows that she is the daughter of the prefectural Party committee secretary. In the novella, *The Whither* (1981), the female protagonist has been repeatedly wronged, maltreated, and demoted during the Cultural Revolution until she is sent to a madhouse due to her honesty and unyieldingness. Her boyfriend thereupon breaks up with her, as her dire situation will implicate him and forfeit his future. In *The Right to Love* (1979), Shu Bei's ex-boyfriend discards her as her opportunity to go back to the city is rescinded due to her "bad birth," but his comes true. After he leaves her and the rural farm, he never writes her once.

Other factors that men value in selecting a partner, especially in long-term contexts, are women's kind-heartedness, meekness, humility, and weakness as indicators of their tractability and sexual loyalty, which may ensure the certainty of men's paternity, elicit their protective and supportive behaviors, and deter aggression (Hopcroft 2002: 47). Zhang (1996a: 195) writes that it is difficult for dedicated and accomplished women professionals "to seek satisfactory mates, as men would rather choose obedient, virtuous women who can provide service for them."¹²⁴ Many of her stories illustrate this tendency in the mating market:

124 "寻觅到满意的伴侣，因为男子们更愿意选择能够为他们服务的贤妻良母。"

The supereminent, talented, and highly educated Li Li in Zhang's novella *The Pagoda* (1983) unwillingly remains mateless. All men keep a respectful distance from her. One ambitious and competent male character in this novella thinks that it is a pleasure to converse with a bluestocking on poems and philosophy, but that she should definitely not be his wife, as she is more professionally successful than him. In the novella, *There Is still One Chance* (1994), the heroin, Xia Xiaomei, is slender, charming, and bright, but she displays more activeness and self-determination than the hero, Luo Xing. Thus Luo hesitates and blunders away his chance of affiliating with her. The novella writes: "Except the physical appearance, if a woman's capability and status are even just slightly higher than him, he will have one hundred question marks" (Zhang 1996z: 85).¹²⁵ Chen Xu in *The Invisible Companion* (1986) turns aggressive and much less considerate towards his wife Xiao Xiao after she gains the position at the Political Culture Office, while he is still a nameless, lowly farmer. Guo Lishu in *The Pale Mists of Dawn* (1980) will not allow his wife to enter higher education, and orders her to read some books about knitting. In the novella, *Blue Collar* (1993), the once pitiful and virtuous wife becomes repulsive for the husband as he deems that she turns into a careerist. After divorce, the third male character, Bu Gong, in *The Milky Way* vows that he will not seek a woman as strong and dominant as his ex-wife, a successful businesswoman. He doubts, when a woman "has power, can she still have womanliness?" (Zhang 1997a: 88-9).¹²⁶

In *Women on the Edge*, Zhuo'er's unruliness and profound free-will in thoughts and deeds repel and scare her ex-husband and other admirers, as women's independence may signal uncontrollability or promiscuity. Even Zhuo'er herself wonders and feels despondent that nobody dares to propose to her. Zheng Dalei chooses Tao Tao at the beginning of the story only after his careful evaluation of Tao Tao's likely controllability and fidelity. Tao's social background is plain and simple, and she is docile, soft, and compliant. This is also why Tao Tao herself intentionally lowers her ambitions and earning capacity, which she thinks might promote her

125 “除去外貌的条件，假如女人的能力和地位略略地比他强些，他都会生出一百个问号。”

126 “有了权，还会有女人味么？”

mate worth on the marriage market.

Men's disfavor and suppression of women's education and capabilities, together with women's own conscious or unconscious low self-assessment, lead to the underdevelopment and under-utilization of skills and capacities of young women – particularly in areas considered outside women's domains (Hopcroft 2002: 50). A point that Zhang repeatedly belabors is women's intentional display of a lower level of self-esteem in order to appear weak and adorable. It might be in the reproductive interests of women (and men) in the evolutionary environment (Hopcroft 2002), but is not exactly so today. Zhang (1996a: 194; 1996hh: 276) writes: "If women willingly and persistently place themselves in the position of the weaker, men will certainly always be commanding and dominating;" "They [(Women)] fail to realize that when they regard themselves as 'weak girls' and entreat for protection, they are devalued just as the old forces have expected. The direst thing is not that the society belittles women, but that women always consider themselves as the perfect weakling."¹²⁷

In women's mating preferences, evolutionary theory predicts that, first and foremost, men's attractiveness is associated with social status and resource-holding. Evolutionary psychologist David Buss's 1989 study of mate preferences in thirty-seven cultures around the world provides "unequivocal evidence that women universally place a greater premium than do men on the resource base and resource acquisition potential of a prospective mate" (Buss 1996: 307). Zhang (1996k: 216; 2002b: 87; 2002e: 30-1) also states in several texts that, throughout the history in China, women have never changed their criteria of mate choices – men's prowess and provision. Acknowledging that women's choices are social-historically context-sensitive and -specific, she writes that, in China:

In the 1950s, a woman became revolutionary as long as she married a revolutionist cadre or leader; in the 60s, she would be safe once she married a man of 'good birth' [(a worker or peasant)]; in the 70s, she

127 “如是女人甘愿持久地将自己置于弱者的位置，那么男人自然永远地居高临下；” “她们并不意识到，当她们把自己作为‘弱女子’去乞求保护的时候，她们就如同旧势力希望的那样贬值了。最可怕的不是社会轻视妇女，而是妇女总把自己当成完美的弱者。”

would have a sudden rise in social status if she married a soldier or somebody from a worker's propaganda team; in the 80s, intellectuals were sought after. Following them, woman would be highbrowed; in the 90s, seeking a wealthy man became vogue. It appears on the surface that women have constantly shifted their mate preferences. But the very core of these choices is that men ought to be powerful and able to provide social-political protection or material resources. Therefore, I feel that women's gauge of desirable men has never changed.¹²⁸

Thus Xiao Xiao in *The Invisible Companion* and Mei Mei in *The Pale Mists of Dawn* both admire and choose the heads of a group of Red Guards – ambitious, declamatory, and prestigious men – as their husbands during the Cultural Revolution. But “with the coming of the scientific age” since the beginning of 1980s (Zhang 1996bb: 36),¹²⁹ men once dazzling during the Cultural Revolution lost their halo. Cen Cen in the novella, *Northern Lights* (1981), gives up a two-floor, well-furnished villa and chooses a shabby hut, as she leaves a good-looking, caring, pragmatic, and better-off fiancée for an ordinary-looking, hapless idealist. It seems that attractive physical features, social status, and resources are not her top consideration. But the Eighties in China after the Cultural Revolution was not only a perplexed era with a belief vacuum ensuing from the collapse of Chinese Marxism and the rupture of traditional value systems, but also a passionate era paying absolute homage to idealism and enlightenment. Intellectuals, elevated as the nation's hope and its people's saviors, enjoyed the highest social prestige. Then “since the 1990s, the thought of idealism that attempts to save and reconstruct Chinese culture has been widely discredited.”¹³⁰ Nubile women on the lookout for marriage began to choose mates on the basis of men's earning capacity and professional

128 “二十世纪五十年代的妇女只要嫁一个革命领导干部，自己也就革命了；到了六十年代，只要嫁一个出身好的，自己就有了安全感；七十年代如果嫁一个军人或者是工宣队什么的，女人便是身价百倍了；八十年代知识分子开始吃香，跟了他无疑自己也就有了文化；九十年代则流行嫁大款。看起来表面上择偶的标准是在变化，但是实质上还是要求男人必须是强大的，而且他能够有条件付出给你一种外化的物质的东西，所以我觉得女人对男人的标准其实一直没有变的。”

129 “随着科学时代的到来。”

130 “进入九十年代，那种试图拯救和重建中国文化的理想主义思潮受到普遍怀疑。”

degrees (Zhang 1993d: 116).

Men's commitment is considered equally important in female choices of mates. Women generally attach great significance to a partner's reliability and single-mindedness. That women place great value on men's willingness and ability to devote themselves to long-term monogamous relationships deters men's philandering predilection and promote their desire to accumulate material and cultural resources. Buss (1996: 308) states that "men's competitive strategies and women's mate preferences coevolved. The intertwining or interplay of these coevolved mechanisms in men and women created the conditions for men to dominate in the domain of resources" and became one of the origins of patriarchy (Smuts 1995). Many men have been motivated to strive for wealth, and think that "to conquer women, they first of all need money" (Zhang 1996z: 75).¹³¹

4.4 Congruence of the sexes' mating preferences

The "evolved similarities and differences in the psychological natures of male and female sexuality lead to both sociosexual congruence and conflict between men and women" (Studd 1996: 57). This remark illustrates that there are both overlaps and differences between the sexes' mate preferences. And it is important to bear in mind that men and women may actually be more similar than different in what they are seeking in a long-term partner (Campbell 2002: 181). Similarities in mating preferences ensue from the "fundamental commonality of purpose between mates, which is – like the commonality of purpose between parent and child or other genetic relatives – ultimately traceable to correlated fitnesses" (Daly and Wilson 1996: 11), while differences result from the sexes' different investment in mating and parenting. According to evolutionary theory, the sexes converge in mating behaviors in the following aspects:

Firstly, under monogamy it pays a man as well as a woman to be choosy

131 "征服女人首先需要钱。"

in their choice of long-term partner, and they share most criteria for selecting opposite-sex mates. Men “are not uninterested in the same mate characteristics as women are; they are just slightly less preferential about them” (Pratto 1996: 201), and vice versa. For example, both men and women attach priority to the traits of kindness, emotional stability, and intelligence.

David Buss’s global study of sexual preferences finds that “‘kindness’ was the single most important feature desired in a sexual partner by both men and women in every one of the 37 cultures he studied,” ranking above intelligence, above beauty, and above status (Miller 2000: 292). Underpinning this common taste is the role of sexual choice in shaping human morality. Geoffrey Miller’s (2000) book innovatively analyses that good moral character is sexually attractive and romantically inspiring, and thus converts the apparent costs of helping others into reproductive benefits. Nepotism¹³² (kindness to blood relatives) and reciprocity (kindness to those who may reciprocate) have difficulty in explaining the (often unreciprocated) charity to non-relatives, which has been selected and evolved because of its courtship benefits. Miller’s standpoint aims to solve the evolutionary paradox and the conflict between human morality and the innate depravity implied by the selfish-gene view in modern evolutionary theory. In Miller’s (2000: 308) own words, “[n]atural selection for selfishness would be impotent against sexual selection for moral behavior.”

Following Miller’s reasoning, Zhang’s *The Pale Mists of Dawn* and *The Invisible Companion* have a similar theme that illustrates the efficient functioning of mate choices as the powerful moral filter, especially the moral power of female sexual choice, in different socio-historical contexts. Both Guo Lishuai’s overbearingness, pretense, and guile, and Chen Xu’s deceits, indolence, and weak-will overshadow their splendid achievements and estrange their wives. A man who fails to display kindness, generosity,

132 Nepotism used in evolutionary theory means the universal human pattern of favoring kin. This is different from the word’s normal usage, which, in a derogatory sense, refers to the favoritism shown or patronage granted to relatives, and implies more preferential treatment of kin than is allowed or preferred.

sympathy, warmth, and sincerity reflects his overall lack of strength, and his undesirability to women as a mate. Both the wives, Mei Mei and Xiao Xiao, in Zhang's two stories, try to avoid bodily contact and sexual intercourse with their mean and immoral husbands. Hypocrites, cowards, liars, and cheats are all sexually repulsive. Mei Mei is immersed in remorse for her mate choice, and Xiao Xiao finally opts for divorce.

The common preference of both men and women for reliability and commitment in a mate may be guided by different motivations. While a female's commitment can ensure her mate's paternity certainty, a man's single-mindedness predicts that he will focus his resources, parenting skills, and capacities on his mate and their common children. Furthermore, even though the sex differences in valuing potential mates' earning potential and physical attractiveness are robust, being rich and socially dominant and/or possessing youth and beauty increase the desirability of both sexes. It is just that control of resources is more highly valued in men than in women, while physical attractiveness more highly valued in women than in men (Roos, Rotkirch, and Haavio-Mannila 2003: 2).

Men often choose a marriage of convenience, as shown in the above-mentioned example of Guo Lishuai in Zhang's *The Pale Mists of Dawn*. Zhang's novella *The Remote Toll* (1981) tells of the phenomenon of assortative mating: Both men and women would marry according to their family's social background and their own stations; "Being socio-economically matched for marriage will remain the axiom from generation to generation" (Zhang 1981a: 98).¹³³ On the other hand, women can gain from gene-shopping as well as from resource-shopping (Marlowe 2000: 55). Handsome men, predicted from the good genes theory, are "indeed healthier, less vulnerable to disease and had fewer developmental problems in their childhood and adolescence" (Campbell 2002: 177).

Therefore, and *secondly*, both men and women employ flexible, opportunistic, and mixed mating strategies best suited to local conditions and their own attributes, just as short-term and long-term mating

133 “婚姻大事要门当户对，到哪个朝代也是这个理。”

orientations are within both sexes' repertoires. Zhang's stories all indicate that mate preferences are individually variant and circumstance-contingent, in contrast with the assumption that all humans follow identical, immutable mating strategies. Mate value can be exhibited in different qualities, and fluctuates within different historical and social contexts. Mate choices can be conditioned by the interaction of a list of factors such as the mate's romantic attachment security, personality, age and life history, ecological conditions, and, in many cultures, pressures from kin (who are, in turn, pursuing their own reproductive benefits) (Vandermassen 2005: 173-4; Cohen and Belsky 2008).

In today's society, women's mate choices are no longer restricted by their limited access to resources. A wealthy, powerful woman such as Dizong in Zhang's *The Milky Way* may think that she should have a more successful, superpowerful husband (Zhang 1997a: 104), or tends to disvalue status and income, as shown in the case of Cen Lang, an adorable, vibrant young university graduate and a brave, high-minded nonconformist, in the series *Summer* (1979), *Go far* (1980), and *The Winter without Snow* (1981) by Zhang. Cen Lang has a politically influential father and a committed, promising, and similarly well-born boyfriend, but says farewell to both and devotes herself to the education of village children. Moreover, a woman can modify the criteria for her mate choices over her single life span. In *Women on the Edge*, Tao Tao's dramatic change into an indiscriminate mate-chooser at the end of the story demonstrates that individuals' evolved sexual natures are constantly and plastically adjustable to varying circumstances (Gowaty 2003, 909-10).

Thirdly, men and women mutually and actively exploit each other's desires to actualize their mate preferences and reproductive fitness. Kenrick, Trost, and Sheets's (1996) article emphasizes that neither men nor women are passive pawns or victims in the mating game, as well as in the controversial trophy wives phenomenon, in which powerful, older men remarry younger, more attractive, and lower-status women. The widely accepted view related to the trophy wives phenomenon tends to ignore the role of female choice in mating relationships, and inadvertently presents a

regressive depiction of women as helpless victims in the hands of men. An evolutionary approach, on the other hand, focuses on female choice as one of the primary mechanisms driving sex differences in mate choices, and affirms that women are not manipulated, controlled, and exploited by the whims and fancies of forceful, resource-rich men.

In the competitive market-place, both men and women endeavor to increase their attractiveness to the opposite sex. Tao Tao in Zhang's novel *Women on the Edge* actively and strenuously promotes her own social and financial status, and maintains her physical beauty to appeal to high-status, successful men as a trophy wife. While women generally trade their "youth and beauty – typical weapons of intrasexual female competition" – for high-status men, men use their social status and wealth – "typical weapons of intrasexual male competition" – to get desirable young women: Women, as well as men, employ their high mate value for acquiring a trophy mate (Vandermassen 2005: 174). Sexual attractions across age and power lines are common mating strategies exerted by men and women due to the operation of both male choice and female choice (Kenrick, Trost, and Sheets 1996: 48). Similar patterns of age difference and of women trading their youth and attractiveness for power in a mate are found throughout the world and throughout history, and are very likely due to sexual selection, not merely patriarchal constraints (Vandermassen 2005: 180). As Zhang (1996hh: 39) writes, "Seduction, like business, is bidirectional, balanced in supply and demand, and mutually beneficial."¹³⁴

In certain cases of sexual harassment,¹³⁵ which have conventionally been interpreted as unwanted sexual attention or sexual aggression initiated by

134 “诱惑是双向的，如同生意，有求有供，互利互惠。”

135 Michael Studd (1996: 59, 61, 82; Brüne 2003) states that sexual harassment is “only one point along a continuum of sociosexual interactions between men and women, ranging from appreciated, mutual, and consensual sexual interest (e.g., romance) to unwanted, one-sided, and nonconsensual sexual advances” (e.g., sexual assault or rape). Behind the one-sided sociosexual interactions, there are evolved psychological mechanisms that were selected in ancestral environments guiding “male motivation to strive for sexual access to females” and motivating female negative responses in order to minimize “the potential costs of reproductively disadvantageous sexual relationships.” Nonconsensual sexual advances by males are better explained as outcomes of conflicting sexual desires and interests between men and women. For example, “men have a

male offenders exercising patriarchal power to oppress and subordinate women, an evolutionary lens illuminates that women are not always victimized, but “should ... assume some responsibility” in those nonconsensual sociosexual interactions with men (Studd 1996: 85; Studd and Gattiker 1991; Brase and Miller 2001; Colarelli and Haaland 2002). Michael Tobler, Ingo Schlupp, and Martin Plath’s (2011) research finds that female livebearing fishes’ foraging and feeding behaviors can be simultaneously influenced by male sexual harassment and active female choice. William Parish, Aniruddha Das, and Edward Laumann’s (2006: 411) article reveals that the most striking result of their research that has received the least attention is “the [(male)] perpetrator’s perception of ‘benefit,’ deriving from the [(female)] victim’s inadvertent ‘signaling’.” Yet to look at women’s behaviors in these cases of sexual harassment does not at all intend to ignore, accept, justify, explain away or condone male violence to women, or to lay the blame on women for male violence.

For sure, women are victims of any coercive, non-consenting sexual approaches. Even such a non-traditional woman like Zhuo’er in Zhang’s *Women on the Edge* is severely injured by her supervisor’s sexual advance and the exposure of this event. She thereafter voluntarily quits her job and takes much effort to release her feelings of humiliation, grievance, and resentment. But Zhuo’er, a woman whom Zhang intentionally depicts as the spearhead who has transcended the hackneyed rules of mating games, is nevertheless obviously biased in her perceptions of different men’s advances. She selectively reacts to (rejects or accepts) the uninvited sexual approaches by the three unmated men who have different institutional power and occupational status. Moreover, she gives off, wittingly and unwittingly, friendly or sexual signals over and over again; for example, giving gifts of two theater tickets, red roses, and red beans (traditional tokens of love). Therefore her supervisor feels chagrined at her rejection: “Didn’t you often get a rise out of me? So I misunderstood you ...” Another man also complains: “I thought that bunch of red roses of yours

greater interest than women in nonselective sexuality (e.g., short-term, low-cost, and potentially coercive sexual opportunities), while women have a greater desire than men to engage in selective sexuality (i.e., long-term sexual relationships with greater investment and commitment by partners).”

today spoke for you” (Zhang 2006b: 204, 299, ellipsis in original).¹³⁶ They interpret Zhuo'er's friendly expressions as seductive, flirtatious, and purposeful (to suggest a romantic relationship or to exchange sex for occupational gains). In these cases of sexual harassment, repeated and prolonged exposure to the stimulations provided by a sexually available woman of reproductive age quickly motivates them to embark upon sexual advances, whether appreciated or not (Studd 1996: 72).

Gender roles can also be reversed in many cases of sexual harassment, which, from an evolutionary perspective, are perceived as a two-way system that addresses the agency and responsibility of both the harassers and the harassed. Zhang (2006b: 6; 2007m: 281-2) writes that, nowadays, women are no longer passive victims, but take the initiative in most of the cases of sexual temptation or sexual seduction in China, purposefully aiming at “their various demands from men.”¹³⁷ Zhang (2006b: 206-7) writes, in concurrence with the statements by evolutionary scholars:

Sexual harassment, after all, results from sheer sex, and sex in the body's category is innocent. Sexual harassment is also tinged with some indiscriminate desires. Dangerous expenses are hidden in the advances that go beyond rationality. Then what about sexual seduction? Women's seducing of men can nevertheless proceed smoothly – out of sober senses, out of interests, and out of barefaced purposes ... Women ... exchange what they want with their bodies. When women make a massive assault on the problem of sexual harassment, have they ever faced the tricks habitually used by women in sexual seduction?¹³⁸

These statements by Zhang are not obviously feminist, even anti-feminist. They seem to be excusing sexual harassment, which no version of

136 “平时你不是老招惹我么？原来是我误会了……。”“我以为，你今天那束红玫瑰，已经替你把话说了。”

137 “她们对男人的各种需求。”

138 “性骚扰毕竟是出于单纯的性，性在身体的范畴内是无辜的，性骚扰还带有那么一点饥不择食的渴望，丧失理性的冒犯中暗藏着危险的代价；而性诱惑呢？女人对男人的性引诱，却能够畅通无阻——出于理智、出于利益、出于赤裸裸的目的……女人……用身体换回她想要的东西。当性骚扰作为一个问题被女人们大张挞伐的同时，女人可曾正视过性诱惑那种女性惯用的伎俩呢？”

feminism would accept. Zhang actually intends to stress (or overstress) female agency in sexual seduction while, inadvertently, whitewashes and dodges male violence involved in sexual harassment. She deplores the fact that sexual seduction must be women's last resort, but points out that it also "highlights a female mind that has an identity of its own, instead of merely being the product of patriarchal oppression" (Vandermassen 2005: 180-1). Studd (1996: 85) concludes that "(1) women do have an evolved motivation under appropriate circumstances to seek out and initiate sexual and romantic relationships with target males ... as well as evolved psychological reasons to respond negatively to unwanted sexual attention, and (2) men have likely evolved sexual motivation and behavioral responses that may lead to overreaction to (or misperception of) female sexual signals." The second conclusion means that exercise of power in certain cases of sexual harassment is not harassers' motivation or an end to maintain patriarchal institutions and men's control of women (see, for example, Hearn 1998), but a tool used by men instrumentally to achieve their sexual goals.

