

Ding Ling and the Literary Revolution of Modern China

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Abstract

Ding Ling was one of China's greatest female writers of the 20th century. She has become widely known for her advocacy of women's consciousness in her writings as a member of the generation of the May Fourth Movement. She explores women's love issues and the gender relationship. The advent of the Communist Party of China in the 1920s and its advocacy of revolutionary ideas in literature led to a distinct transformation of Ding Ling's artistic tendency as she emerged as a one of the foremost literary figures of the leftist literary movement. This study will examine the influence of this literary revolution on Ding Ling's works, her role in the emerging proletariat literature of China, and her works on romantic themes during this period. This is a textual analysis study accompanied by the use of selected historical and contextual approaches. Its findings confirm that Ding Ling's writings have left a lasting legacy on modern Chinese literature, her personal image and unwavering commitment have improved the social status of women and greater consciousness of their plight.

Keywords: Ding Ling, women's consciousness, modern Chinese literature, literary revolution, "revolution and romance"

Introduction

The theme or concept of "revolution and romance" became increasingly popular in the late 1920s following the literary revolution in China.¹ Chinese authors had emulated European literature

after the May Fourth Movement.² But in 1928, Jiang Guangci argued that Chinese literature was lagging behind other countries and it was essential that a literary revolution was needed in order that Chinese literature might catch up with the trend in other countries (Jiang, 1981). Jiang's desire to place China's literature in the eyes of the world clearly reflected the spirit of modern Chinese nationalism that sought to defend its dignity against the Western threat represented by capitalism. Therefore, most intellectuals accepted Marxism in the short run because they believed that Marxism could save China from oppression by capitalism. A left-wing literary publication called *Cultural Criticism* was launched to promote the absorption and assimilation of Marxism into the practice of Chinese literature. Its aim was to criticise capitalism in society and to replace the dominance of the May Fourth Movement literature (J. M. Liu, 2008). In the process of redefining literary terms and establishing links between literature and revolution, left-wing young writers were critical of the May Fourth Movement's writers for their role as emblematic of the bourgeois class, Western imperialism and even capitalism.

The action of left-wing literary writers shocked the literary world through the persistent criticism of and growing debate waged by the May Fourth Movement writers. Lu Xun an almost iconic writer of the May Fourth Movement, was a target of criticism by the young writers, include Feng Naichao, Li Chuli, Guo Moruo and Liang Shiqiu (see Appendix A). The young writers argued that literature should be looked upon as a political tool and attempted to capitalise on role of literature to serve political ends (Xu, 2021). Although this view was opposed by Lu Xun (Lu, 1981), he failed to win the support of most intellectuals. This debate on the need for a literary revolution not only limited the freedom of choice of subject matter, but also raised the influence of Marxist ideology in literature. However, the literary revolution movement had to rely on new concepts associated with the writings of May Fourth Movement to gain acceptance in modern Chinese literature. According to Tsi-an Hsia, an acknowledged scholar on the left-wing literary movement, writings inspired by the literary revolution were a denial of the May Fourth Movement yet at the same time it was its continuation. There was a change among writers in the 1920s from