These two points summarized by Studd should not be considered as a justification of men's sexual violence to (known) women. Studd does not intend to prove that it is all because of a woman's perceived "provocation" of the man through her sexual appeal or not conforming to a deferential and passive sexual partner that the violent incident occurs (Hearn 1998: 126-7). Furthermore, there is another point worth reiterating: To argue that there is a biological cause of the violence should not lead to the assumption or apprehension that there is biological inevitability to the violence – the biological determinist view. Jerome Barkow (2006: 15) writes that "[e]volutionists often find it difficult to convince critics that their accounts are in no way exculpatory": If an evolutionary perspective implies that males use violence including rape to gain reproductive advantage, and have been selected to do so, it is more often than not misinterpreted as another instance of seeking to excuse male criminal behavior "on the grounds that it is a fault of the body, a failing, and that the mind, that impalpable Cartesian essence, cannot be expected to control so imperfect a body."

Jeff Hearn (1998: 19-20; Hearn and Mckie 2010: 138, italics in original) states that violence should be viewed from various different standpoints of the violated, the violator, those dealing with violence, and those who observe violence, and that clearly there is “the need for social *and* biological explanations” of men’s violence to women,” but “biological or psychological explanations generally do not address the interrelations of body and society, and of mind, body and society.” Thus a full, vertically integrated explication of the relationships between human evolved psychology, societies, and socioeconomic systems is called upon (Barkow 2006: 36). In the review article that provides an overview of the perplexing nature of sexual harassment and the various concerns and angles surrounding the topic, Afroditi Pina, Theresa Gannon, and Benjamin Saunders (2009) affirm that there is no single cause of sexual harassment. They urge “more sophisticated multifactorial theories which integrate individual, sociocultural, biological, and organizational factors.”

A vertical integration model emphasizes a comprehensive and systematic search for compatibilities among the multiple levels of explanation required to account for the complexities of human social life including male (sexual) violence to women, forsaking the dated dichotomies such as nature versus nurture, mind versus body, and culture versus biology (Barkow 2006: 29). This compatibility and complementarity rule allows for a full-scale of understanding of violence, as it recognizes that violence can be not only an interpersonal or structural intervention, but also the result of the trigger of an internal presence or potential, synthesizing societal and personal, external contextual/ situational and internal gender-based etiologies.

4.5 Are women dependent?

At the same time when Zhang (1996k: 217; 2002e: 36) states that women “need men’s strength and care – it is decided by the whole physiological structure,” she laments that “from slavery societies to feudal societies,

from the East to the West, women who are dependent on men have various reasons and excuses. You don't know why on earth women are dependent, but the dependency is everlasting.”¹³⁹ By contrast, she genuinely appreciates the total independence of female tigers, who always live on their own, and rear and take care of their young alone (Zhang 2007m: 73-4).

From an evolutionary perspective, women's financial dependency and sexual modesty are only later “acquisitions in the hominid line (learned, evolved, or both) rather than essential features of female nature” (Hrdy 1999a: xxvi). The premise that females are by nature financially, sexually, and mentally reliant and submissive and should be protected and provided for, is untenable. In all nonhuman primates and during most of human evolution, females have done almost all the childcare, with very little assistance from males, which was not even a necessity (Miller 2000: 189), although due to the heavy burdens and encumbrance of pregnancy, childbirth, and subsequent extended periods of lactation and child-rearing, male protection and help prove to be an asset in survival and reproduction. Therefore women “have inherited a rich set of mental and physical adaptations fully sufficient to nurture their offspring” alone (Miller 2000: 189). Since the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry, however, women were restricted to a small plot of land used for growing or grazing, and lost the ability to forage self-sufficiently as in the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, while men increasingly accumulated and gained control over resources that women needed in order to survive and reproduce (Campbell 2002: 246). Male support and provision made it costly for women to stand up against male domination.

Furthermore, the rise of patrilocal postmarital residence in the course of history meant that women transfer from their natal group at marriage to reside with their husband's kin and lost the advantages of living with genetic relatives (Campbell 2002: 116). Barbara Smuts (1995; Campbell 1999: 211) offers an account of the possible evolutionary genesis of

139 “需要男性的温情，需要男性的力量，这是由整个生理结构决定的。”“从奴隶社会到封建社会，从东方到西方，依赖于男人生存的女人一直具有各种理由和借口。你不知道女人究竟因什么而依赖，但依赖却是永远的。”

patriarchy, which begins with the argument that female exogamy reduced female kin ties and alliances that had protected and supported them, and consequently deprived them of their ability to resist male coercion and aggression. Wife beating and abuse in Zhima's and Laidi's family, described in Zhang's novellas *Zhima* and *An Hourly Worker*, take place in rural China, a patrilocal society. The presence of kin apparently protects a woman from male or in-laws' violence, while patrilocal residence renders women vulnerable. On the contrary, by remaining among their patrilineal kin, men could form alliances much more easily and cohesively, and thus were able to control, as well as protect, women, and coerce other groups' men.

“Men's capacity to set aside inter-individual conflict over reproductive opportunities” in order to sustain intrasexual alliances also contrasted vividly with the weak female-female coalitions (Campbell 2002: 143). Ruling males were able to forgo polygyny and sacrifice their mating privileges in order to enforce sexual equality among men, pacify low-ranking men, control male-male competition and aggression, and cement male within-group solidarity (Campbell 2002: 249). Viewed in this light, official monogamous mating systems may do less to protect the interests of women than to reflect an agreement among cooperating men about their mating opportunities, their “possession” of particular women, and their rights to coerce their own women with reduced interference by other men (Smuts 1996: 240; Hurley 2002: 13).

Male power over women ultimately revolves around male control of female sexuality, which has been “an abiding feature of human history” stemming from female internal fertilization and concealed ovulation, and male uncertainty of paternity (Smuts 1995: 2; Campbell 2002: 216). Male sexual proprietariness, mate-guarding, sexual jealousy, and their extensive precautions to prevent women from breaching chastity, such as claustration, veiling, footbinding, and infibulation, are all male responses to the problem of misattributed parenthood. Sexual control and coercion lie at the core of patriarchy too (Smuts 1995: 22). Due to male control of resources and high paternal investment, men became increasingly

concerned with monitoring women's sexuality to guarantee their undisputed parenthood and their property to be passed on to their own descendants, that is, to ensure the purity of patrilineal continuity (Campbell 2002: 164). Women were encouraged to be sexually passive and chaste, would be severely punished and even murdered for suspected or real promiscuity and adultery, and thus lost the assertive sexual legacy inherited from their primate predecessors (Gowaty 2003: 912).

Female complicity has been “another critical factor in the evolution of patriarchy: Often females could better pursue their material and reproductive interests by competing with other females and allying with males than by allying with other females” (Vandermassen 2005: 187). Among the six important features in the evolution of patriarchy hypothesized by Barbara Smuts, one is that “female reproductive strategies often supported aspects of patriarchy” (Smuts 1995: 19). With the evolution of language, patriarchal arrangements and ideology further became pervasive and “invisible constraints that creep inside human imaginations and insinuate themselves into the way men and women conceptualize who they are” and how they behave to be accustomed to the perquisites of patriarchy (Smuts 1995; Hrdy 1999b: 258). Zhang (1996: 43) also asserts that “misery and distress are not all in men's fault.”¹⁴⁰

All in all, women were eventually financially, sexually, and ideologically disempowered due to female dispersal away from kin, male monopolization of productive resources, well-developed male political alliances, male control of female sexuality, and women's own collusion. These factors resulted in inequalities in male wealth and power, forced women into an entirely new kind of dependency, and procured women's preferences for resource-holding and patronizing men (Campbell 2002: 246). Women's marrying for wealth and being dependent are therefore an artifact of patriarchal societies and their aftermath, “the outcome of ‘patriarchal constraints’ on female reproductive options” (Hrdy 1999a: xxvi).

140 “苦难不全是男人造成的。”

Nowadays, plenty of women, like their sisters in hunter-gatherer societies and unlike those under patriarchy in the past ten thousand years, again become economically independent and self-sufficient, even though “the inflexible labour arrangements ... make it difficult for a woman to simultaneously rear children and engage in full-time labour” (Campbell 2002: 182). Significant maternal contribution to subsistence with the important implications of the separation of women’s sexuality from their reproductive function and women’s options of flexible residence patterns – patrilocal, matrilocal, bilocal (opportunistically shuttling between kin of either partner), neolocal (newly married couples construct their own nuclear families and set up separate residences independent of either spouse’s parents), or living alone (Hrdy 1999a: xxv; 1999b: 102) – explain why the rural women in China such as Zhima and Laidi can eventually rid themselves of domestic violence and gain power over other family members. After Zhima goes to work in the city, her husband does not lay a finger on her any more, and learns to love her dearly. Laidi becomes the head of her family, can decide upon every issue in the family, and assigns the childcare task to her husband. Moreover, “the change of modern Chinese women’s passivity to activity in sexuality is an important mark of women’s emancipation. ... It leads to freedom in loving and sexual relationships ... and excludes the constraints of marriage and pecuniary dealings” (Zhang 2009b: 265).¹⁴¹

The evolutionary answers to Zhang’s puzzle about women’s persistent dependence are that women’s deference to men has not manifested itself during all of human history, that patriarchy should be “a thing of the past” (Fruehwald 2011: 30), and that a woman’s vulnerability or autonomy depends on her direct control of physical resources, the availability of support from her kin and allies, her sexual freedom, and her own mentality. Understanding mate selection and gender inequality through an evolutionary filter helps us see that, far from being immutable and inevitable, male coercion and female suppression are conditional and dependent on circumstances.

141 “现代的中国女人在性爱上从被动转向主动，恰恰是女性解放的一个重要标志。……产生了自由的性关系，而不再需要勉强的婚姻来实现……排除了金钱交易的情爱自由。”

At present, some women (such as Zhuo'er and her fellows) already gain autonomy in finance, sexuality, and reproduction, some women (such as Zhima and Laidi) are striving for financial sufficiency, some women (such as Xiao Xiao and Mei Mei) are financially self-reliant but still sexually or mentally dependent on their male counterparts, while other women (such as Tao Tao) willingly connive at and cooperate in the widespread practice of serial monogamy – social monogamy with remarriage(s), “a form of sexual inequality that is equivalent to polygamy, or worse” where one male monopolizes the reproductive years of more than one female in a series instead of simultaneously (Hurley 2002: 8, 15).

This coexistence of different phenomena explains that changes are ongoing, yet the forces producing patriarchy are still at work, and both sexes contribute to its lingering and persistence (Vandermassen 2005: 189). It is “of no use to condemn only men,” as Zhang (1996d: 193) writes.¹⁴² When Zhang repeatedly deplores women’s continued dependence in today’s time, she and evolutionary theorists converge at the point that analysis of “the evolution of gender inequality in humans points directly to the essential counterstrategies that women must develop in order to reduce gender inequality” (Smuts 1995: 22), and that “women’s emancipation depends essentially on women’s growth and strengthening themselves” (Zhang 2004: 285).¹⁴³

4.6 Discussion

Predicted from a Darwinian framework, men are, on average, expected to be attracted to youth and beauty, which are important markers of fertility, to be more actively seeking short-term mates, and to have a greater desire for sexual variety than women, while women generally emphasize committed relationships and paternal investment as a context for sexuality (Vandermassen 2004: 19-20).

142 “一味谴责男人是无济于事的。”

143 “女性解放在本质上取决于女性的成长壮大。”

The evolutionary viewpoint has often been rejected as politically unacceptable by many feminists. Even Zhang who has much in common with evolutionary insights, morally disproves women's preference and competition for well-resourced men. She (2001h: 45) thinks that it is rather utilitarian that women weigh men's value according to men's current control of social or material resources. If a man's potential is oppressed or unfulfilled, or his talent does not bring immediate rewards or social recognition, he will then be disregarded. "Mate choice is intrinsically discriminatory and judgmental, built to rank potential mates by reducing their rich subjectivity to a crass list of physical, mental, and social features," and paying the most attention to the most striking fitness indicators, such as male display of monetary wealth and female display of physical attractiveness (Miller 2000: 432). Zhang states that this is really not recommendable, and that women should overcome this pragmatism and short-sightedness.

But as I have mentioned several times, evolutionary theory is descriptive, and not prescriptive. It is critical to separate evolutionary predictions from our moral judgment. *Secondly*, evolutionary theorists do not assume that human beings or any other species "run around with the conscious goal of trying to optimize their reproductive choices," as I also mentioned in the introduction. *Thirdly*, there are also evolved cognitive and affective mechanisms that influence mate choices (Kenrick, Trost, and Sheets 1996: 46). Cohen and Belsky's (2008) research examines and calls for more attention to the study of how romantic attachment security or insecurity relates to human mating preferences. *Fourthly*, both men and women possess a diverse range of mating and reproductive strategies; fitness indicators are various and manifest themselves both differently and similarly in men and women.

Fifthly, though the sexes' different mate preferences and reproductive strategies have ultimately led to the rise of patriarchy, this does not imply that these strategies, or the social systems they produced, are optimal, or that men are inherently dominant and women inherently submissive and

inferior. Social relations between men and women are not direct or inevitable consequences of genetically determined differences in the physical and psychological natures of the sexes, but conditional and contingent on circumstances. Tracing our evolutionary history reveals that we are not locked into a pattern of male dominance over women, which was only a later, recent evolution and is passing into a bygone era. Different male and female reproductive strategies and counterstrategies coevolve in dynamic interactions (Smuts 1995: 21). There has to be equilibrium in one way or another due to the counterbalancing forces of male and female choice, and changes are dynamically ongoing. Furthermore, while sexual control and sexual coercion lie at the core of patriarchy, men and women have shared in creating a patriarchal society. So, both of them are responsible for eliminating the subtle or conspicuous gender inequalities in today's modern society.

Whereas feminists have been reluctant to accept these sex differences in mating preferences for resources and physical beauty (as well as to admit women's responsibility in all sociosexual interactions with men), a better understanding of evolved human nature and its role in sexual conflicts may assist the feminist agenda for changes. On the other hand, feminist concerns can help us argue and judge what kinds of fitness indicators we should keep or encourage in our societies.

Reproduction, Kinship, and Violence during the Cultural Revolution

5.1 Introduction

The Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China was a socio-political movement in which violence swept the whole country for one decade from 1966 through 1976. The movement's alleged aim was to enforce socialism in the country by removing capitalist and traditional cultural elements from the society. In 1966 and 1967, the Red Guards,¹⁴⁴ mostly high school and university students, were mobilized by Mao to start a mass movement, which directly facilitated the spread of the Cultural Revolution across the country and violent factional struggles into all walks of life. In 1968, the Down to the Countryside Movement¹⁴⁵ began, tens of millions of urban youth (also called young intellectuals or re-educated youth)¹⁴⁶ were transferred to the countryside and mountainous areas to receive "re-education" from peasants, which was actually a makeshift solution to the problem of those high school students' employment, as the educational system collapsed and the national economy stagnated (Zhang 2007a: 5). It was a decade of radical upheaval and thorough reversal, with the forced plebeianization of the bourgeois, the roaring uplift of the proletariat, the kenosis of gods, and the extremism of Mao's personality cult. Millions of people were persecuted and suffered incessant interrogation, imprisonment, outrageous insults, physical harassment, mental torture, and seizure of property. Historical relics were destroyed, and cultural and religious sites ransacked.

Zhang Kangkang stopped her schooling in 1966 when the Cultural

144 红卫兵。

145 上山下乡运动。

146 知识青年 or 知青。

Revolution started. She went to the Great Northern Wilderness in 1969 and worked on a desolate farm for eight years. Having been an urban youth and writing extensively about the Cultural Revolution, she is often labeled an “urban youth writer.”¹⁴⁷ Focusing on Zhang’s “urban youth works” including the novels, *White Poppies* (1980), *The Peony Garden* (1980), *The Spirit of Fire* (1981), *The Soul of the Nation* (1982), *The Pagoda* (1983), *The Invisible Companion* (1986), *Never Confess* (1987), *Cruelty* (1995), *Scarlet Cinnabar* (1995), *Distant Mountain, Nearby Lake* (2000), *Please Take me along with You* (2003), and *A Tree with Soft and Floury Fruits* (2007), reminiscences, *Who Dares to Question Himself/Herself: My Life Notes* (2007), and essays, this chapter addresses the outburst of violence during the Cultural Revolution and highlights the following two points: the outburst of violence during the Cultural Revolution due to the violation of women’s and men’s reproductive opportunities and rights, and due to the effects of the reversion of the principle of nepotism¹⁴⁸ on both individual- and group-level human sociality.¹⁴⁹

5.2 Reproduction and violence

The bygones and trauma of the Cultural Revolution have become numerous shrapnel embedded in Zhang’s body and soul. What she does in her works is to tear out those fragments along with blood and flesh (Zhang 2007a: 1). She reveals, as evolutionary theory does, that both men and women engage in violence to attain social status and culturally valued resources, to attract desirable mates, to provide for offspring, and, first of

147 Zhang herself thinks that this is an embarrassing title for her, because, as she (2007a: 283) says, “I’m ... no longer an urban youth writer, but a composer whose ultimate concern is to attend to human nature,” and “my ‘urban youth works’ do not occupy an important position in my oeuvre.” (“我……早已不再是知青作家，而是一个以人性关注为终极关怀的写作者；”“我的‘知青小说’在我的全部作品中，并不占有重要位置。”)

148 Nepotism, in evolutionary theory, means the universal human pattern of favoring kin, as mentioned in Chapter 4 (see footnote 129).

149 This chapter does not address men’s and women’s violence involved in mate-guarding, which is also directly linked with one’s reproductive interests (see, for example, Buss 2002; Campbell 2006).

all, to survive during the Cultural Revolution: Violence becomes an effective, even indispensable, way to survive and reproduce.

5.2.1 Men's violence and social dominance

Kruger and Fitzgerald (2012: 1, see also Geary 1998: 318, Campbell 2002) writes that “[a]ggression and violence are common elements of male mating competition across animal species,” and that “[i]n humans, peak rates of violence and homicide occur as males reach reproductive maturity and contest directly for mates, as well as for the social status and resources that facilitate attraction of prospective partners.” As women invest more heavily in offspring, they become the limited resource for reproduction, and men seeking sexual access to women compete for them more intensely than the other way around (Trivers 1972; Buss 1996: 302). “For many species of primate, including humans in many contexts, males compete by means of physical attack and physical threat to establish social dominance over other males. The position within the resulting dominance hierarchy oftentimes has rather dramatic reproductive consequences for individual males” (Geary 1998: 9). Hence sexual selection has imposed powerful pressures selecting for aggressiveness, strength, and size among males (Hrdy 1999a: 23). Evolutionary theory furthermore indicates that the fundamental motivation of human beings throughout the world is to achieve some level of control over the social, biological, and physical resources that support survival and reproduction (Geary 1998: 161).

Zhang (2007o: 53) also says that all the animals on the Earth inherently adore the stronger and strive to be the stronger themselves; “this is irreproachable.”¹⁵⁰ In an essay about a tiger preserve, she (2007o: 79-80) describes that wild tigers by nature will turn hostile, fight ferociously, and kill each other to vie for domains, food, and females. She further states (2003: 38, 58) that “no matter if it is among human beings or wild animals, the defeat and conquering of another life is life itself, which is worth admiring and eulogizing,” and that the history of human civilization is carried forward in blood, violence, and warfare.¹⁵¹

150 “这本无可非议。”

151 “无论人类还是猛兽，一种生命对另一种生命的吞噬或战胜，都是值得赞叹和讴歌的生命本身。”

Zhang, however, in no sense tries to approve of or promote violence involved in male-male competition, neither does evolutionary theory. Scientific theories do not dictate human values and also cannot be used and misinterpreted to rationalize what we human beings deem as undesirable, such as the evolutionary assertion that males are biologically destined to fight and compete with each other for social status in order to enhance their reproductive success. But scientific theories can cast new light on ethical issues. Male-male competition need not be expressed physically. From a sexual selection viewpoint, moral philosophy, religions, and political theory have mostly been attempts to shift human male sexual competitiveness from physical violence to peaceful accumulations of wealth and status (Miller 2000: 428).

In my reading, what Zhang intends to reveal in her works is that, during the Cultural Revolution, this process was exactly reversed. Social and cultural factors during the Cultural Revolution failed to provide any alternative means of competition among men to make themselves more attractive in the mating market. Men, especially those young men who were in the initial mate-finding phase of the lifespan in which intrasexual competition tended to be the most intense (Geary 1998: 324), were unable to accumulate culturally valued resources by, for example, legally obtaining an education and later through striving for occupational success. They could only resort to blatant assaults, physical combat, and rough-and-tumble that may be used to achieve a reputation in the community. The level of violence in the society was raised to the extreme.

Zhang's *The Invisible Companion* (1986)¹⁵² is a novel representatively

152 As stated earlier in Chapter 3, *The Invisible Companion* is not autobiographical, but the outline of the story basically corresponds to Zhang's own life experiences: A nineteen-year-old girl goes to the Great Northern Wilderness during the Cultural Revolution, marries an urban youth who is also from Hangzhou, bears a child, and they soon divorce.

Zhang (1996e: 367; 2002c: 74) herself states that this novel "definitely has no intention of reflecting the disasters of the Cultural Revolution, re-presenting urban youth life in the Great Northern Wilderness, or probing into the moral issues of love and marriage." By using the title "The Invisible Companion," she aims to convey the theme that everybody has an invisible and irrational self hiding under the surface of the rational self and

relating this passive choice of young men in male-male competition during the Cultural Revolution. The male protagonist, Chen Xu, brilliant, charismatic, and ambitious, scores full marks in every subject and always comes out top in sports and mathematics. If it were not for the occurrence of the Cultural Revolution, he would be the chairman of the student union at a famous university in Beijing. But the whole educational system has collapsed; teachers have been beaten down, including his respectful teacher Jin who delivered the stipend to his home in a storm with an umbrella shredded by the typhoon and whose blood floats on the whole surface of the pond due to the Red Guards' beating and torment. All Chen Xu's wonders at school have been drowned in the numerous red flags since 1966. He becomes the head of a group of Red Guards at the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution when he can still use his intelligence to draft posters and edit the Red Guards newspaper.

After Chen Xu is dispatched to the desolate State Farm – used to be a work farm for prisoners, there is no scope for him to put all of his ambitions, charisma, capacity, talent, and learning to good use. Every day and night when he is dreaming of the recurrence of his once-splendid achievements and fame, what he has to face in real life are onerous farm work, crude and foul-mouthed officials, extreme scarcity of both food and cultural activities, vulgarity and poverty, lynch and demagoguery, too frequent public criticism and self-criticism, xenophobia and factionalism, dogmatism and rough luck. Even his “good birth” and class background – three generations of workers – does not counterbalance the whole hostile social environment. Only his eloquence and acute remarks have helped him several times to evade assaults and animadversion and to impress Xiao Xiao, a fair nineteen-year-old woman who goes to the Farm with him, becomes his wife but soon leaves him. While gaining some level of control over the dynamics of social discourse with his speechcraft does provide survival and reproductive benefits, on the Farm, which is controlled by perverse political ideology and ill-mannered officials, both survival and reproduction rights are basically violated or deprived (Zhang

controlled by the subconscious. (“决不是一部旨在反映‘文革’十年灾祸的作品，也无意再现北大荒的知青生活，更不想探讨爱情与婚姻的道德观念。”)

1996a: 22, 75, 77, 256).

Chen Xu feels “double-crossed and tricked” and cannot resign himself to the setback. But what these young men including him can do to assure social standing, strive for dominance, and claim and retain mates is to instigate fights, publically display competitive risk-taking skills, deceive, swindle, filch, drink, and gamble (Zhang 1996a: 259).¹⁵³ The level of male violence is highly increased, as those are the main, if not only, ways to attain cultural success. “This society has provided far too scarce opportunities for us urban youth. If his intelligence had somewhere to be put to good use, maybe he would not have needed to search for his way out or attain a state of mental balance by ruining others,” by engaging in internecine struggles, and by unrighteously scrambling for power and profit, as Zhang (2007a: 93) analyzes the motivation of one urban youth who has repeatedly tried to derogate her in real life.¹⁵⁴

To defeat and get rid of one competitor, Chen Xu in *The Invisible Companion* again and again incites his partners to beat up the competitor who consequently becomes a cripple for life, returns to the hometown and leaves the newly-promoted position vacant. Conflicts among men on the Farm, like everywhere else, are largely over the establishment of dominance and attainment of culturally valued resources, but what is particular about these conflicts on this Farm is that they are solved mainly by physical violence. To snatch some coal, a resource that is really scant, everybody is “ready for combat at any time” after getting the information that the truck will arrive with coal, and then fights “a horrifying battle.” If people fail to snatch any, they will have to steal (Zhang 2007a: 237).¹⁵⁵ Fighting with and getting wounded by farming tools such as spades, rakes,

153 “让人骗苦了，骗够了。”

154 “这个社会给我们知青提供的机会实在是太稀缺了。若是他的那些才华也有施展的去处，也许他就不需要依靠诋毁别人来谋求出路，求得心理平衡了。”

Zhang, however, by no means intends to lay all the blame on the society, the history or the government policy. In many works, she painstakingly tries to introspect and expose every individual urban youth's, including her own, responsibility for the decade of tragedy and violence.

155 “人人处于一级战备状态；” “一场惊心动魄的抢煤大战。”

sickles, and pickaxes can occur at any moment and for any petty reason (Zhang 1996a: 9, 99, 295, 305).

Chen Xu's motivation to compete and swindle material resources is implicitly yet directly related to his reproductive interests – to attract and keep Xiao Xiao and to provide for their son. Xiao Xiao is a nineteen-year-old woman with “natural and unfeigned beauty” that can forever make him catch his breath in admiration. He “would never let anyone else get her” (Zhang 1996a: 35, 104).¹⁵⁶ Once when Xiao Xiao questions him why he incites fights or cheats, he says impassively:

Because it's necessary. We had to show everybody on this Farm that we're not going to be pushed around! ...

Silly girl, what do you think it was for? ... You are mine ... (Zhang 1996a: 19, last ellipsis in original)¹⁵⁷

Later he answers himself: “For fighting? For the big movement of criticism? For bearing children?” (Zhang 1996a: 42).¹⁵⁸ Obviously, these reasons refer to, correspondingly, male-male competition (physically), social/political status, and reproductive success.

While the root of all Chen Xu's status-striving efforts and aggression lies in his preoccupation with mating, all his struggling is in vain. After losing the last chance to revive his failed career, in complete despair, he cannot go home to face Xiao Xiao but succumbs to drink, over and over again, slacking off at work or just skipping work altogether. In order to hand over the full monthly wage to his wife as usual, he cheats another urban youth out of his money (Zhang 1996a: 218-9, 224). Exploiting others and opting for the short-term benefits of lying and cheating repeatedly, he is a “secondary psychopath,” as categorized by Campbell (2002: 296-7):

156 “没有任何装饰和做作的美；” “他决不会让别人来得到她。”

157 “因为需要。要让全分场的人都晓得，我们不是好欺负的！……

傻姑娘，你说是为什么？……你是我的……”

158 “为打仗？为大批判？为生儿育女？”

“Adverse developmental and environmental factors trigger the use of a ‘cheating’ strategy to others. ... They [(Cheaters)] experience impoverished environments with high competition for scarce resources. Although they experience the normal ranges of fear and empathy [and even guilt], they adopt an exploitative response to others because they are unable to compete in the legitimate economic market-place ... [I]t represents a response to family stress, competitive handicapping and inadequate economic resources.”

In the end, Xiao Xiao can no longer tolerate Chen Xu’s lies and weak willpower. Realizing this, Chen Xu gives her up under dispassionate consideration, though he is suffering bitterly. He then turns to cling to his son, an unplanned, too-early arrival, yet wholeheartedly loved by him. He agrees to divorce only on the condition that he has the son. Even before their divorce, he has already adopted a high paternal-investment reproductive strategy after he finally withdraws from the vehement male-male competition for political status. He is excited and nervous to be a novice father, and in total bliss when a boy comes into the world. He rushes about restlessly, washing diapers, lighting the stove, cooking, carrying water, chopping firewood, and pilfering some coal like a bandit (Zhang 1996a: 186-7).

However, without enough resources that come with social dominance, his ability to be a parent and invest in his child is dramatically reduced. He cannot even provide enough food for the new mother, though he himself only lives on a few roast potatoes soaking in soy sauce day after day in order to save more and better food for her and for the baby. Neither does he have money to buy infant formula milk, which they need since unfortunately there is no mother’s milk. He has “no choice but to send the boy away” (Zhang 1996a: 188, 203, 236).¹⁵⁹

Competing and fighting for social status and resources is an adaptive male reproductive strategy, as socially dominant men or men with material wealth can more easily attract or claim desirable mates and better provide

159 “除了把儿子送走这唯一的出路外，真的再无别样选择。”

for their children. As to Chen Xu, being the loser in the male status competition, he can hardly fulfill his reproductive preferences. A different story of reproductive failure happens to another two male characters in the novel: Zou Sizhu who goes mad and Beanpole who commits suicide at the end of the novel. Failing “to give the goals of status and resources a high personal priority and fail[ing] to take calculated risks to best other men,” they fail to attract any mate and leave any genetic legacy (Buss 1996: 307).

One of Zhang’s novellas, *Cruelty* (1995), gives an example of male-male competition resulting in cruel homicide. Fu Yongjie is a low-rank official and an absolute ruffian, flaunting despotic power over others, appropriating the urban youth’s provisions, demanding bribes, seducing and raping young women, subjecting rebels to torture, and murdering the witness to prevent the divulgence of his secrets. But under the chaotic social and legal system, his rampant crimes remain unchecked. After Fu has attempted to violate the most desirable woman, Yang Yang, in the company of the Farm, two urban youths, Niu Ben and Ma Rong, bury him alive – justice can only be resumed by private revenge and physical violence. But while there is certain scope for heroism in the two urban youths’ cruel act, what motivates them most is their desire to claim the woman themselves. It is a cruel, violent way to advertise their success in the male-male competition. Later Niu Ben confesses to the murder alone in order to prove Yang Yang’s innocence and expose Fu’s evils. Before he voluntarily confesses to the crime, he entrusts his wish to Ma Rong: “Please marry her for me later;” never let anybody else touch her or love her (Zhang 1996aa: 115).¹⁶⁰

Cruelty also shows that violence often results from unequal distribution of culturally valued resources. While economic exploitation within one’s society is an adaptive strategy for high-status, politically powerful men such as Fu Yongjie, with the two urban youths there is also an evolved inclination that not only gives priority to social status, but also leads them to take risks to attain social attention and status in order to attract desirable

160 “日后你替我娶了她吧，拜托了。”

women (Buss 1996: 307).

Men continue to form alliances and compete with other groups to outrank other men and exploit out-groups materially. Coalitions of high-status men achieve and maintain social control of cultural and material resources by means of violence or threats of violence, and prosper at the expense of lower-status men and with little regard for the preferences of women (Geary 1998: 155-6). The leadership on the Farm in *The Invisible Companion* bond together and achieve absolute dominance over the urban youth, farmers, and local villagers – lower-status men and out-group members. If some urban youth attempt to defy their rule, they assault and batter them, and even lynch them until these noncompliance are beaten down and subjugated. Every year there are coalition-based battles between the State Farm and the village production teams, fighting over land and water rights. Occasionally someone gets killed in the fights. The Farm officials gain not only sexual and ideological control of women including Xiao Xiao, but also economic and political exploitation of out-groups' members such as villagers in the production teams and low-status men such as Chen Xu, who is “turned willy-nilly into a bargaining chip” in the “political deal” between coalitions of men (Zhang 1996a: 81, 225).¹⁶¹

Furthermore, intergroup interactions are strictly prevented by various forms of group prejudice. In her reminiscences, Zhang (2007a: 59-62) recounts that she becomes the target of public criticism because she borrows ten *yuan* from an ex-prisoner,¹⁶² an absolute “class enemy,” who has the lowest social status and minimal political rights. Even everyday conversation with ex-prisoners is under rigid surveillance. Taking a kind-hearted and effective suggestion from an ex-prisoner will bring disaster to both parties. The aggregate effects of both individual discrimination and institutional discrimination are the perpetuation of group inequality and social dominance patterns (Pratto 1996: 214).

161 “糊里糊涂地当了一只筹码。”

162 Ex-prisoners (former prisoners, 二劳改) refer to farm employers who were once prisoners but released upon completion of the term of imprisonment on work farms. For certain reasons, they could not or would not return home, and remained on the farms.

On the other hand, women's desires and preferences for men with resources and status stimulate and coevolve with men's intrasexual competitive strategies (Campbell 1999: 219). Xiao Xiao in *The Invisible Companion* selects Chen Xu mainly because "he has really been in the limelight enough in the red new world." He is the head of a group of Red Guards. The posters he drafts fill the whole cart and the yard of the city hall. People rush to read and transcribe his posters. He is the editor of the Red Guards newspaper and holds the right to decide if her articles are published or not. He is the famous rhetorician in the city. He leads his cohorts, and his followers cluster round him. The whole city resounds with the prestige of his troops. She feels him "safe and reassuring," and unconditionally follows him, even if what he is doing will make her a "deserter" as well. But that splendor of the Red Guards age is in the past. Chen Xu is now only "an unnoticeable, helpless, and unkempt farmhand, getting through life by bearing insults without complaint, insignificant and exploited." After they get married on the Farm, what they have is only a "cramped, run-down cottage" with a tiny and low window and a "dingy ceiling shrouded in spider webs." The only furniture is a shaky little table. There is not enough straw for the stove, no coal or firewood for heating, no money for their baby's milk, and no food for themselves, only soybean sauce and pickled vegetables. Xiao Xiao utters her grievances: Lili "married a company commander in the local army district. When she had her baby, she even got a nanny." Xiao Xiao feels that, in her life with a husband with too little status and resources, she is far away from the ideal she has dreamed of. She divorces him (Zhang 1996a: 5, 22, 51, 84, 130, 146, 234).¹⁶³

In an essay, Zhang (1996jj: 121-4) charges that the drying-up of natural resources and environment pollution on the Earth result from men's destruction, from "the genes of men's desire to dominate," and from "men's intense wish to continue their racial lines." But instead of claiming

163 "他在这个红彤彤的新世界里确实出够了风头。" "安全又安心;" "逃兵。" "一个碌碌无为、蓬头垢面的小农工, 辛辛苦苦、忍气吞声地苟活, 无足轻重, 任人宰割。" "低矮破旧的茅屋;" "挂满蜘蛛网的灰黑的棚顶。" "嫁给省军区一个连长, 生孩子还请保姆。"

that men are criminals and women sufferers, women have to admit that they are also accomplices, and have, at least indirectly, participated in murderous actions against this planet. The reason why men spoil and ransack the Earth may result “from women’s encouragement and appreciation, from the strong material demands of men’s beloved women.”¹⁶⁴ This passage by Zhang summarizes well this subchapter’s topic about men’s violence and social dominance.

5.2.2 Women’s violence and status striving

According to evolutionary feminism, despite expressing low rates of aggression, women do compete and engage in violence to strive for status in the spheres that matter to them (see, for example, Campbell 2002; Hrdy 1999a; Ingo, Mize, and Pratarelli 2007). The juxtaposition of competitive, aggressive males and peaceful, nurturing females neglects the manifestations of assertiveness and aggression in females as well, which oftentimes brings females into conflict with males and among themselves.

Women are found to be less violently aggressive and “more risk-averse,” and the greater the danger and possible injury, the more men outstrip women in their level of overt aggression (Campbell 2002: 75, 91). The sex difference in physical aggression, according to the constructionist feminist view, is a direct result of gender-role norms and socialization: Aggressiveness is culturally encouraged and reiterated in masculinity, and compliance in femininity. But from an evolutionary perspective, there are distal causes of this sex difference in aggression, which is cross-culture and trans-historical, and can be traced back ultimately to differential evolutionary pressures on the two sexes (Campbell 2002: 14). Campbell further analyzes that women’s lower physical aggression and avoidance of risk taking is mediated by the emotion of fear – fear of injury and death, which is rooted in their fear of fitness costs, as they make greater pre- and post-natal investment, have more to lose, and their survival is more critical to the survival of the young (Campbell 2002: 74-8, 216-7; see also Hyde

164 “男性企图称霸世界的遗传基因：” “男性对于种族延续的强烈愿望。” “来自女人的鼓励激赏、为了满足心爱女人强烈的物质需求。”

1996: 113-4, Vandermassen 2005: 150).

However, although women seem to avoid outright aggression even where the pay-offs are directed and vital to reproductive success, these do not forestall women's competition and status striving. There should be little sex difference in the general concern for the establishment and maintenance of social status, as the rewards brought by social status "are just as great for females as for males – arguably greater" because of the heavier maternal investment (Campbell 2002: 74, 116-8, 135). Hrdy (1999a: 128, italics in original) also argues that women "should be, if anything, *more* competitive than males, not less," but the manner in which females compete may be less direct, less boisterous, at a less lethal level, and hence more difficult to measure. Women compete for all those requirements that ensure their reproductive success (Campbell 2002: 310). Rank is critical in meeting those requirements so that women do not lack "any 'preadaptation for competition' or any 'genetic predisposition toward the creation of hierarchy'" (Hrdy 1999b: 81).

When turning to Zhang's works, images of highly competitive women flock to mind. In her works, especially those about the Cultural Revolution, many women are depicted as being keen on status striving, even belligerent and atrocious. These are not only "iron girls," ideologically propagandized, desexualized, and stripped of their womanhood, but also violent and destructive women, engaging in both verbal and physical violence. Their violence is at least as repulsive and shocking as that of men. It is a woman who leads her troop, mercilessly pulling out all the peonies and fiercely smashing the historical site, the Peony Pavilion (Zhang 1996v: 282, 284). On one summer morning in 1966, Zhang witnessed dozens of old men and women, mostly "parents of the antirevolutionary academic authorities" from Beijing, kneeling down on the playground under the scorching sun, thick clothes wet with sweat and tattered from being whipped with straps. "One girl, brandishing the leather belt, shouted towards them: 'Quickly! Call me Grand aunt!'"

(Zhang 2007a: 10-1, 20).¹⁶⁵ The scene of a woman whipping others with a leather belt and shouting blusterously reappears in *The Invisible Companion*:

Her name was Shi Laihong. She took her leather belt and beat teacher Jin with it. With one foot on his [(Jin's)] back, she cackled, 'Say Red Guard grandma!' 'Say grandma!' She had failed most of her exams, but when it came to beating people, she knew enough to concentrate on the ankles. (Zhang 1996a: 76)¹⁶⁶

After Chen Xu snatches the belt out of Shi's hands and throws it into the pond, "she shrieks, 'You're shielding cow ghosts and snake spirits!'" Because of this "vicious attack" of his, Chen Xu is beaten down. He and Shi have actually been enemies for long. Shi is the first student in the whole school to join the Party, and Chen, the Propaganda Chief of the Student Association, has publically ridiculed the mistaken characters in her essays more than once (Zhang 1996a: 76-7).¹⁶⁷

It is evident that women's violence directly connects with their desire for social dominance and, often implicitly, with their reproductive concerns. Guo Chunmei in *The Invisible Companion* is an "iron girl," with a chest as flat as a man's and very short hair tucked up under her cap like a tomboy. She is exerting her utmost strength to catch up with the revolutionary trend. Only she can go on day after day for the big campaign which demands taxing physical labor. She drags her ailing legs, brandishes her beefy arms, and runs back and forth, with scratches on her shoulder and teeth clenched, so tired that she groans far into the night. She does not even go back home for the Spring Festival in order to fatten up five hundred piglets. For her, "one's family is a tiny concern compared to making a revolution." Guo arrives on the Farm on the same train as Xiao Xiao and Chen Xu. But after two years of competition with both men and

165 "反动学术权威的父母。" "一个女生挥舞着皮带对他们高声嚷嚷: '快叫, 快叫姑奶奶!'"

166 "她叫史来红。解下腰中的皮带, 抽打金老师。她的一只脚踏在他身上, 咯咯地笑: '叫红卫兵奶奶! '叫奶奶!' 她考试大多不及格, 但打起人来, 却知道专抽脚踝。"

167 "'你包庇牛鬼蛇神!' 她尖叫。" "恶攻。"

other women, she stands out and gets a meteoric rise in rank: She becomes “the Official Pace-setter in studying the works of Chairman Mao,” is recommended as the province’s Model Worker, and later assumes the title of “New Boss of the Branch Farm.” “How fierce, how aggressive” she is when she criticizes “class enemies,” “backward elements among the masses,” and “political leaders taking the capitalist road.” It is “keen arrows one after another that are shot out of her throat” as she leads the shouted slogan. Near the end of the story, it then turns out that all her aggression, toil and moil are motivated by her reproductive interests: “If I work hard ... I may be promoted to the District Office” which is not far from “my” first-lover’s city; “I really like the North, and it’s because ... my first love ... is here” (Zhang 1996a: 190, 226, 263-4, 349, 400-1).¹⁶⁸

Xiao Xiao in *The Invisible Companion*, on the other hand, offers an example of women who are keen on social dominance, yet compete less directly and boisterously. At the beginning of the novel, Xiao Xiao “exhibits a true image of a traditionally tender and obedient girl when she is with Chen Xu, who, by contrast, is a very assertive decision-maker.” She is “morally and psychologically dependent on her male companion” though she is financially self-reliant and enjoys a certain degree of freedom and respect (Yang 2010: 114, 118). Nevertheless, she is far from the stereotyped and idealized image of women portrayed as caring, nurturing, and devoid of competition. She is not juxtaposed as the gentle, modest, and mothering female in convenient opposition to the ambitious and belligerent male. Even though she tries to stop men’s physical violence whenever she sees it, she is not immune to the lust for power and social position. By using “two forms of low-risk tactic – an unwillingness to escalate to direct combat and a preference for indirect forms of aggression” (Campbell 2002: 90), she reveals the more subtle ways in which women compete both with one another and with men.

In the face of misfortune and difficulty, while Chen Xu attributes his failure to external causes – the adverse social environment – and mollifies

168 “家里事小，革命事大呀！”“学习毛主席著作标兵；”“分场新来的一把手。”“好凶，好冲！”“喉咙里射出支支利箭。”“我好好干……也许……总会调上去的；”“我是真的喜欢北大荒，因为……我的初恋……就是在这里。”

his grievance and anxiety by fantasizing his being in power: sitting pretentiously in the Farm leader's black leather chair, with all of the officials serving him deferentially and complaisantly, Xiao Xiao constantly immerses herself in the fairy tales of Pushkin's flounder – a symbol of desire and power – and Anderson's ugly duckling – a symbol of transformation and ascension. For both of them, fantasy functions to create an illusionary world in which they gain social attention and essential resources. In Xiao Xiao's dreams, money appears and reappears, and she replaces Guo Chunmei and obtains the leader's appreciation. She admits that wealth, social standing, and reputation are all indispensable. She manages to counterpoise the disparity between her illusion and the actual status quo by imagining that she is the old Fisherman's wife, who can demand and acquire abundant wealth and power from the flounder. As her story progresses, her imagined demands from the flounder also get bigger and bigger and more and more ambitious (Zhang 1996a: 155-6, 210).

Xiao Xiao manages to make a name for herself with her writing talent – contributing insubstantial, deceitful poems and reports to the broadcasting station and newspapers. Even the motivation for her decision to get married is not the fact of getting married itself, but “becoming the absolute center of attention” of the whole Farm. She is promoted to the Political Culture Office – a position everybody on the Farm fights for openly and secretly. When Chen Xu later constitutes a hindrance to her status-seeking and status-enhancing due to his ridicule, “truth-telling,” and intransigence, she proposes the divorce. No matter whether the breakup of the marriage is because of Chen's poor character that has destroyed her ideal or for the sake of her own future, she will not “have herself buried in his tomb.” She needs to “go somewhere high up.” She regrets: “If she had never been married, she could have been a Model Worker,” and feels resentful and shameful: Coming to the Farm aboard the same train, “why couldn't she accomplish everything that Guo had accomplished in those three years? Why couldn't she get what Guo had got?” Moved by Guo's loyalty and dedication, she works harder for self-renewal and purification of her class origin. Envious of Guo's status enhancement, she follows Guo and tries to win her favor by eulogizing her empty, phony achievements and

collaborating with her on the falsification of an open letter. She says that she will not be “weak and innocent” any longer (Zhang 1996a: 126, 256, 336, 351, 358, 431).¹⁶⁹

It is reproductive concerns that drive her quest for status and stimulate her desire for wealth and other physical resources. Being “the dominant individual pays off much better in terms of reproduction than being a member of the rank and file” (Zuk 2002: 39). Xiao Xiao, like other women, faces “a life history filled with as much potential for competitive violence as men” (Campbell 2002: 74). There are significant and long-term consequences for women’s reproduction due to their jockeying for position, whether this is intense (such as in the cases of Shi Laihong and Guo Chunmei) or low-key (such as with Xiao Xiao). Almost all mothers in adversity will grieve as Xiao Xiao does: “In this world, she doesn’t have a foothold even for herself. How can she take on a less-than-one-year-old baby?”¹⁷⁰ Xiao Xiao’s monthly salary is thirty-two *yuan*, and every month she remits twenty *yuan* to her baby son. In a dream, when she gets extra income she immediately and happily plans to remit more money to him (Zhang 1996a: 222, 229, 280).

In the mating market, there is also a significant correlation between a woman’s rank and her reproductive success. Women compete with one another for good-looking, resource-controlling “eligible” husbands, and social status can have a profound effect on women’s mate-seeking opportunities. During the Cultural Revolution, when people’s survival and reproductive rights were basically violated or deprived, lower-status women’s survival and reproduction were more suppressed and infringed by both men and more dominant women.

Xiang Feizi in Zhang’s novel *Never Confess* (1987) is a farmhand of the lowest degree with the lowest salary. Her love affair is publically and sinisterly insulted by the instructress who gets promoted and substitutes

169 “顶顶引人注目的人物。”“要让她给他当陪葬品。”“往高处。”“如果不结婚，她也可以当劳模。”“三年过去了，郭春莓能做到的，她怎么会做不到？郭春莓所得到的她为什么得不到？”“软弱天真。”

170 “在这个世界上，她连自己的立足之地都没有，如何承担一个不满周岁的孩子？”

the previous instructor by secretly tearing open his correspondence with his mother and delivering the transcribed copies to the higher-level officials. The effect of this incident of female-female competition between Xiang and the instructress is enormous. Xiang is punished and banished to the dirtiest hoggery for her “immorality” after the instructress’s public insult. Her boyfriend thereafter turns to the instructress even though he has to take in the instructress’s repulsive and inerasable body odor. Heartbroken, Xiang becomes an indiscriminate mate-chooser, and remains in the North as an aimless and nameless countrywoman, while the instructress, among the first urban youth who are recommended into the universities, now well-dressed and well-preserved, sits at the banquet table with her “extraordinarily handsome” and “infinitely promising” husband – Xiang’s ex-boyfriend (Zhang 1996ee: 345).¹⁷¹ Despite the absence of overt violence, female dominance can be ruthless and have far-reaching consequences no less than the most savage physical fight among males (Zuk 2002: 130).

It seems that Zhang is rather ambivalent towards this less benevolent side of women’s nature – highly competitive and strenuously striving for social position. In *The Invisible Companion*, Xiao Xiao’s ambitions are subdued and tinged with a poetic, fairytale hue. Yet elsewhere, Zhang always brings forth her ambitious women in a derogatory tone. In her first novel, *The Demarcation* (1975), the protagonist’s opponent is set up as a dominating, “pro-capitalism” woman leader. In *Blue Collar* (1993), the wife’s active pursuit of social position and physical resources repels all her colleagues as well as her husband. In the short novel, *One Thousand and One* (1997), the “iron girl,” a high-level woman official, is callous to her underlings but obsequious to the superiors. She keeps five hundred young students waiting and shivering in the freezing snow for almost two hours in order to meet the leaders for just one minute. In *Red Poppies* (1982), any of the following negative adjectives can be used to describe the female cadre: pretentious, calculating, guileful, manipulative, and crazy about their official careers and political power. In an essay, Zhang explicitly states:

171 “英俊非凡；”“前程无量。”

Some women, or iron ladies, have too fervent a desire for power, material gain, and success. It's a bit excessive. I feel that they are rather frightful. In their lives, the only purpose is to stand out and dominate others. On the other hand, the simplicity and tranquility of ordinary people who do not seek fame and wealth is really beautiful. ... Actually, I think it's better that women do not seek so much fame and wealth. When a woman sedulously aspires after success, sometimes she really loses something very beautiful in womanhood. (Zhang 2002b: 106)¹⁷²

Zhang is even self-critical, writing that "I ... made great efforts to change my destiny ... and became mendacious, timeserving, insinuating, and more and more self-deceiving." She questions herself: "Why ... was I so zealous about glory and 'political life'?" (Zhang 2007a: 30, 96-8).¹⁷³

Here, Zhang not only idealizes women as a sex less competitive by nature and less interested in dominance (Hrdy 1999a: 190), but sees women's aggression in status-striving as a gender-incongruent aberration from the idealized female stereotype. "Women's aggression has been rendered unnatural and treated as evidence of pseudo-masculinity or irrationality," and thus should be stigmatized, pathologized, and minimized (Campbell 1999: 214, 222). This may be the reason why Zhang herself experiences guilt and anxiety about being motivated to compete and strive. She clearly sees the high level of competitiveness of women's nature and describes it in detail, but disapproves of it and tries to deny it by invoking an idealized, "beautiful" womanhood – peaceful and indifferent to wealth and position.

This is one point where Zhang diverges from evolutionary feminists who, impartially recognizing that "[t]he roots of violence are not found in males

172 “有些女人，或者是女强人，她有极强烈的功利心，那种权利的欲望，物质的欲望，成功的欲望太强了，有点过分了，我觉得这种人蛮可怕的。在她的生活中唯一的目的就是出人头地，驾驭别人。反过来，那种平淡和淡泊，很平凡普通的人，真的是很美的。……其实，我觉得女人比较淡泊一些是好的。一个女人刻意追求成功的时候，有的时候真的会把女性一些很美的东西丧失掉了。”

173 “我……努力想改变自己的命运……变得虚伪和随俗，变得越来越自欺欺人。”“我为什么……那么热衷于荣誉和‘政治生命’呢？”

alone” (Zuk 2002: 130), do not attach any value or moral judgement to women’s competitive nature and aggressive behaviors, but exactly oppose and endeavor to correct the above female stereotype idealized by Zhang. As Campbell (1999: 214) states, “The ‘Madonna’ idealisation of women as devoid of competition or aggression has alienated women from their own nature ... The idea that females could have survived without the motivation and ability to compete for scarce resources is, from an evolutionary viewpoint, untenable.”

5.3 Kinship and violence

Often with indignation and compunction, Zhang indicates that chaos and violence would undoubtedly erupt if the principle of nepotism is wiped out and consanguinity cut off in human social interactions. The following two subchapters analyze the perverse human sociality resulting in the explosion of massive violence during the Cultural Revolution on both individual and group levels – the two modules evolved in human social interactions.

Geary (1998: 182-8) summarizes that on the individual level, kin- and friend-based relationships are favored and defined by altruism and reciprocity. On the group-level, the categorization of people into social groups also appears to reflect the significance of kin and alliances, and in- and out-groups are formed by rallying around “differing social and moral ideologies that favor in-group members (kin and friends) and, under extreme conditions, devalue and even dehumanize out-group members.” In brief, in both individual- and group-level human interactions, kin- and friend-based relationships are basic.

5.3.1 Individual-level interactions

The function of individual-level human interactions is to “develop and maintain long-term relationships with kin and friends, and to support attempts to obtain social and material resources from other people” on the

basis of William Hamilton's kin selection and Robert Trivers' reciprocal altruism – the two forms of altruism offered by evolutionary theory in interpersonal relationships (Geary 1998: 182; Campbell 2002: 150). Natural selection would strongly favor individuals who aid kin in ways that facilitate their survival and reproduction, as “the reproductive success of kin would perforce increase the altruist's genetic contribution to the next generation (Hamilton, 1964, 1975),” that is, inclusive fitness¹⁷⁴ (Geary 1998: 182). This is the theory of kin selection and accounts for generosity directed toward kin (Miller 2000: 296-7). Generosity toward non-kin (such as friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers) happens, explained by the theory of reciprocal altruism, because the beneficiary is supposed to reciprocate the favor in kind or degree at a later date. A similar ratio of rewards to costs has to be kept for both parties in order to maintain a sustained relationship. The concept of reciprocal altruism thus suggests that people may behave altruistically with the expectation of long-term reciprocation.

As Campbell (2002: 144-51) analyzes, kin selection corresponds to “communal sharing” and reciprocal altruism to “exchange relationships.” In communal sharing, goods “are held in common and used as they are needed;” people “work collectively without assessing individual inputs” and are given what they need without regard to their ability to repay it in the future; “people's individual identities are merged into a greater whole.” Communal sharing is most evidently shown in very close attachments such as between lovers or between a mother and child where no or little repayment is anticipated. Exchange relationships, on the other hand, explain that towards non-relatives, people tend to follow a rule of equity. Giving, taking, and returning have to be kept in balance and mutualism for a long-lasting relationship. Human social relationships map on to a continuum that ranges from kin selection in its most extreme form at one end, to reciprocal altruism, and then to the exploitative response (of cheaters who take without giving back) at the other end.

174 Inclusive fitness “refers to an individual's overall genetic contribution to the next generation, which is represented by the combination of one's children and the children of kin (e.g., nephews)” (Geary 1998: 182).

During the Cultural Revolution, in interpersonal relationships, altruism and communal sharing were ideologically boosted, yet not towards real kin or friends, but towards “class brothers and sisters” – people who were often actually unknown and unrelated. What was politically advocated but did not happen and could never happen were constant self-sacrifice and altruism without expectation of repayment, which would not be “a winning strategy for either men or women (MacDonald 1988)” (Campbell 2002: 158). People actually pursued the “minimax principle” towards strangers – maximizing their rewards and minimizing their costs (Campbell 2002: 146). Altruism has been selected “because of its individual survival value” manifested in “nepotism (kindness to blood relatives) or reciprocity (kindness to those who may reciprocate)” (Campbell 2002: 211; Miller 2000: 292). It will hardly be directed towards strangers. Contrary to the ideology promoted during the Cultural Revolution, people will not readily abandon self-interest for the common good, or for any stranger’s good (Hrdy 1999b: 349).

Meanwhile, nepotism or kindness to blood relatives was forcibly disrupted in this decade, especially in the families who were not from the proletariat. They had no “right to love”¹⁷⁵ their children, parents, and other family members. The function of individual-level interactions of these people was *not* to develop and maintain long-term relationships with kin and friends. Kin and friend networks had to be dismantled since they ruined one’s subsistence and well-being. In the short story, *Olives* (1980), Zhang (1996c: 5-6) grieves that the protagonist has been rejected by the university three times even though every time he scores highest in all the tests, just because of his intellectual father’s “anti-revolutionary” identity. In the reminiscences, Zhang (2007a: 15, 32) narrates that her own uncle cannot even enter the senior high school because his brother – Zhang’s father – has been expelled from the Party and lost his profession as a newspaper editor and journalist on the suspicion of being a secret agent or trotskyst. In the novel, *Blue Collar*, Zhang (1993a: 194, 209) satirically writes that the Party has not been “genial and sensible,” as it tries to break up the couple and demote the husband because the wife is not from the

175 Zhang’s novel *The Right to Love* (1979).

working class or peasantry.

Mei Jin's story in Zhang's reminiscences (2007a: 68-70) is an example of how friendship has to be discontinued as it destroys one's life and future. Mei Jin, a hospitable and generous woman who is dispatched to a farm in Heilongjiang province during the Cultural Revolution, has many friends all over the province. Whenever possible, friends come to visit her. On one occasion, she accommodates two friends – a brother and sister – for one night just as usual, but she is soon plunged in unceasing interrogation and self-exculpation because after leaving Mei Jin, the two friends succeed in traversing the frontier between China and the Soviet Union. Mei Jin is wholly unaware of her friends' plan, but her opportunity to go to university is thereby forfeited, and her "political life" ends abruptly. Her dossier with the "black documents" about this "serious case" hangs over her, causing troubles even after the end of the Cultural Revolution. This true story becomes the archetype of Zhang's novel, *Please Take me along with You* (2003), and repeats in *The Pagoda* (1983) with one cynical character suffering this fate even until the 1980s: erudite and diligent, but forever jobless, penniless, and mateless.

Human relationships were characterized by betrayal of kith and kin, disruption of affinity and friendship during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. This is especially striking with young people who tried on their own, or were forced, to move out of the nepotism network and consanguineous lineage. In the reminiscences, Zhang (2007a: 24-5) recalls that one of her classmates, Yanjun, becomes the target of denouncement from the whole class because her father is a famous director, a "reactionary academic authority," and her mother is the main actress in a drama troupe. After one year, unable to bear the torment under animadversion, her father commits suicide. Yanjun's sister is compelled, "in a tearful voice," to publicly renounce their father and condemn his "crime of alienating himself from the people."¹⁷⁶

Guo Lishu, in Zhang's novel *The Pale Mists of Dawn* (1980), offers a

176 "声泪俱下地："“‘自绝于人民’的罪行。”

typical example of deliberate betrayal of kin. Guo's mother remarries after she divorces his father, who was labeled a rightist in 1957 and sent to a mining area. Guo is self-contemptuous because of his own father's intellectual identity and adversity. At the age of eight, he already immediately understands the usefulness of his step-father's position – the vice director of a revolutionary committee. He is unwilling to put his own father's name and profession in the high school student registration form, as his elder brother has done and thereafter suffered from bad luck at every turn. At high school, because Guo decisively draws a clear demarcation line with his own father, he successfully joins the Communist Youth League. At the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution, taking advantage of the social chaos, he clears up all the materials about his biological father in his dossier, becomes “the blood son” of his step-father, and consequently secures a desirable position later (Zhang1996bb: 14, 28-9, 102).

Zhang's own mother had been put into isolation under prolonged interrogation since 1968, and her father had been expelled from the Party already since 1952. Because of her family's political background, she was in a sorry plight at school. She was removed from the class cadres, and was not allowed to participate in the pageant on National Day. She applied again and again for membership of the Communist Youth League, but again and again was refused and told that she should renounce her family. Her father himself asked her to draw a clear demarcation line with him, while at the same time he straightforwardly and self-contradictorily told her that he was wronged (Zhang 2009a: 327). Zhang (2007a: 33, 35-7) writes that she, on her own initiative, wishes to break away from the family, and away from “the discrimination and oppression” in her city. She finally chooses to leave her poor parents and younger sister behind and goes to the Great Northern Wilderness to start a new life of her own alone. She recalls that, at that time, “my passion towards the Great Northern Wilderness was insane, but my indifference towards my kin freezing;” “The torrent of revolution effortlessly smashed all the affection, justice, and innocence that my mother has fed me bit by bit for nineteen years. ... Like a sharp-edged sword, the Cultural Revolution chopped off the last

connecting point on the umbilical cord between me and my mother.”¹⁷⁷

That new life of Zhang’s meant eight years of laboring in the rural north and discarding all the kin- and friend-based support and love: “I fell out with almost everybody in order to go to the Great Northern Wilderness” (Zhang 2007a: 36).¹⁷⁸ But she (1996i: 25; 2007a: 37) later confesses that “it has been the truehearted love from all of my relatives and friends that sustains my fragile life,” and that “if one kept on saying that s/he loved the nation and the people, but didn’t love his/her own family and relatives, that so-called love was so hollow and hypocritical.”¹⁷⁹

Stripped of the social and material support provided by kin, and breaking away from parental affections and brotherliness, those loners including Zhang herself “immediately felt that they fell into orphans, dispossessed and helpless in the desolate wilderness” (Zhang 2007a: 46).¹⁸⁰ They were assembled into “siblings” under the common mother and father – the nation¹⁸¹ and the Party, substitutes for their own blood mothers and fathers. Instead of the intimacy and mutualism of fraternity, and exactly opposite to the political propaganda advocating altruism and reciprocity towards one another, these ideologically constructed “quasi-kin” relationships were characterized by dissidence and betrayal, precaution and provocation, and life-and-death fights. These young people, called urban youth, were not only the afflicted, but also the inflictors – afflicted

177 “歧视和压迫。”“我对北大荒爱至疯狂，而对亲人冷若冰霜；”“革命的洪流，把妈妈在19年里一口一口喂给我的温情、仁义和童心，毫不费力地一下子摧毁殆尽。……‘文革’像一把利剑，彻底斩断了我和母体脐带之间最后的那个连结点。”

178 “为了去北大荒，我几乎和所有的人都闹翻了。”

179 “支撑我的柔弱生命之力，就是亲人、友人全部真挚的爱；”“一个人若是口口声声热爱祖国热爱人民，却不爱自己的家人和亲人，那种所谓的爱，是多么空洞而虚伪啊！”

180 “顿觉自己已沦为孤儿，在荒天野地里无依无靠。”

181 In Zhang’s novel *The Soul of the Nation*, the protagonist’s son directly addresses the nation as the mother, and the sentiment towards the nation supersedes his love and longing for his own mother who has emigrated out of China before the Cultural Revolution: “Even though he misses his Mama in Paris, his mother – the nation – has stronger magnetism for him;” “He remembers: love your mother – the nation – even during her adversity” (Zhang 1982: 287, 288). (“他虽然想念在巴黎的妈妈，而他的母亲——祖国，对他却有着更加强大的吸引力；”“他记住了——爱你的母亲——祖国，即使在她遭遇厄运的时刻。”)

by a period of history in contravention of the logic of nepotism and reciprocity, and inflicting harm on other “siblings.”

Conflicts inevitably ensued throughout this decade. In Zhang’s novel *Distant Mountain, Nearby Lake* (2000), Li Po and other young people “bid farewell to their hometown and relatives,” and settle down in the desolate rural area in the northern part of China (Zhang 2000c: 95).¹⁸² Li Po becomes close to another urban youth, Du Huihuang, in their tough and stiflingly dull lives. They offer valuable, heart-warming companionship and care to each other. But behind Li Po’s back, again and again Du harms him and destroys his future in order to get himself promoted. Du uses various kinds of contemptible tricks, furtively and deliberately: writing anonymous letters, publicizing posters, fabricating charges, and distorting the facts. Similar wrongs have actually been inflicted on Zhang herself in reality. Viewing her as a rival, an urban youth repeatedly used these tricks in order to denigrate her and change his own predicament brought about by his “bad birth.” Zhang writes that the discord and mutual abuse among the urban youth is really frightening as “it was impossible to defend oneself effectively. It could even bring you down” (Zhang 2007a: 50, 82).¹⁸³

In many texts, Zhang writes about the de-individuation (and desexualization) under communal sharing during the Cultural Revolution. She (1996h: 162-3; 1996i: 21; 2007a: 132) writes that, at that time, “there was not any difference between one life and another life,” and that without any other choices, everybody had to eat the same amount and kinds of food, wear the same clothes, utter the same voice, think the same ideas, and behave in the same way.¹⁸⁴ These sameness, consensus, unity, and conformity, however, were merely ostensible and deceptive gloss. In contravention of nepotism and reciprocity, violence rampantly prevailed.

At an ultimate level, “kin selection explains the universal human pattern of

182 “辞别了家乡和亲人。”

183 “知青之间的互相倾轧，却防不胜防，有时甚至能置人于死地。”

184 “不存在一个生命同另一个生命的区别。”

favoring kin” (Hrdy 1999b: 63), and thus explains why political interference with human social interactions during the Cultural Revolution was doomed to cause calamities and failed in the long run. Nepotism is the general rule. It cannot be eradicated, and genetic relatedness and succession intercepted. Zhang (2007b: 49) also says: “Kinship is an umbilical cord that cannot be clipped,” connecting one’s antecedents and descendants, and “linking where one comes from with where one is going.”¹⁸⁵ Even if nepotism is not allowed to function properly or publicly, it still exists and takes effect, stealthily and persistently – human nature is undeniable. In an essay about the inhibition of human desire for wealth during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang argues that the desire for wealth is actually intrinsic human nature, and that “it is only this kind of human nature that is qualified to be the strong impetus for social development because although human nature can be partly controlled and changed, it can never be destroyed and snuffed out” (Zhang 1993b: 53).¹⁸⁶

During the Cultural Revolution, the patterns of kin relationships were changed by the social and political factors that caused a large segment of the population to be forcibly displaced and moved out of their native kin network. Furthermore, there was uncompromising inhibition of the preferential treatment of kin by the political force. Nepotistic self-interest, however, still crept in. In the Soviet Union in the 1920s, many young people went to great lengths to cover up their disadvantageous social origins, or publicly renounced their family in order to escape the stigma of their class-enemy background and to navigate Soviet society more successfully. But in secret, they still maintained contact with their family and financially supported them whenever possible (Redlick 2008: 76-8, 81). During the Cultural Revolution in China, almost all urban youth wished to go back to their cities and parents soon after they arrived at the farms and villages, mostly by going through a “back door” such as falsifying medical certificates, committing bribery or marrying (often undesirable) city dwellers. Even well-off leaders and officials tried hard to

185 “亲人是一根剪不断的脐带，连接着他的来历与去处。”

186 “其实只有本性这种东西，才有资格成为社会发展的强大动力。因为本性虽然能够被局部地控制或是改变。但它绝不可能被扼杀被消灭。”

get back to their hometowns (Zhang 1996a: 399).

In Zhang's novel *Never Confess*, Lianzhang, a low-ranking official, aggressively demands bribes and appropriates the urban youth's salaries and provisions. After he finally and happily returns to his native village, he distributes one full truck-load of wood blocks, dried fish, bean oil, rice, wheat flour, tea leaves, watches, and more to his relatives and fellow villagers. One urban youth, a Model Worker and Pacemaker for his successful, effortful bee-keeping, covertly tries to mail bottles of royal jelly to his sibling, even though he clearly knows that his promising future will be entirely destroyed if this is discovered. This urban youth's story is true and narrated in Zhang's reminiscences (Zhang 2007a: 84-5). It is adaptive that people center on diverting material and social resources to themselves and to their kin. Contending with political pressures, selection pressures triumph and "quickly favor individuals who selectively provide social and material support to their kin (see Daly & Wilson, 1995; T. Day & Taylor, 1997)" (Geary 1998: 182).

Yang Hongying in Zhang's novel *A Tree with Soft and Floury Fruits* (2007) would rather take an ex-prisoner for her father and remain in a remote village for the rest of her life to construct the indispensable kin support network. In order to avoid being an "orphan" and a loner, Yang Hongying takes every effort to search for her father even though she understands that she should renounce him – an ex-prisoner. Her unquenchable desire to feel the warmth of family love is enormously insulted and derided. She insists on claiming that the ex-prisoner is her father, even though her only friend points out that she bears no resemblance to him. Only after she has had her own children and lost her husband in a coal mining accident, she realizes that consanguinity cannot be falsified. She regrets the past and admits to her friend thirty years later that she knew from the very beginning that this ex-prisoner was not her real father. She throws away the sweet, soft, and floury fruits whose tree was particularly chosen and planted by the "father" in anticipation of her old age when she loses her teeth. This story shows how persistent nepotism can be and how perplexed, troubled, and desperate people can

become under political oppression and denial of nepotism (Zhang 2007c: 143, 144, 152, 155, 157).

5.3.2 Intra- and inter-group relations

According to evolutionary theory, in pre-industrial cultures, and most likely during the course of human evolution, individuals that make up distinctive groups are typically kin and share beliefs, such as origin myths, that not only distinguish them from other groups but often assign special significance to their own group (Geary 1998: 182).

During the Cultural Revolution, however, on the group-level of human sociality, the categorization of people into in- and out-groups was made by imagined class demarcation, falsified emotions of love and hatred, and ideologically induced passion for and loyalty to the revolutionary cause. Instead of developing and maintaining preferred relationships with relatives and fellows, on which the formation of in- and out-groups is then based, people were forced into certain rigid social categories. Assigned feelings of belonging to a class maintained and regulated the boundaries of each group. At the same time when conflicts mushroomed within each group, such as among the urban youth and Red Guards, intergroup relations were also pervaded by conflicts and appalling violence. Because the grouping was not kin- or friend-based and oftentimes relatives and friends became out-group members, dehumanization of relatives and friends was a common occurrence.

Zhang indicates that the alliances within each group during the Cultural Revolution are far-fetched, temporary, and precarious. One example is *laosanjie*.¹⁸⁷ Zhang (2000b: 1; 2002: 188-9) says: “*Laosanjie* people don’t like to say ‘I’, but always say ‘we’;” “The concept of ‘we’, however, is very suspicious. In fact, ‘we’ have never really been regarded as a ‘group’;” After the Cultural Revolution, “we” immediately fell apart.¹⁸⁸

187 *Laosanjie* refers to the junior and senior high school graduates of 1966-1968. Most of them were urban youth and dispatched into the rural regions during the Cultural Revolution.

188 “老三届人不喜欢说‘我’，总是说‘我们’‘我们的’。”“‘我们’这一概念十分可疑，‘我们’实际上从来没有真正被视为一个‘群体’。”

Because the grouping is tenuous, intra-group conflicts are explosive and endless. Zhang (1993c: 94-5, 103; 2000b: 2) describes that the alleged purity or naivety of “we *laosanjie* people” is loaded with hypocrisy and disgrace. *Laosanjie* people think that only *laosanjie* themselves are amiable and trustable. But when it comes down to one’s benefits, the alliance of *laosanjie* is never credible. “We *laosanjie* people ... jostled with one another for the very limited quota of Party memberships, university studentships or jobs as factory workers. For the uncertain future, we were harmed and harmed others,” and actually regarded everyone else as a rival or enemy.¹⁸⁹

Geary states (1998: 184-5) that one important condition “for effective competition against an out-group is the disengagement of the emotional and moral mechanisms that appear to be designed to reduce conflict and to foster cooperation within in-groups.” Some level of in-group conflict is always anticipated, and “emotional reactions, such as guilt and empathy, moderate this conflict in the service of mutually beneficial cooperative exchanges (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Trivers, 1971).” During the Cultural Revolution, those mechanisms that functioned to suffocate conflicts and facilitate cooperation within in-groups were built on falsified emotions of love and hatred, and misled passion for and loyalty to the revolutionary cause – the communist ideal. The former was the great yet “abstract, inane” love of the leader, the Party, socialism, and the toiling millions, and fierce hatred of “class enemies” (Zhang 2007a: 26-7). The latter was the communist ideal – the construction of a fair, perfect world without social hierarchy, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, and suffering – utopian, “inane, and worthless” as such (Zhang 1993c: 95; 2009a: 21).¹⁹⁰ Neither could effectively solidify the pursuers (in-group members) and fulfill the task of alleviating in-group tensions and conflicts; instead, these were simply exposed and exacerbated.

Based on the stories of her own grandparents’ and parents’ frustrated lives

189 “我们老三届人……为了入党升学招工提干，为了那极其有限的名额，为了渺茫的前途，我们被人伤害也伤害别人。”

190 “抽象而空洞的。” “空洞，没有什么价值。”

from the 1930s onwards, Zhang's novel *Scarlet Cinnabar* (1995)¹⁹¹ uncovers the injustice, anguish, and despair of these genuine pursuers, such as her own parents, who are persecuted by in-group comrades. Far from the picture that members bond together within one group, in-group members frame and inform on one another. Innocent people are incriminated, reviled, tortured, and sent to work on farms by their in-group members. True believers and loyal followers are condemned as "black dissidents" and thus "excluded from all the living environments of a normal person."¹⁹² Previous friends turn hard-hearted or hostile in order not to get implicated. Family attachment is superfluous and ruthlessly rebuffed. A nine-month-old infant's "fountain of life" is pitilessly severed, as the mother is put into isolation under interrogation and forced to wean her. The baby piteously cries of hunger until she is exhausted and loses her voice, when the mother's milk only flows into a cup. All communication during the interrogation, including meeting with and writing letters to relatives and friends, is prohibited. Children and parents become estranged and even unacquainted due to prolonged and frequent periods of forced separation. Facing the ill-treated parents and spouse, one can do nothing but endure, unable to utter any complaint to anyone. Bereft of dignity, profession, and blood relatives, many commit suicide in violent ways to avoid further debasement and torment (Zhang 2009a: 89-92, 317).

That is why Zhang (2002a: 120-3, 132) says in a conversation about *Scarlet Cinnabar* with Professor Zhang Yiwu at Peking University that "the ideal could evolve into a kind of violence in the 'revolution,' and ill-treated people. ... The whole lives [(of our parents)] have been under the beautiful and cruel maltreatment of the ideal. ... As a result, it was exactly the heart bearing the weight of the ideal that was first harmed by spiritual

191 The novel's name in Chinese is *Chi tong dan zhu*, which are all different shades of red – the color of revolution. The novel is about the red revolution that has swept China for half a century "from the spread of the red ideal to the bringing-forth of the red storm and red revolution, to the foundation of the red regime, and finally to a red myth, until the gradual end and disassembly of this myth in the 1980s and 1990s" (Zhang 2002a: 119). ("从红色理想的传播到造就红色风暴、红色革命，再到建立红色政权，最后演化成为一种红色神话，直到八九十年代这个神话的逐渐终结和解体。")

192 "黑色的'异己分子'：" "排除在一切正常人的生活环境之外。" "生命之源。"

violence” against the original well-meaning intention, on top of physical violence. Zhang concludes: “An ideal has to be connected with the needs of ordinary people in the society, and should not inhibit or destroy these needs.” But “a group ... controlled the explanation and expression of the ideal to serve its own interest,” and led the ideal astray with a pair of invisible, huge hands. *Scarlet Cinnabar* “is about the harm done by this kind of inhibition.”¹⁹³ Rightly and honestly recognizing human intrinsic desires and needs is a prerequisite for the foundation of firm ethical standards and political guidelines. As Steven Pinker (1997: 48) asserts: “If people’s stated desires were just some kind of erasable inscription or reprogrammable brainwashing, any atrocity could be justified.”

Geary (1998: 182, 185) further states that, when directed toward out-groups, “these same moderating emotional reactions would result in a competitive disadvantage.” Individuals who are able to dehumanize, in extreme cases, members of out-groups are at a competitive advantage when the competition between groups affects survival and reproduction. This principle was pursued to the utmost during the Cultural Revolution. The hatred towards “class enemies” was “on call.” “Everybody could indescribably kindle the most intense feeling of ‘enragement’ in the shortest time,” and “everybody could be turned from ‘a comrade’ into ‘a class enemy’ at any moment,” as Zhang (2007a: 27) writes in her reminiscences.¹⁹⁴

Inter-group conflicts arose, first of all, between the officials and lower-status people. Zhang (2007a: 45-7) recalls that, on the farm where she worked, the administrators, who had supervised prisoners, were rude and peevish. In the face of these urban youth who were complacent, clumsy, and actually expecting genial parental tuition from them, the administrators felt irritated and at a loss. Conflicts soon arose between the

193 “理想在‘革命’中可以演化成为一种暴力，可对人施虐。……他们一生都在理想美丽而残暴的虐待之下。……结果承载理想的心灵，恰恰最先受到了精神暴力的伤害。”“一种理想必须和社会中普通人的需要联系起来，而不是压抑、扼杀这些需要。”“一个群体……掌握理想的话语权或表述权，为自己的利益服务。”“写出了这种压抑造成的伤害。”

194 “召之即来。”“每个人都能够在最短的时间内，莫名其妙地激发起‘恨’的情绪，并恨得义愤填膺；”“所有的人都可能随时从‘同志’变成‘阶级敌人’。”

two groups, and antagonism grew out of every single small issue. The administrators treated these eighteen- or nineteen-year-old teenagers as if they were prisoners. To display and maintain their authority, the administrators could seize these unmanageable young people at will, send them into confinement or starve them into submission. Unable to fight back tit for tat, the urban youth made trouble in secret, sabotaging field work, playing tricks on the administrators, putting up posters in protest against them, stealing their food in retaliation, or appealing to the higher authorities for help.

Zhang also writes at length about the conflicts between different groups of the urban youth, which are expressed more dreadfully and violently. In the novel, *The Invisible Companion*, and the reminiscences, she (1996a: 14-5, 232; 2007a: 106) describes that at first when the urban youth arrive at the State Farm, “living together on one adobe kang was riddled with clashes as they came from different regions with different dialects, customs, and habits.” Soon birthplaces form the basis of different groups, such as the “Hangzhou faction,” “Ningbo faction,” “Hegang faction,” and “Ha’erbing faction.” Different groups “carved out ‘spheres of influence’ and contested for the position of ‘the overlord’.” Inter-group rough-ups take place for positions, promotions, meals, even for lice, mosquitoes, a tube of toothpaste, a spoon of hot water, a sock, or a piece of hair. Later regions are no longer reliable for the grouping of these young people, as gradually “mutual interest, advantage, influence, or even degrees of affinity with the officials sorted them. Northerners and southerners, men and women were mingled.” Various factions are “like rings of mushrooms springing up in the meadow after rain, one ring surrounding another, and each small ring with a larger one around it.”¹⁹⁵ Even former enemies become in-group members, but inter-group conflicts remain and actually become aggravated. Fighting to the death is not a rare occurrence.

Factional conflicts teemed in the Red Guards as well. Scrambling for

195 “由于各自的生活习惯、语言和行为方式不尽相同，一条大炕上共同生活，自是矛盾百出。”“划分‘势力范围’，争夺‘霸主’地位。”

“南北混杂，男女混杂，人以群分，按各自利益、势力甚至同领导的关系程度来划分。”“如雨后草甸里的蘑菇圈儿，一个圈儿套一个圈儿，小圈儿之外还有大圈儿。”

dominance, they would seize upon anything to start a fight against an out-group. Zhang (2007a: 239) recalls in the reminiscences that a group of Red Guards break into her home, ransack boxes and chests, and find her diary. In the diary she writes about her first love with the head of another group of Red Guards. The former group believe that the diary can provide some clues or evidence with which to attack her lover, they grab it and swagger off. They fully intend to make a big issue out of it in order to beat her lover down.

Zhang trenchantly reveals that the urban youth are still reluctant to confess their wrongdoings during the Cultural Revolution. Besides harming one another among themselves, they devalued and dehumanized other groups' members – the “class enemies,” as shown in the crimes committed by the Red Guards against intellectuals, and by the urban youth against ex-prisoners, all described in Zhang's stories.

The Red Guards brought numerous teachers down, searched intellectuals' houses, confiscated or even took possession of the property (Zhang 2000b: 2; 2007a: 24). In the novel, *The Soul of the Nation* (1982), Zhang writes that the Red Guards destroy antiques, pry open the floor, smash the cupboards, and forage for the historian's savings. When they finally find a deposit note, which reads five *yuan* with an interest of fourteen cents, they are exasperated. After setting fire to the historian's research materials and manuscripts, they swagger off. A similar tragedy is described in the novel, *The Spirit of Fire* (1981), where the novelist thereby dies of heart disease and his daughter has to endure ceaseless humiliation and torment.

In her reminiscences, Zhang (2000b: 2) acutely asks: “How many people who ‘lagged behind’ and how many ‘landlords, kulaks, counterrevolutionists, villains, and rights’ lost their livelihood under our denouncement and attacks?”¹⁹⁶ Her works often reveal the inhuman treatment by the urban youth of ex-prisoners, who were politically the most powerless and were often sentenced just for stealing some food. She (2007a: 52) writes: “You could berate, order, and befool them at will. You

196 “有多少在我们的严厉批斗和打击下，而丧失了生路的‘落后分子’和‘地富反坏右’分子？”

could shove off the dirtiest, most tiring work onto them, could unscrupulously blame them for your own mistakes, could wantonly revile them to give vent to your reasonless flames of anger, and could go to their places and fetch whatever you wanted.”¹⁹⁷ And no urban youth felt that they should own any appreciation to the ex-prisoners for their kind help and hard work. By treading on them, the urban youth felt compensated and diverted, and their political status was elevated. In the novel, *White Poppies* (1980), based on a true criminal case narrated in Zhang’s reminiscences, one urban youth, a postman, embezzles an ex-prisoner’s remittance to his son again and again. Another urban youth robs and murders the ex-prisoner, and then feels confused and wronged that he gets punished for killing such a “dog-like” person. Nobody on the farm thinks the ex-prisoner deserves pity. The capacity of human beings to articulate compassion entirely disappears (Zhang 1996t: 234; 2007a: 55-8).

5.4 Discussion

This chapter deliberates on the overflow of violence during the Cultural Revolution in China, and is divided into two parts to address the topic:

Firstly, both Zhang’s stories and evolutionary theory show that violence can ensue from men’s and women’s concerns for survival and reproductive interests. During the Cultural Revolution, social and cultural factors failed to provide any alternative means of competition among men to make themselves better marriage prospects. What men could do to assure social standing, claim and keep mates was to physically combat, cheat, and steal. While women are found to be less violently aggressive and more risk-averse, there ought to be little sex difference in status striving. In Zhang’s works, many women are highly competitive, keen on striving for social dominance, and even atrocious and destructive, engaging in both verbal and physical violence, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

197 “你可以大声呵斥他们、指使他们、差遣他们、戏弄他们；你可以把最脏最累的活儿推给他们去干；可以把自己的过失肆无忌惮地加在他们头上；可以对他们大肆骂脏话以泻心头无名之火；可以到他们的住处任意取用自己想要的东西。”

Secondly, an evolutionary reading of Zhang's "urban youth works" exposes the perverse human sociality on both individual and group levels during the Cultural Revolution. Within the dynamics of one-on-one social interactions, altruism and communal sharing were ideologically boosted, yet not towards kin or friends, but towards "class brothers and sisters" – people actually often unknown and unrelated. On top of forced betrayal of kin and disruption of friendship, discord, mutual injury, and life-and-death fights characterized these politically constructed "quasi-kin" relationships. Then on the group level, the categorization of people into in- and out-groups was made by imaginary, rigid class demarcation, falsified emotions of love and hatred, and ideologically induced passion for the revolutionary cause. At the same time when intra-group conflicts mushroomed, such as among the urban youth and pursuers of the communist ideal, intergroup relations were also pervaded by violence and dehumanization of out-group members, as shown in the crimes committed by the Red Guards against intellectuals, and by the urban youth against ex-prisoners.

Infanticide and the Birth Control Policy in China

6.1 Introduction

No topic can incur stronger repugnance than that of infanticide. But the behavior is remarkably widespread, both in the animal kingdom and the human world. Infanticide is known to have been practiced throughout history and in different cultures in deliberate or passive forms, consciously or unconsciously. And the earlier idea that infanticide can only represent abnormal and maladaptive behavior has given way to the current view that in many populations infanticide is a normal and individually adaptive activity (Hrdy and Hausfater 1984: xi).

Infanticide refers to the killing of dependent offspring, or more formally, to “any behavior that makes a direct and significant contribution to the immediate death of an embryo or newly hatched or born member of the perpetrator’s own species” (Van Schaik and Janson 2000: 1). Thus here I am using a broader definition of infanticide. The phrase “foeticide-infanticide-pedicide” underscores the wide age range during which the destruction or termination of parental investment can occur (Scrimshaw 1984: 440).

Hrdy (1979) identifies five functional categories of infanticide in non-human animals: “(1) *exploitation* of the infant as a resource, usually cannibalism; (2) *competition for resources* where death of the infant increases resources available to the killer or its lineage; (3) *sexual selection*, where individuals improve their own opportunities to breed by eliminating dependent offspring of a prospective mate; and (4) *parental manipulation* of progeny, where parents on average increase their own lifetime reproductive success by eliminating particular offspring” (Hrdy and Hausfater 1984: xvi, italics in original); and then alternatively (5) a reflection of *social pathology*, which allows for the possibility that not all

infanticide cases are adaptive. These main functional classes of infanticide that have been described for non-human animals “can all be documented among humans, if only anecdotally,” though certainly the patterning of infanticide in humans is considerably different (Hrdy 1994: 6).

This chapter is an analysis of Zhang’s novella *Zhima* (2003) within the logics of evolutionary explanations of infanticide phenomena (Hrdy 1979, 1994; Hausfater and Hrdy 1984; Parmigiani and vom Saal 1994; Van Schaik and Janson 2000) and feminist critiques of the dual effects of the birth planning policy in China on women (Greenhalgh 2001, 2008; Hershatter 2004). *Zhima* is a story about the imperative for infanticide/abortion under the birth control policy in China. Infanticide practices under the policy correspond to all of the above five hypotheses identified by Hrdy except the first one. All of these hypotheses, except the third, predict that both males and females would commit infanticide where possible (Hrdy and Hausfater 1984: xix).

The birth control policy in force as of 1979, together with the socioeconomic transformations since the reform and opening-up policies since 1978, has profoundly remodeled China’s demographic structures and family concepts and values. Over the course of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, state birth planning regulations have been modified repeatedly, and caused enormous tensions and condemnations though incurring both positive and negative gender and demographic impacts. The controversies about the birth control policy, first of all, centered on the dual effects of the implementation of the policy on girls and women, and on whether the positive effects outweighed the negative ones. Another dilemma and controversy the policy has engendered and confronted is that whether reproductive preferences and rights lie in individuals’ hands, or ought to be connected to and regulated by the state concerns. Various contradictory views persist.

In the literary world, Zhang is one of a few writers who have worked on the birth control policy with her novella, *Zhima*, which won “the golden award for novels in the twelfth Chinese population and culture award” in

2005. The story narrates that Zhima (meaning sesame), an artless and laborious woman from the rural area in China, now works as a domestic servant in Beijing in order to pay off the heavy fine she received after giving birth to her second child. Every three months she and other fellow women between menarche and menopause have to go and receive gynecological examinations to get a certificate of non-pregnancy. One day in the crowded examination room, she comes across a villager (Feng) who pleases her to help a pregnant relative (Xing'er) to falsify a certificate because Zhima resembles Xing'er. Xing'er, five months pregnant, also has to hand in a non-pregnant certificate to continue her life undisturbed. Otherwise she will have to undergo induced abortion in late pregnancy as she has already had two children. After days of pondering and hesitating, Zhima decides not to help Xing'er.

6.2 Infanticide by males

6.2.1 An extreme expression of intersexual conflicts

In Zhang's earlier works (1989: 207), the state is a mother figure who nurses her and inspires her, and to whom she devotes herself wholeheartedly. But in *Zhima*, the state, especially the authority it carries, represents an image of an infanticidal male. This soon reminds us of Hrdy's third hypothesis – the sexual selection hypothesis, which postulates that infanticide is an individually adaptive male reproductive strategy that curtails the infant-deprived mother's investment in the offspring of another male. With the infant being killed, the mother resumes her ovarian cycles earlier than if the infant had lived, and the infanticidal male can gain mating access to the female when she ovulates again (Van Schaik 2000: 27, 61). Yet unlike the prediction of this sexual selection hypothesis (in which only males commit infanticide), the infanticidal male's motive under the birth control policy in China is not to gain sexual access to the victim mothers to improve his reproductive success, but to exploit women's productive potential. Nevertheless, one fact remains the same: Female sexuality and fecundity are strictly monitored and controlled by the statist machine, by the implementation of a top-down policy that treats

women “as objects of control rather than subjects with needs of their own, with deleterious consequences for their reproductive health and lives at large” (Greenhalgh 2001: 852). This is an extreme form of male coercion, one component of the nearly ubiquitous intersexual conflicts, and one expression of the more general male-female conflicts that have their origins in fundamental reproductive asymmetries between the sexes (Van Schaik and Janson 2000: 2, 3).

In *Zhima*, the character Yang Baoguai typifies the infanticidal male image:

Cao'er, who lives in front of Zhima's courtyard, conceived a third child. Her belly already protruded to a point. The fetus was probably seven to eight months old. Zhima heard the noise of a car and she saw Yang Baoguai jumping out of the car with three other men. They appeared to kidnap Cao'er, like in a movie scene. They dragged potbellied Cao'er into the car, sent her to the hospital, and slew her. Yet what has been slain was not Cao'er, but her belly. The baby was killed. (Zhang 2006a: 447)¹⁹⁸

Yang also becomes the image of a cannibalistic adult male, lurking in children's repertoire of fears when Zhang (2006a: 447) writes that “if a child in the village was crying or making trouble, once the parent said that Yang Baoguai was coming, the child became quiet out of fear.”¹⁹⁹ The fear of infanticide has been noted in “a wide variety of primate species, including humans, as incursion of unrelated males who never mated with the mother is potentially bad news for immatures ... It is a phobia that appears almost universally in older infants” (Hrdy 1999b: 414).

The ferocious grip of the birth control policy execution on women's bodies brings enormous consequences for the life and fitness of the victims, and for “their psychological well-being and socioeconomic

198 “前院儿的草儿怀上了第三胎，肚子都冒了尖，那胎儿不说八个月也有七个月大了，芝麻听着汽车响，就见杨宝拐带着三个男人跳下车，跟那电影里头演的绑票似的，愣把大肚子的草儿拽上汽车，送到了乡医院，一刀就给宰了。宰的不是草儿，是草儿的肚子。孩子宰没了。”

199 “村里谁家孩子哭闹，大人一说杨宝拐来了，那孩子吓得就没了声儿。”

security” (Greenhalgh 2001: 870). Maternal conditions and preferences are ignored and severely violated. Cao’er intends to commit suicide after she loses the unborn, and “ever since that, she shuddered once she heard the name Yang Baoguai” (Zhang 2006a: 447).²⁰⁰

Zhang writes that, once in every three months, Zhima and other immigrant women workers have to go and receive pregnancy check-ups. If a woman is found to be pregnant, she will not only lose her job, but undergo an induced abortion if she already has a child. The results of the check-ups will be transferred to their hometown via the Women’s Federation. None of these rural women want to take the examination, because it takes time to go there and every time it costs fifty *yuan*, three days’ salary and more than the price of one hundred kilograms of eggs. But they have no choice, as they need the certificate to continue their work, and there is a big fine waiting if they do not go for the check-up (Zhang 2006a: 439).

Zhima reveals that the power of the state machine, through regular check-ups by ultrasound, penetrates into women’s bodies, not only appropriating their labor value, but also strictly overseeing and controlling their sexuality and reproductive capacity. At the same time it ousts lower-class men and deprives them of sexual access to women:

Zhima lied down on the little bed with a white sheet, undid her buttons adroitly, took down the trousers a little, and revealed her round belly. A TV-like device was put up over her head. ...The machine rattled ... She has had this inspection for years, but every time she lay down, she was afraid that the brush of the machine would bite into her belly. Her body was motionless. She suddenly felt that Xishu [(Zhima’s husband)] was very pitiful. Xishu couldn’t touch her body, while the machine gnawed at it once every three months. (Zhang 2006a: 441)

Her man Xishu at home was also sexless ... Xishu couldn’t hug his

200 “打那以后，草儿听见杨宝拐的名儿就哆嗦。”

wife to sleep, but instead slept with piglets. (Zhang 2006a: 440)²⁰¹

In this sense, the infanticide male's motive under the birth control policy in China is, symbolically, to gain sexual access to the victim mothers. But here the infanticide male intends not to produce his own offspring with the women, but to appropriate the right to determine whether women conceive or not, and thus to benefit from women's productive capacity by diverting their reproductive efforts. Sexless and sterilized, Zhima now functions not as a fecund and nurturing mother at home, but works all the time far away from home as the primary bread-winner for the family, plunged into poverty due to her natural prolificacy. The high cost of the second child and the heavy fine prevent her from providing direct and extensive care for her own children.

Moreover, the infanticidal male not only destroys and decreases other men's offspring, but also exploits their (and women's) labor value with the ruthless forfeiture system. In the novella, because Zhima gives birth to a second child, her family gets a heavy fine and then a heavy usury. Zhang (2006a: 448) writes that "no matter how many pigs and lambs he had bred, and no matter how big his harvest was, Xishu even couldn't pay off the usurious interest."²⁰² In the village, all the families who have given birth to more than one child are fined to poverty and ruin (Zhang 2006a: 447).

This is a form of *male-versus-male competition*. On the other hand, it is also a form of *male-male bond*. For those men who are separated from their working wives, the pregnancy examination system also helps them to keep their wives' sexuality in check. It is "an institutional supports for a proprietary view of marital relations" (Wilson 2005: ix). It reflects the idea that men are obsessed with female sexuality and reproductive ability. Regulating women's sexual activities with the aid of the male authority,

201 "芝麻在铺着白床单的小床上躺下来,熟练地解开扣子,把裤子往下褪褪,露出圆圆的小腹。一台电视样的仪器就架在她脑袋顶上。.....机器吱吱地响着,.....她都'毙超'了那么些年,每次躺下,心里仍是害怕那刷子把她的肚子咬坏了。她的身子一动不动,忽然就觉得喜树好可怜,喜树挨不着她的身子,她的身子倒让机器啃了,每隔三个月啃一回。"

"男人喜树在家也是早着.....喜树搂不上老婆睡觉,只能陪猪娃睡觉。"

202 "喜树就是养下再多的猪羊,打下再多的粮食,能还上高利贷的利息就算是好事儿。"

men possess an anti-strategy against women's concealed ovulation and assertive sexuality, and can relieve their anxiety of the uncertainty of paternity (Hrdy 1999a: 187). Thus Zhang (2006a: 439-440) sneers at the system: "It was actually so useless to have this pregnancy examination. In these years of working in Beijing, Zhima's body has been untouched all year round. Not a single seed was inseminated. Could a seedling grow out of an empty stomach?"²⁰³

Women have to adapt themselves and acquiesce to this new form of male control of their sexuality, becoming more subordinated and discreet. The birth control policy was enacted after the communist party came into power, replacing feudal patriarchy in China and marking the evolution of Chinese politics from the old father to the new father figure. The former exploited women's fertility for as many (male) offspring as possible. The latter, conversely, deprives women of their reproductive ability by unwaveringly demanding adherence to the birth control policy. Zhima has to turn into a new, submissive daughter. The novella writes about her phobia of every kind of machine, even of a TV remote control. Whenever she touches a household appliance, her heart throbs with fear (Zhang 2006a: 465). This indicates not only the dichotomy of (female) emotion or instinct versus (male) technology and machine, but a woman's fear of power, especially male political power. Zhima feels pity for those who have been assimilated and alienated by the machine/power. But she also cannot identify with those who have not been able to associate with the power. She is in the process of becoming allied with the (male) power, which is both beyond her control and inextricable from the entanglement of power, actual bodies, and lives.

6.2.2 It can be adaptive

Zhang's viewpoint in the novella, however, is that the birth control policy itself is inculpable and certain practices of infanticide can function adaptively, no matter how repellent this view may sound. She is convinced that mandatory birth control is essential for the long-term welfare of

203 “还孕检哩，在北京打工这些年，芝麻的身子一年到头都旱着，一粒种子都播不上，空空的肚子能长出苗来么？”

Chinese people, even at the huge expense of women's health and well-being. To the question of whether the positive effects of the policy implementation outweighed the negative ones, Zhang has her own answers. She tries to show that the policy is not only for the purpose of fertility regulation, for the relief of resource competition, but also for the maintenance of the newly shifted patriarchal authority, and for the interests of those infanticidal male individuals especially.

First of all, infanticide can serve as an adaptive mechanism to regulate population size, and thus to reduce resource competition – the second hypothesis by Hrdy is also employed here to account for the infanticide phenomena under the birth control policy in China. Regulation of “either familial or societal fertility is one of the most common reasons cited for overt infanticide ... This is often expressed in terms of limiting the population in order to avoid food shortages” (Scrimshaw 1984: 453). State control over reproduction and infant/fetus mortality is supposed to be an efficient means for this end. The practice of infanticide for this reason is made culturally, institutionally, and personally acceptable in the society. Zhang expresses this view of hers by writing that even a semiliterate countrywoman like Zhima recognizes the seriousness of the population problem and the correctness of the state's birth planning solution. Zhima realizes that there are really too many people in China, “like worms in cotton fields, growing crazily, never to be stopped. ... In Zhima's heart, there was a tint of shame” (Zhang 2006a: 446).²⁰⁴

However, this “population regulation hypothesis ... relies on a group selection model.”²⁰⁵ The idea that selection should act on individuals rather than groups has come to be widely accepted since the 1960s (Hiraiwa-Hasegawa and Hasegawa 1994: 138). There has been “a growing

204 “多得像棉花地里长疯了 的虫虫，捉也捉不完。……芝麻心里有了一点隐隐的愧疚。”

205

Group selection theory explains that a behavior may spread in a population because of the benefits it can bestow on the group even though the individuals who aid the group through exhibiting this behavior may sacrifice fitness. It was used as a popular explanation for adaptations, especially by V. C. Wynne-Edwards. But evolutionary biologists have cast serious doubt on it as a major mechanism of evolution (See, for example, Borrello 2010).

trend to view infanticide in terms of its effect on the reproductive interests of individuals” – the only currency in the cold calculus of evolution (Bugos and McCarthy 1984: 503). In this sense, under the birth control policy in China, those who benefit most are the infanticidal male individuals themselves, usually those in power, i.e., the Yang Baoguais. They are motivated to strive for status, to flaunt their power, and to reduce resource competition by eliminating others’ offspring. They commit infanticide with very limited costs, and derive both reproductive and productive benefits from it. All the goals are consistent with their fitness-promoting interests.

Hrdy’s sexual selection hypothesis also states that “[i]nfanticide is usually conducted by a male unrelated to the infant that has just gained the dominant position in the group” (Sterck and Korstjens 2000: 294). Zhima’s story happens after the communist party has come into power replacing the feudal patriarchy in China, as mentioned above. Male power-shifting proves to be an ill omen for mothers and infants. Infanticide occurs following the change in the political status of males. By eliminating the offspring of their predecessors, the current ruling party eliminates future rivals and exerts the power in hand to inspire dread and submission. Reminding us of the story in the bible in which the king of Judah puts all the infants under two years of age to death against the threats of Jesus’s birth and empowerment, Zhang (2003a: 69) indicates that “it is because of the trepidation and weakness that the tragedy of killing the innocent is still played and replayed in this world.”²⁰⁶ Genocide/infanticide can be highly advantageous for the perpetrators, and may explain why Yang Baoguais respond with brutal violence to the unborn children that they do not sire himself. On top of demographical and economical considerations, the practice of infanticide benefits those individuals in power and is used for the maintenance of political power in China.

6.2.3 Still it is pathological

Adaptive as it may be, Yang Baoguai’s behaviors, as depicted in the

206 “由于恐惧，由于虚弱，这个世界上滥杀无辜的悲剧，仍然一次次重演。”

novella, are a blatant reminder of the term, “social pathology,” the pathological and abusive execution of political power. Incidents of infanticide/feticide do go on in China, at least partly, due to a politically-constructed attitude that condones and connives in brutality.

Hrdy (1999b: 244) reminds us that the behaviors of infanticidal men are “homologous to that of their primate cousins in only the most general sense.” At least Yang Baoguais do not directly raise their fitness by mating with the victim mothers. I have employed Hrdy’s second and third hypotheses to account for the infanticidal phenomena in China, but they will only explain a portion of cases of violent mistreatment of human immatures under the birth control policy. The term, “social pathology” – the fifth hypothesis – applies particularly to Yang Baoguai’s infanticidal behaviors. It may be a pathological response to the high levels of social or environmental stress, or to overpopulation and scarce resources. Or it is “de-humanizing [that] does the trick” (Sommer 2000: 17).

In *Zhima*, the behaviors of Yang Baoguai are clamorously inhumane and deranged: “The baby was killed. Cao’er intended to jump into the river and commit suicide. Yang Baoguai even asked people not to stop her” (Zhang 2006a: 447).²⁰⁷ Yang Baoguai’s atrocious behaviors are also rooted in an unabashedly selfish motive to promote individual gain. Zhang writes in the novella that Zhima feels indignant whenever she thinks about the fine: “It must be because they [(people like Yang Baoguai)] failed to get their salaries paid that those who were provided for by the government in the village all the time tried to find some excuses to impose a fine” (Zhang 2006a: 439).²⁰⁸

In the novella, Zhang’s attitude towards the authority involved in the birth control policy is ambivalent. One dilemma the birth control policy has engendered and confronted is whether women’s reproductive rights and preference lie in individuals’ hands, or whether they ought to be connected with and regulated by national demographical concerns. Zhang (2007:

207 “孩子宰没了，草儿要跳河，杨宝拐还让大伙儿都别拦着。”

208 “乡里养着那么些个吃皇粮的人，准时发不上工资了，找个茬子就让交罚款。”

265) is convinced that “women should not abuse their rights of childbearing. ... A country that loses control of its population growth is a hopeless and inhuman one.”²⁰⁹ So she (2006a: 449) writes that “Zhima dared not resent the government. The government has made principles clear to you for a long time.”²¹⁰ On the other hand, Zhang shows that sexual coercion and violence are perpetrated on a massive scale in the name of urgent demographic goals of the nation. She then shifts the responsibility and lays the blame on the local cadres who adopt draconian and inhumane executive methods of enforcing the birth planning policy, and writes: “Zhima has been thinking it over for years. She thought and thought, and still felt that it is that damned Yang Baoguai that should be blamed” (Zhang 2006a: 449).²¹¹ Thus Zhang deems that a distinction between decision makers (the nation) and perpetrators (individuals) has to be made, and that women are obliged to make restrained decisions that compromise their own reproductive success for the interests of the nation, or of the elites and power blocs.

Zhang does not, however, let pass the corruptive and impotent politics in China. The same public father who has trespassed into everyone’s private life for long and interfered with individuals’ right to make decisions about their own fertility, cannot even ensure a village school teacher’s subsistence (Zhang 2006a: 461). Zhang derides the supremacy of politics in China and men’s incompetence in general with a kind of mock-epic description of a flood that happens in Zhima’s childhood. The tiled roof of a village government official’s brick house functions as Noah’s Ark. All of the other villagers’ houses, which are made of thatch and mud, collapse in the flood. And unlike Noah, the man fails to protect his own wife and children, let alone acts as the chosen one to save all of nature and human life. He even almost loses his son in the flood (Zhang 2006a: 459-460).

Zhang attempts to disclose that the fact that dominant groups and individuals remove infants of subordinate groups is clothed and sanctioned

209 “女人无权滥用生育权……一个人口失控的国家将是没有未来的，也将是更不人道的。”

210 “芝麻也不敢怨政府啊，政府早就把道理告诉你明白了。”

211 “芝麻想了好几年，思来想去，觉得还是该怨那个该死的杨宝拐。”

by political ideologies. That is why infanticide is practiced overtly and decisively in China, and why Yang Baoguai can veil his extraordinarily destructive behaviors in the name of the state's demographic welfare, and dish out justice in an assured and bold way. He shouts at the victim family: "Why did you give birth to those many children? ... How did you think our state could manage with this?" (Zhang 2006a: 448).²¹² This formulation propagates the nationalist (hegemonic) discourse that has run in China for over a century and has now been translated into the form of population policy, still subjecting women's bodies and sexuality to the fate of the nation. It gives an example showing "how the Chinese state succeeded in expanding 'population' into a gigantic terrain of power over women's bodies, subjectivities, and lives" (Greenhalgh 2001: 851). As Greenhalgh (2001: 863) continues to point out, "The national crisis and salvation narrative [is] still unchallenged and unchallengeable."

6.2.4 Evolutionism, ethics, and politics

Atrocious and repulsive as it is, infanticide that happened and happens in China bears no relevance to any further political or moral agenda. Yet certainly, there ought to be a separate way of approaching the issue from the insights of philosophy and ethics, other than from an evolutionary perspective (Hrdy and Hausfater 1984: xi-xii).

The topic of infanticide is already gruesome, even though it is a naturally occurring and widespread behavior. Viewing it from an evolutionary perspective and affirming its adaptive function becomes more appalling. No other words can epitomize the neutral and level-headed attitude of the scientists who study infanticide phenomena better than the following:

Throughout recorded history in both Eastern and Western societies, traditional and modern, as well as in many species of primates and many other mammals and vertebrates, infants have been reported to be abandoned, abused and killed. The finding that these are widespread behaviors has no bearing on the issue of whether they

212 “谁让你们生那么些孩子……你叫国家咋办那？”

should be socially acceptable, justified or condoned. Similarly, the study and reporting of animal or human behavior by scientists does not imply that we condone or seek to promote the behavior. (Parmigiani and vom Saal 1994: xvi-xvii)

That is, science does not dictate our values, nor does it have any obvious political implications. Infanticide anyway is nowhere taken lightly. Nor is it in China. That is why Zhang wrote the novella to reveal the complexities and pain in it. But Yang Baoguais do not need metaphysical justifications for their exertion of power or for killing. An ethical standpoint is needed to view their dehumanized executive manner and the infanticidal phenomena under the birth control policy in China. On the one hand, the policy's adaptive features are made clear. On the other hand, we are inclined to vilify at least some of its practices as lunatic savagery and condemn them as a sin. Therefore, there are two separate processes: "a distinction between what we as humans hold to be morally desirable and what natural selection has retained as an adaptation" (Campbell 2002: 20). That is why at the end of the story, Zhima feels that she cannot find her own home – her moral orientation.

There is another situation in which "the scientific interpretation becomes bound up with a political one": viewing science "as a tool for ideology, as a weapon in the gender wars" (Zuk 2002: 154, 160). As Sommer (2000: 11) analyzes, there is some truth in what Donna Haraway (1989: 311) says: "To center the debate on the biological meanings of infanticide among primates too easily plays into the culturally overdetermined lust for sexualized violence," if "we look at how the popular media disseminate findings about infanticide: as a story about sex and crime in which the theory is often not only trivialized but distorted." But this opinion of Haraway's "can be labeled as the *moralistic fallacy*: what should not be, cannot be" (Sommer 2000: 11, italics in original). Biology "has been so misused before, particularly in setting women and minorities as biologically, inevitably, inferior" (Zuk 2002: 178). The evolutionary explanations of infanticide by males cannot be used to rationalize and perpetuate gender inequality.

6.3 Infanticide by females

Zhima also implies that women can be infanticidal. Threats to infants may come from female(s) other than the mother or from the mother herself.

6.3.1 By females other than the mother

Zhima's unwillingness to help Xing'er makes her accountable, though indirectly and not even necessarily, for a forced abortion of a late-term pregnancy. It is possible that *Zhima* views Xing'er's children as potential competitors of her own children. Of the four adaptive hypotheses originally proposed by Hrdy, the resource competition hypothesis is the most relevant for infanticide by females other than the mother. With the removal of the young of other females, the infanticidal female will have fewer future competitors, and will have increased access to the limited resources that will enhance the survivorship of her young, while decreasing the reproductive success of other females (Digby 2000: 427).

Zhima narrates at length about the problem of theft in *Zhima*'s hometown. Competition for food is extremely intense and sometimes carried to extreme, and people are ruthlessly selfish when it comes to food and survival. With *Zhima*, however, the resource in question is not only food, but, more importantly, "socially valued goods" (Scrimshaw 1984: 453), such as education and job opportunities. The reason why she refuses to help Xing'er may lie in her, probably unconscious, consideration of reducing competition for limited resources. Disposing of other women's infants will effectively cut out or at least decrease competition. This indicates the cruel nature of female reproductive competition. There is "nothing in evolutionary theory that decrees that females should be caring and cooperative to one another" (Campbell 2002: 73).

Zhang's novella does write about cooperation and reciprocity within *Zhima*'s social circle: She helps other women and was helped to leave the village and find a job in Beijing. But there is always severe yet subtle

competition among females – “that fine line between cooperation and competition” (Hrdy 1999b: 100). Zhang (2003a: 8) once writes, “The primal biology of human beings determines the repulsion among non-kin. Especially when interests cannot be evenly distributed, a woman’s love is usually only restrictively diverted to her own offspring. We cannot censure that this is another kind of selfishness. ... Acquired rationality and moral education” do not work on everybody and result in a better overall picture of a human society.²¹³

As an immigrant worker in a big city, Zhima’s subsistence remains marginal. The novella describes the tremendous disparities between city and village life, and the highly skewed social power and status between city dwellers and peasants who work in Beijing. But Zhima is more fortunate than her fellows, as she secures a not-so-bad job in Beijing due to her industriousness and honesty. Her status in her own family drastically changes due to the economic contribution she is able to make. The debt has been paid off and a new house built with her salary. Meanwhile, with Zhima’s constant transformation and “becoming-art” (Grosz 2005: 2), another skew in status between her and other peasants in her village ensues: “In her heart, she clearly began to look down on those people [(her village fellows)]” (Zhang 2006a: 475).²¹⁴ Her hard-hearted decision is backed up by her sense of superiority and empowered by what the city (her host family) has implanted in her. So she can decisively reject Feng’s repetitive pleas and the order of her father-in-law – a funny complex of both new and old patriarchal figure – and maintain her ascendancy. It also shows that infants of subordinate females are at greater risk of infanticide than those infants born to dominant females (Digby 2000: 440), as women of wealth and power can form allies more easily, or can simply pay the fine, to deter infanticide by both males and females.

It seems, however, that Zhang is perplexed. She nevertheless implies that this point of infanticide by other females is unlikely, at least with Zhima,

213 “人的原始生物性决定了非血缘之间的斥力，尤其当利益无法均分时，她的爱往往仅限于施予亲子。我们无法指责这是另一种自私。…… 后天的理性和道德的教化。”

214 “她心里分明是有了瞧不起那些人的意思。”

who is described as so simple-minded and benevolent. *Secondly*, weighing the costs and benefits, it is obvious that the direct gain Zhima accrues from her decision is at best zero. Besides the tremendous physical and mental suffering of Xing'er, Zhima has to resist the temptation of the reward offered by Xing'er's husband, will offend her parents-in-law and might lose their alloparental assistance for her own children, and will be driven out of the Confucius-oriented network, which is built on reciprocal obligation. *Thirdly*, "where females live in groups, all group members would presumably benefit from the reduced competition, thus diluting the effect of the infanticide for the perpetrator and her young" (Digby 2000: 425). Those who benefit most may not be Zhima and her children. It is more plausible that decisions of such infanticide are made at the level of the society.

6.3.2 By the mother

Unlike among non-human primates where unrelated males are the most likely perpetrators of infanticide, in humans, "biological parents are apparently responsible for the largest portion of infanticides" (Hrdy 1994: 6). Infanticidal mothers do exist, and Hrdy (1999b: 451) states that they are not "in the least unnatural," although most people, and even many evolutionists, view infanticidal mothers as depraved and abnormal. Under particular circumstances, such as scarcity of resources or high levels of social stress (for example, due to the woman's unwedded status), maternal investment in an individual offspring may be reduced or revoked.

The idea that Zhima and Xing'er are infanticidal mothers is abhorrent and unacceptable, "even less comprehensible to many people than is male brutality toward an unrelated infant" (Hrdy 1999b: 289). It runs sharply against the assumption that a mother is unconditionally devoted to all of her children. However, it is not possible to consider Zhima's decision in isolation from her circumstances, and her decision cannot be understood without simultaneously discussing discriminative parental solicitude – Hrdy's fourth hypothesis. Maternal commitment to offspring is discriminative and complexly contingent on circumstances, as child-

rearing requires efforts, incurring an irretrievable, costly accumulation of time and resources. Mothers will consciously calculate how to optimally allocate limited parental efforts to each offspring, assess each one's prospects of survival, and predict what costs an additional infant might impose on the survival of older siblings, or on the economic circumstances and harmony of the family (Hrdy 1999b: 454). A failure of maternal inclination as drastic as infanticide nevertheless "exhibits an adaptive logic" (Daly and Wilson 1984: 502), and it would be the last resort of a mother who believes that the investment in the infant is not worth continuing, and other options to reduce both pre- and post-partum investment are constrained (Campbell 2002: 50).

From Zhima's point of view, the main reason why she should opt for abortion and sterilization for the other woman is not only the political pressure, as Xing'er's pregnancy is unauthorized, and Zhima's help will be illegal anyway. It is also not the indifference to another woman's well-being and an unrelated baby's life. Rather, it is the deliberation she makes based on her own experiences. She only wishes that she herself should have done the same years ago. It is an adaptive maternal tactic to relieve the high costs of rearing one more child, a mother's tradeoff between subsistence and reproduction.

The well-being of older offspring is Zhima's utmost concern. Bearing and investing in a new infant will definitely detract from her ability to invest in her other children, as the frequently cited passage by Trivers (1972: 67) states: "[A]ny investment by the parent in an individual offspring ... increases the offspring's chance of surviving (and hence reproductive success) at the cost of the parent's ability to invest in other offspring." Zhima believes that it is better for her and Xing'er to focus on the well-being of the small number of offspring they already have. She says: "Xing'er should go for an abortion. Otherwise, they would get such a heavy penalty fee. It's not worthwhile. It would be so nice if they could save this money for the education of her two older children" (Zhang

2006a: 479).²¹⁵

Accordingly, the scarcity of resources is also the top concern in Zhima's consideration. It is a common rationale for infanticide due to the mother's present incapacity to cope with the demands of child-rearing. The fine for having an extra child is so much that Zhima cannot even afford to raise her older children. The novella writes much about the poverty of Zhima's family. They are so poor that three people share one quilt all year round. The house is built but they cannot afford to install any windows. The plastic sheets in the window clatter day and night (Zhang 2006a: 446). The living conditions of Xing'er's family are even more precarious, hiding away from home with two small children tottering behind. As transgressors, they have to become vagrants, living in destitution and shaking in fear.

The pronatalist push almost always comes from husbands and in-laws rather than from mothers themselves. The "one-child certificate" has been issued for Zhima's first-born boy. But "within three days her father-in-law regretted it. Her mother-in-law scolded him almost to death. For three years she constantly nagged Zhima into giving birth again" (Zhang 2006a: 446).²¹⁶ Women are under the pressure from both the familial compulsion and state coercion, and constrained to act in the interests of their mates, their kin, and the state.

Evolutionary theory explains that the key reproductive difference between male and female is quality versus quantity, i.e., r-K distinction:

The more time and effort an individual channels into any single offspring, the fewer offspring they will ultimately produce. This simple principle amounts to a distinction between offspring quantity and quality. Animals who have taken the quantity route are called r-selected species. ... K-selected species, such as primates, give birth to one baby at a time and spend several years feeding and protecting

215 “杏儿该去引产，要不，将来生下来，罚那么多钱，不值当。这钱要留着，给她家老老二上学用，多好。”

216 “没三天公爹就悔了。婆婆没把公爹骂死，三年里天天叨叨着让芝麻再生一个。”

it ... The r-K distinction seems to hold for men and women also.
(Campbell 2002: 38)

A father's goal is "quantity" – as many as he can have. Having many children may confer prestige, a higher standard of living, and reproductive success (Hrdy 1999b: 255). But unlike a father's goal, a mother's top priority is "quality." Because the minimum biological costs of reproduction are much greater for women than for men (Campbell 2002: 38), mothers have to be judicious about whether to produce many offspring, investing little in each, or produce a few and invest a great deal in each. The basic trade-off in maternal investment between quality and quantity predicts greater investment in fewer children and the adoption of family planning behaviors. For people like Zhima, control of fertility is extremely important, and rampant fecundity is thoroughly worthless (Zuk 2002: 56). Far from the stereotyped image of self-sacrificing mothers with maximum maternity and devotion, Zhima would choose to trade off quantity for quality, for Xing'er and for herself. Zhima reproves Xing'er in her mind:

Why is Xing'er so weak-minded? Will you just give birth because your man asks you to do it? ... After the baby is born, the fine could be tens of thousands. How can you pay that off? Children need to be fed, dressed, and later educated. In the future it will only be you yourself who will be burdened by the upbringing of three children. (Zhang 2006a: 472)

Yet more often than not, male interests and priorities are given more weight than maternal ones, and high fertility (quantity) takes precedence over children's well-being (quality).

The birth control policy in China frees urban women from the repetitive labor of both childbirth and childcare, and diverts their reproductive potentials into productive efforts, as in the case of Danni, Zhima's hostess. Only being able to have one descendant, who can be much doted on by the whole family, virtually raises the status of the mother and lessens her

previously sole task of bringing up the child. However, other women's situations worsen sharply due to the policy. Most of them are in rural areas, hinterlands, and mountains. The policy collided profoundly with the pronatalist interest of men and in-laws, and aggravated the catastrophic practices of female infanticide, female-selective abortion, and neglect or abandonment of girls, leading to a skewed sex ratio and trafficking of women to compensate for local shortages of brides. Even though the policy was greeted with relief by women exhausted by the demands of large families, they were subjected to spousal and family condemnation and abuse if the first or second child is not a boy. It is not her fault, but she lives, forcedly or on her own, in great shame and reprehension. As in Xing'er's case, maternal conditions and motivations are seldom given a thought: "Actually Xing'er also doesn't want to give birth again. She will not blame you [(Zhima)]" (Zhang 2006a: 484).²¹⁷

The development or loss of an offspring is conducive or detrimental to the fitness of both parents. Often fathers are involved in parental manipulation of their progeny. Zhang shows in the novella that, for some fathers, a shift in strategy appears. When "a man's reproductive success is identical to his only wife's, he is more likely to share her preference for quality over quantity" (Hrdy 1999b: 8). That is why Zhima's husband tells her: "I won't let you change into Xing'er. You are not Xing'er. You are Zhima. Understand? ... If time could go backwards to seven or eight years ago, Yan'er [(Zhima's second child)] would never have been born" (Zhang 2006a: 484).²¹⁸

In a nuclear family, raising a child involves a huge commitment of time and energy from both of the parents. It takes even longer and requires more extensive investment from parents than ever before in a modern society, for children need to acquire enough education to negotiate effectively in this increasingly competitive world. "Kaplan (1996) has argued that quality drives quantity and, therefore, increasing investment in quality will reduce quantity;" his term "embodied capital" refers to "a

217 "其实杏儿也不愿生，她不会怨你的。"

218 "我不叫你变成杏儿，你不是杏儿，你是芝麻，明白不？.....要是能倒回去七八年，咱也不能把燕儿生下来。"

coordinated constellation of skills, knowledge, and the good health or strength needed to apply and sustain productive efforts” (Leonetti et al. 2007: 226). In the modern, skills-based, and competitive market economies, parental investment strategies would be predicted to become increasingly oriented toward producing competitive offspring and investing in the embodied capital of the offspring. Thus, producing fewer children and ensuring the quality of each of them becomes more important than the sheer number of them (Hrdy 1999a: 28). It reduces the pressure of economizing parental investment on each offspring, and is essential for those not-so-well-off families in an overpopulated society where children are often “neither disciplined nor educated” (Zhang 2006a: 473).²¹⁹

Furthermore, parents expect returns from their investment in children. There is “a contract stored deep in the minds of parents: They expect those to whom they give so much to bring credit to the family name, or to translate parental investment into either cultural success” or enhanced fitness of the family lineage (Hrdy 1999b: 318). That is why Zhima cries when she reads in the newspaper that a poor village girl becomes a university student through hardworking. It again all the more illuminates the importance of quality – women’s preference.

Under the birth control policy in China, infanticide is mandated at the societal level, and directly linked to fertility regulation, both within families and the society as a whole. Parental considerations may interact with social concerns and adopt the adaptive value of this societal population policy. Or parental considerations can be facilitated by socially and culturally permitted behaviors. Societal and familial goals are intertwined. Along with population and family-size regulation, “infanticide frequently serves as a means of maximizing the resultant output (in terms of number and quality of offspring reaching adulthood) of parental investment” (Scrimshaw 1984: 461). Gail Hershatter (2004: 1036) agrees with Susan Greenhalgh (2001) that “although holding a place of honor at the center of national crisis may not always have served women’s interests well, being removed from that place and succeeded by

219 “没人管没人教的。”

the specter of uncontrolled reproduction may be even worse for women.”

Certainly, Zhima’s heart brims over with sorrow. She mourns, “One life will be gone even before it’s born. It’s so pathetic” (Zhang 2006a: 488). Nevertheless she sticks to her decision: “If a person comes to this life to suffer, it’s better not to be born. She reconsiders and her heart hardens” (Zhang 2006a: 488).²²⁰ There is “no heartbreaking dilemma ... required,” and the unborn will be sacrificed (Zuk 2002: 56). This echoes Scrimshaw’s (1984: 462) much cited remarks: “[T]he decline of infanticide may result in more suffering for older infants and children, and even adults, than when an infant’s fate, be it life or death, was determined swiftly, early and irrevocably.” Certainly, Scrimshaw is not advocating infanticide. Rather, she is “making a realistic and compassionate comparison between one fate and a ‘far crueler’ alternative” (Hrdy 1999b: 324).

Zhang’s novella is actually about induced abortion, but as I said earlier, I am using a broader definition of infanticide: “[T]he line between abortion and infanticide is not always clear” (Scrimshaw 1984: 441). No other topic “of mother politics is as divisive as abortion, and none elicits more irrational debate” (Hrdy 1999b: 4). Although I do not intend to delve into the “seemingly irreconcilable moralities: the rights of the unborn versus the bondage of the born,” it is worthwhile to note Hrdy’s (1994: 27; 1999b: 392) standpoint that women’s decision to choose abortion often “has far more to do with family structure, ecology, and the absence of alternative means of mitigating parental investment than it does with morality.”

In Zhang’s story, the abortion Xing’er will undergo can be a naturally selected infanticide to curtail the immediate maternal input to cope with her socioeconomic difficulties. In another novel by Zhang, *Women on the Edge* (2006), the protagonist Tao Tao chooses abortion several times, as a baby born to her – an unwed woman – will compromise her mate value and marital prospects. This infanticidal behavior by the mother can be

220 “一条命还没出世，说不定就没了，也真是可怜呢。” “人生下来若是受苦，莫如不生呢哩。转念一想，心就狠了起来。”

interpreted as a sexually selected mating strategy. While Xing'er's abortion is "an adaptive response to resource scarcity and the associated reduced probability of survival of the current offspring" (Van Schaik and Janson 2000: 5), Tao Tao's abortion is an adaptive outcome of a maternal algorithm that weighs current reproduction against future mating success (Volland and Stephan 2000: 465), and the cost and benefit structure for maternal underinvestment in her own offspring is crucially influenced by her future mating opportunities.

The willingness of both Tao Tao and Xing'er/Zhima to have abortions sacrifices the interests of the unborn for the maintenance of family unity, either present or future.²²¹ These maternal infanticides are also imposed by third parties, so that interests other than those of the women are served (Daly and Wilson 1984: 494). For Xing'er, infanticide becomes imperative out of political pressure. For Tao Tao at the end of the novel, it is the father of the unborn who urges her to have an abortion. In both cases, the decisions are clearly contrary to the mothers' fitness interests. The availability of abortion gives both Xing'er and Tao Tao the right to choose whether and when they give birth, but this right is fundamentally restricted.

6.4 Infanticide avoidance

Zhang's novella highlights two parental strategies to counter threats of infanticide (especially by males): female-female bond and female-male bond.

Feng has phoned Zhima several times to implore her: "Zhima, we are all women. Can't you think on Xing'er's behalf? ... We have to help her quickly" (Zhang 2006a: 477).²²² Females facing infanticidal threats are not

221 This is related to the concept of inclusive fitness, which "refers to an individual's overall genetic contribution to the next generation, which is represented by the combination of one's children and the children of kin (e.g., nephews)" (Geary 1998: 182), as I quoted in Chapter 5.

222 "芝麻呀，咱都是女人，你就不替杏儿想想？.....这事儿还真得快办。"

just passive recipients of male aggression, but have developed a broad array of strategies to reduce the risk of infanticide (Janson and van Schaik 2000: 469). Female-female bonding provides crucial leverage against male dominance and infanticide. If Zhima offered her help to Xing'er, an incident of infanticide would be prevented. Zhima, Xing'er, and Feng would form an effective "sisters' alliance" against the infanticidal male. By clustering together and acting in concert, women offer mutual help and protection, and thus decrease the dangerousness of male attacks.

But Zhima refuses to offer help to her fellow female. This again comes down to issues of female solidarity and female-female competition. Women do cooperate, just as Zhima helps several other women to go to work in Beijing and Feng tries to help Xing'er (but Xing'er is her *relative*). Yet "they do so imperfectly or incompletely. They cooperate selfishly, and there is a perpetual undercurrent of competition" (Hrdy 1999a: 100). The existence of reproductive conflicts of interest accounts for the barrier to cooperation among women.

Furthermore, in *Zhima*, women's sexuality is controlled under the statist machine with the assistance of the Women's Federation. It often happens that "less-powerful people whose interests do not appear to be advanced by particular cultural beliefs nevertheless often seem to share them" (Smuts 1996: 252). Women "may advocate cultural beliefs that allow men to coerce other women" (Smuts 1996: 253), as the Women's Federation is very much involved in the supervision of lower-class women's sexuality and procreation. Yet the Women's Federation is reportedly unwilling to cooperate with the Birth Planning Commission in China, especially to undertake the politically difficult and personally anguishing task as local enforcers of the policy (Greenhalgh 2001: 976). Assisting the state's precautionary measures for regulating women's sexuality and fertility would be an eclectic solution for an organization that is government-led and supposedly dedicates itself to promoting women's interests. Zhang seems to deplore the fact that female defense fails to impose any large-scale challenge to male aggression, and that females never achieve sufficient coalition to boycott infanticidal males. Instead, there is always

intense intrasexual competition among women, and women's compliance and collusion perpetuate male control and their own subjection.

Compared to female-female bond, male-female or wife-husband alliances serve as more effective anti-infanticide strategies. The nuclear family as a protective system can protect defenseless children and mothers burdened by pregnancy or breastfeeding. In *Zhima*, Xing'er's husband takes her away from their hometown and settles her down in a relative's home. He himself collects rubbish and saves money for the growing family and the fine. Hiding away or fleeing together is common in China under the birth control policy. This strategy of infanticide avoidance affects social relations and dispersal patterns (Sterck and Korstjens 2000: 320). Dispersal functions to reduce the risk of infanticide, and results in greater protective responses by fathers and other relatives. Xing'er's husband appeals for aid from his relative, Feng, and is willing to pay five hundred *yuan* for Zhima's help. Another relative of his will hide Xing'er and look after her up until the delivery. Compared to female-female bond, male-female bond is stronger and works better.

6.5 Female-selective infanticide

Sex-selective infanticide in order to obtain specific family configurations has a long history in China and elsewhere. The birth control policy aggravates the catastrophic effects of infant mortality and the abnormal sex ratio in China. But both Zhang and evolutionary theory predict that son preference is evolutionally unstable, and will change and fade away.

Across cultures, “[p]arents bias their investment in favor of the sex that yields the greater fitness returns per unit of investment” (Gibson 2008: 264). The extreme of differential parental allocation of care resources is sex-biased infanticide. In the novel, *Scarlet Cinnabar* (2009), based on Zhang's own family members' life stories, Zhang (2009a: 3) writes that “all families became inured to the drowning of female infants” in the

1920s in China.²²³ Her own mother survives after she is first abandoned to a foundling house, and then given to her adoptive grandmother. In *Zhima*, Zhang does not directly address the problem of female-selective infanticide, but centers on the issue of son preference. Zhima's first-born is a boy, but her mother-in-law is still very displeased as the second baby is a girl. Biased parental investment toward sons is the ultimate reason behind the whole story in *Zhima*. The desire for sons motivates parents to have larger families, as those with only daughters such as Xing'er's family keep trying for sons, in defiance of the government's policy and repetitive propaganda advocating gender equality:

Years ago, Xing'er gave birth to a girl, then the next year again a girl. Xing'er's man won't allow Xing'er to have tubal ligation. He demands that Xing'er give birth to a third child. ... As long as Xing'er gives birth to a son, he is willing to pay any fine. (Zhang 2006a: 470)²²⁴

The skewed sex ratio in China (118,5:100 in 2005) is the starkest problem caused by son preference and female-selective infanticide, with special condemnation reserved for the birth control policy itself (Hrdy 1999b: 319, 321). That is why Skerritt (2008) indignantly and ironically says in her report "Where Are the Girls?" that "thanks to that government's one-child policy," every year one million girls are "believed to be abandoned or aborted in China." But distortions in sex ratios "can be documented for other Asian countries that *do not* have such coercive family planning" (Hrdy 1999b: 321, italics in original). And female infanticide "was practiced long before Mao's population policies were introduced in the second half of the twentieth century" (Hrdy 1999b: 319).

Favoritism toward sons goes hand in hand with patriarchal ideologies. Zhima's mother-in-law's attitude shows that women themselves collude with culturally mediated parental preference toward sons, and thus

223 "溺死女婴的事情家家都见怪不怪。"

224 "杏儿前几年生了一个闺女，第二年又生了一个，还是个闺女，杏她男人不让杏儿去结扎，非让杏儿生第三胎。……只要生下个儿子，认罚认赔咋的都认了。"

validate their own inferiority. Zhang has not directly written about the increase of social violence caused by the disproportionate number of men to women in China. But she intends to show in her stories that the “mania for sons” dies away, slowly yet eventually. In *An Hourly Worker* (1997), the generation of the protagonist’s parents and parents-in-law regard sons as being much superior to daughters. So the protagonist is given the name Laidi (meaning “the coming of a younger brother”) and her sister Zhaodi (meaning “bringing a younger brother along”).²²⁵ But with Laidi, she is fine with one granddaughter and admits that girls are equal to boys (Zhang 1997: 248).

This would be an effective remedy for China’s “missing daughters” when parents’ mindsets change. It is in agriculture that females are most devalued. When the society becomes industrially mature and urbanized, sex discrimination may decline (Johansson 1984: 464), as more and more educational and employment opportunities create attractive futures for daughters. Furthermore, the emotional support that daughters can provide, namely, the gendered association of emotional intimacy with female family members, promotes parents’ acceptance of and desire for female children.

Evolutionary theory also predicts that preference for either sex would be evolutionarily unstable (Wilson and Daly 1994: 85). “Over time, natural selection should favor parents that produce the rare sex ... And so it goes, the pendulum swinging first one direction, then the other, favoring first daughter-producers, then son-specialists. The outcome, according to Fisher, is a population with more or less equal numbers of sons and daughters;” thus devaluation of daughters should not be viewed as a purely cultural construct (Hrdy 1999b: 337, 339). The evolutionary dimensions of parental sex preferences may be derived from an innate human predisposition that enhances inclusive fitness and the long-term survival of family lines (Hrdy 1999b: 338). In other words, “individual parents might profit by investing preferentially in one or the other sex” (Wilson and Daly 1994: 78).

225 来弟 and 招弟。

6.6 Discussion

This chapter analyzes Zhang's novella *Zhima* within the logics of evolutionary explanations of infanticide and feminist critiques of the dual effects of the birth planning policy in China on women. In *Zhima*, the state, especially the authority it carries, represents an image of an infanticidal male. Women's sexuality and fecundity are stringently monitored and regulated, and sexual coercion and violence are perpetrated on a massive scale in the name of the urgent demographic goals of the nation. Zhang's viewpoint, however, is that the practice of infanticide functions adaptively in China, not only to regulate population size, but to maintain the newly shifted patriarchal authority and benefit especially those individual perpetrators in power.

Zhima also implies that women, either women other than the mother or the mother herself, can be infanticidal. Infanticide by females can be an adaptive outcome of a maternal algorithm that reduces resource competition, optimizes parental efforts on each offspring, or promotes the mother's future mating opportunities. Zhang further enumerates parental counterstrategies against infanticidal threats in *Zhima*. While confirming the efficiency of female-male bond, she deplors that women never achieve sufficient coalition to boycott infanticidal males.

Martin Daly and Margo Wilson (1988: 591) argue that “[e]arly European accounts of infanticidal savages bristled with ethnocentric moralizing. ... And yet as we read the tragic accounts ... from one society to another, it is not the inhumanity of the unfortunate perpetrators that confronts us, but rather their humanity.” Evolutionary analyses not only recognize the adaptive logic of certain infanticidal practices among humans (and non-humans), but also expose their complexities. Lest evolutionists paint too bleak, or essentialistic as some people would state, a picture, it is important to stress that evolutionists also state the profound need for a politically and ethically comfortable position from which to view the

phenomena. It has been an ongoing challenge to develop this position within feminism and literary studies among other efforts and attempts, with Zhang's writings being one of them.

Summary and Discussion: A Triangle and Human Morality

This comparative study centers on transdisciplinary encounters between a literary writer and evolutionists, and is situated at the crossroads of literature/humanities and evolution-oriented natural science studies. In this concluding section, I will first summarize the meeting points between Zhang Kangkang and evolutionary feminism, which I have elaborated in the preceding chapters, and then reflect on the inherent dilemma faced by evolutionary theories with the issue of human morality.

7.1 Similarities and congeniality

In their common attempt to honestly face up to and reveal the multifaceted displays of human nature and behaviors, Zhang and evolutionary feminists are also bravely outspoken in their revelations. Focusing on the five themes where Zhang and evolutionary feminism particularly converge, the following list manifests the similarities of their viewpoints; at the same time it indicates the compatibility of Zhang and feminism, and the congeniality and mutualism of evolution theory and feminism – a triangle connecting the three vertexes of Zhang, feminism, and evolution is drawn:

(1) Instead of reducing sex differences to biological preformation and reasserting patriarchal containment of women, evolutionary feminism – a feminism of difference – recognizes the biological infrastructure of sex differences in humans and other species, and reveals not only why and how these differences exist, but what they are, from a fundamental, ultimate level (Trivers 1972; Pratto 1996; Campbell 1999, 2002; Hopcroft 2002; Vandermassen 2004, 2005). Often echoing evolutionary feminism at a distance, Zhang acknowledges sex differences as manifestations of inherent, genetically transmitted predispositions, and indicates that, because there are inherited dispositions that shape and delimit men's and women's responses to the variations in the environment, their minds

cannot be inscribed at will by upbringing, socializing or political ideologies such as those that prevailed during the Cultural Revolution in China (Richards 2000; Vandermassen 2005; Fruehwald 2011).

These ideas of Zhang and evolutionary feminism would be discounted as reductionist, essentialist, and determinist assessments of female nature. Both of the two have been subject to wide-ranging criticisms and hostility from feminists. But they do not at all presume inherent rigidity or genetic determinism. On the contrary, developmentally and circumstantially contingent variation is precisely what evolutionary theory aims to uncover. As an interactionist approach, it emphasizes both ultimate (evolved, phylogenetic) and proximate (immediate, situational) influences on human attributes and behaviors, and uncovers how evolution, environment, culture, and ontogeny are interconnected (Pratto 1996; Daly and Wilson 1996; Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 1999, 2002; Bleie 2003).

Yet in spite of recent dramatic socio-ecological changes, adaptations that have evolved and formed in the past may still linger in the present (Tooby and Cosmides 1990). The differences between the sexes are also not extinct, yet they may already be non-adaptive or ill-adaptive, and subject to both natural and social punishment, as shown in Zhang's stories. Understanding the evolutionary forces behind sex differences, far from condemning us to unalterable gender roles fixed by nature, enables us to recognize both the persistence and mutability of sex forms and differences.

(2) An evolutionary reading of Zhang's maternal stories, including her own life experiences, elucidates that this way of reading, rather than being biologically reductive or essentializing mothers, is illuminating and convincingly recognizes and reveals the specificities, subjectivity, and agency of mothers (and children) as feminists strive to do. The dilemma confronted by physically absent and/or emotionally detached mothers, depicted in Zhang's stories, entails women's strategic intelligence to make tradeoffs between their reproductive efforts and their life stage and conditions. It sheds light on conditional maternal commitment, and the necessity and feasibility of cooperative child-rearing (Hrdy 1994, 1999a,

1999b, 2001, 2009).

Insensitive and unpredictable mothering during childhood can have long-standing ill-consequences on children's physical and emotional development (Bowlby 1969; Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper 1991; Belsky, Fish, and Isabella 1991; Hrdy 1999a; Belsky et al. 2007). The potential conflicts between caregivers can also lower the quantity and quality of childcare (Sear and Mace 2008). Sinking into a nonchalant and avoidant state after experiencing distress, terror, rage or desolation due to mothers' disappearance is especially elaborated in Zhang's texts. Absent and ambivalent mothers including Zhang herself are generally harassed by the feeling of guilt, resulting from various mother-child conflicts and the high expectations of the motherhood myth (Rotkirch and Janhunen 2009). It is in the interests of children and other caregivers that maternal guilt functions as a regulator for promoting mothers' investment in children.

Children's counterstrategies also regulate and elicit maternal or alloparental care. Rather than being only vulnerable and helpless, infants and children have evolved to be active agents tactically negotiating their survival and well-being (Hrdy 1999b). Appearing nonchalant and avoidant, and being self-centered and manipulative, as described in Zhang's texts, can be two adaptive strategies to protest and reproach a mothers' disengagement, and evoke and deepen her feeling of guilt.

(3) Evolutionary feminists trenchantly point out that the agency Darwin conferred to females in their choice of mates had been wrongly criticized or ignored for one century before Robert Trivers (1972) finally brought it back to the theoretical foreground (Gowaty 2003). They also reveal the subtle yet intense, implicitly or explicitly expressed, female intrasexual competition, and the instability and opportunism of female solidarity (Hrdy 1999a), as shown in Zhang's novels and essays.

Zhang repeatedly laments the hard-to-communicate and impossible-to-connect insulation between men and women, which, from the evolutionary perspective, can be traceable to the genetic nonidentity of the two parties

and their divergent mating and reproductive preferences and strategies. Besides these differences, there are also remarkable overlaps and similarities between the sexes' mate preferences. Zhang's stories and evolutionary theory indicate that both men and women actively employ flexible and mixed mating strategies contingent on variable circumstances and ecological contexts (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Buss 1996; Daly and Wilson 1996; Kenrick, Trost, and Sheets 1996; Studd 1996; Hrdy 1999a; Schmitt, Shackelford, and Buss 2001; Hopcroft 2002; Campbell 2002; Miller 2000; Low 2005; Cohen and Belsky 2008).

Zhang also often deplors women's persistent financial, sexual, and mental dependency on men. An examination of human evolutionary history makes it clear that women's dependency and sexual modesty are only later, more recent acquisitions, rather than essential features of female nature. In all nonhuman primates and during most of human evolution, females have been independent and responsible for their own subsistence and have been responsible for almost all the duties of childcare with very little assistance from males. But since the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry, women were restricted to small plots of land used for growing or grazing, and lost the ability to forage self-sufficiently as in the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, while men increasingly accumulated and gained control over resources that women needed in order to survive and reproduce. Male monopolization of productive resources, together with patrilocal postmarital residence, well-developed male political alliances, women's collusion in patriarchy, and male control of female sexuality, resulted in inequalities in male wealth and power, and forced women into an entirely new kind of dependency (Smuts 1995, 1996; Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 1999, 2002).

Nowadays, plenty of women, like their sisters in hunter-gatherer societies and unlike those under patriarchy in the past thousands of years, have again become economically self-sufficient and sexually self-governed. The evolutionary answers to Zhang's puzzle about women's persistent dependence are that women's deference to men has not manifested itself throughout human history, and that a woman's vulnerability or autonomy

depends on her direct control of physical resources, the availability of support from her kin and allies, her sexual freedom, and her own mentality.

(4) Analyzing Zhang's "urban youth works" and the outburst of violence during the Cultural Revolution in China from the perspective of evolutionary reasoning highlights the following two points:

Firstly, both Zhang and evolutionary theory exemplify that violence can ensue from men's and women's concern for survival and reproductive interests (Buss 1996; Geary 1998; Campbell 2002; Kruger and Fitzgerald 2012). From a sexual selection viewpoint, moral philosophy, religions, and political theory have mostly been attempts to shift male human sexual competitiveness from physical violence to peaceful accumulations of wealth and status (Miller 2000). Zhang's stories indicate that during the Cultural Revolution, this process was exactly reversed. Social and cultural factors failed to provide any alternative means for men to compete and to become better marriage prospects. What men could do to assure social standing, and claim and keep mates, was to physically combat, cheat, and steal. Coalitions of high-status men achieved absolute dominance by exploiting lower-status men and women, and subjecting noncompliers to confinement, assault, and battery.

While women are found to be less violently aggressive and more risk-averse, there ought to be little sex difference in status striving, as the rewards brought by social status are as great for women as for men, arguably greater because of the heavier maternal investment (Hyde 1996; Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 1999, 2002; Zuk 2002; Vandermassen 2005). In Zhang's works, many women are highly competitive, keen on striving for social dominance, and even atrocious and destructive, engaging in both verbal and physical violence, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

Secondly, the encounters between Zhang and evolutionary theory expose the perverse human sociality on both individual and group levels during

the Cultural Revolution (Geary 1998; Campbell 2002). Within the dynamics of one-on-one social interactions, altruism and communal sharing were ideologically boosted, yet not towards kin or friends, but towards “class brothers and sisters” – people who were actually often unknown and unrelated. On top of forced betrayal of kin and disruption of friendship, discord, mutual injury, and life-and-death fights characterized these politically constructed “quasi-kin” relationships. Then, on the group level, the categorization of people into in- and out-groups was made by imaginary, rigid class demarcation, falsified emotions of love and hatred, and ideologically induced passion for the revolutionary cause. At the same time when intra-group conflicts mushroomed, such as among the urban youth and pursuers of the communist ideal, intergroup relations were also pervaded by violence and dehumanization of out-group members, as shown in the crimes perpetrated by the Red Guards against intellectuals, and by the urban youth against ex-prisoners, all described in Zhang’s texts.

(5) Reading Zhang’s *Zhima* within the logics of evolutionary explanations of infanticide phenomena (Hrdy 1979, 1994; Hausfater and Hrdy 1984; Parmigiani and vom Saal 1994; Van Schaik and Janson 2000) and feminist critiques of the dual effects of the birth planning policy in China on women (Greenhalgh 2001, 2008; Hershatter 2004), lays out both the adaptive features and complexities of infanticide under the birth control policy.

In Zhang’s *Zhima*, the state – specifically, the authority of the state – represents an image of an infanticidal male. Women’s sexuality and fecundity are stringently monitored and regulated without exception, and sexual coercion and violence are perpetrated on a massive scale in the name of the urgent demographic goals of the nation. Zhang’s viewpoint, however, is that certain practices of infanticide can function adaptively in China, not only to regulate population size, but also to maintain the newly shifted patriarchal authority and benefit especially those individual perpetrators in power.

Zhang’s acceptance of the correctness of the state birth planning solution

nevertheless represents a stance that propagates the nationalist (hegemonic) discourse in China, which has continued for over a century and has now been translated into the population policy and still subjects women's bodies and sexuality to the nation's crisis and salvation. Zhang then makes the distinction between decision makers (the nation) and perpetrators (individuals), and shifts the responsibility by laying the blame on the local cadres who adopt draconian and inhumane methods of enforcing the birth planning policy, patently ignoring and severely injuring women's physical health, psychological well-being, and reproductive rights and preferences. The infanticide male's behaviors, as depicted in her novella, are a blatant reminder of the term, "social pathology." It conveys the message that there ought to be two separate ways of approaching the issue: from the evolutionary perspective, to admit the adaptive features of certain infanticide practices, and, from the insights of philosophy and ethics, not to condone and connive in brutality.

Zhima also implies that women, either women other than the mother or the mother herself, can be infanticidal (Hrdy 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 2002). Infanticide by females can be an adaptive outcome of a maternal algorithm that reduces resource competition, optimizes parental efforts for each offspring, or promotes the mother's future mating opportunities. Zhang further enumerates parental counterstrategies against (male) infanticidal threats in *Zhima*. While confirming the efficiency of female-male bonding, she deplores the fact that women never achieve sufficient coalition to boycott infanticidal males, and are inextricable from the entanglement of power, sexuality, actual bodies, and lives. As to the problems of son preference and sex-selective infanticide, Zhang and evolutionary analyses again converge, predicting that the problems are grave, but they are evolutionarily unstable and fading away, slowly yet eventually (Wilson and Daly 1994; Hrdy 1999b).

7.2 Being objectiveness-oriented and the moral dilemma

Zhang Kangkang would neither know nor anticipate the advent of evolutionary feminist theory, even less that her works could coincide with

it and be explained by it, though she also diverges from it on many points. Possibly this is because Darwinian theory can be used to accommodate artistic expressions and political lines of reasoning, as well as biological science enterprise, especially after it has been redressed and revised by evolutionary feminists.

Evolutionary feminists, as well as other evolutionists, study the evolved tendencies of sex differences in reproductive interests and strategies, of women's oftentimes hard-hearted reproductive calculations, of both male and female competitiveness and violence, and of other predispositions that we may consider thoroughly politically unattractive and morally undesirable. But as I have reiterated throughout this dissertation, evolutionary theory aims at offering objectiveness-oriented descriptions of the workings of nature, and ought to be politically neutral. It is doomed to fail to make direct inference from nature to values and politics. Evolutionary feminists stress that evolution is about facts, not about dreams or convictions. In order for our dreams to come true, however, knowing the facts is vital. It is unwise and ill-omened to jettison biology simply because what biological explanations present will be an unpleasant or even repellent picture.

Furthermore, evolution is about adaptation and biological underpinning, yet it is also about contingency and continuous self-transformation. Evolutionary feminism facilitates the awareness not only of the costs of being a woman, but of the abundant problems that still remain and loom ahead. Changes are ongoing and open-ended, but desirable or justified changes have to be channeled and steered by rightfully understanding human needs and propensities, and the roots of social inequality.

On the other hand, because evolutionary theory is only descriptive, it confronts an inherent dilemma, i.e., the paradox and contradiction between evolution and human moral concerns, especially when it transfers to humanities and social sciences. Thomas Huxley, in his *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), deals with the question of whether biology has anything particular to say about human moral sentiments. He was diametrically

opposed to Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism, stating that human evolution is a process of constantly inhibiting the natural instincts of struggling for existence and promoting ethical reflections and moral responsibilities.

During its travelling course (both spread and transformations) in China, Darwinism, or, more specifically, Social Darwinism, was also widely and profoundly reprimanded by Chinese intellectuals during the first half of the 20th century, although Spencer's ideas of competition, survival of the fittest, and progressiveness have offered them the hope of national revival and the legitimacy of revolution and political reforms. For example, Sun Zhongshan (better known as Sun Yat-sen) stated in 1912 that "evolutionary selection is the barbaric, material way of progressive evolution, while reason and conscience are the way of progressive evolution for morality and civilization."²²⁶ When criticizing the moral absence or depravity implied by the formulations of struggle-for-existence and the-weak-to-be-the-meat-of-the-strong, Chinese intellectuals either embraced traditional Confucian values or promoted humanity, mutual aid, and tolerance. Zhang Kangkang also several times morally disproves or even tries to deny (at this point, unlike evolutionary feminists) what she has revealed about female nature in her literary stories, such as female aggressiveness and violence, female utilitarian mating preferences, and female-female competition for high-status and well-resourced men, as I pointed out in chapters 4 and 5.

Modern evolutionists have, from different perspectives, tried to conciliate the tension between ethics and evolutionary survival and reproduction. In chapter 5, I explained William Hamilton's kin selection and Robert Trivers' reciprocal altruism – the two forms of altruism and generosity towards kin and non-kin in human interpersonal sociality. For another example, through emphasizing a moral character's mating benefits, Geoffrey Miller (2000) attempts to solve the conflict between human morality and the innate depravity implied by the selfish-gene view in

226 “天演淘汰，为野蛮物质之进化。公理良知，实道德文明之进化也。” The English translation is cited in Pusey 1983: 436.

modern evolutionary theory, as I mentioned in Chapter 4. Sarah Hrdy (2009) boldly indicates that human emotions and capacity for compassion have evolved out of cooperative child-rearing arrangements and negotiations. Modern evolutionists do not take human morality as an autonomous acquisition, but as part and parcel of evolution, subject to selection in the same ways as other human predispositions.

Scientific undertakings can engender more inquiries and problems than scientific enterprise itself is able to solve alone. We need a clear view of human needs in order to know what kind of society we want, but science may be not able to say much about it; it might be better to try to find the answer to human nature in literature (Seegerstråle 2000, 2006; Vandermassen 2005: 116). At this point, I think Zhang Kangkang would agree. The scientific value of evolutionary theory makes it indispensable for understanding human origins and human needs, but meanwhile the inherent moral dilemma in it also entails the accomplishments of ethics, philosophy, literature, and feminist studies for prescriptive guidance to attend to the implementation of the betterment of our societies – to meet the challenges of the ethical practices of science. As Jerome Barkow (2006: 35) states, “Evolution is always a good place to begin but ... seldom a good place to end.”

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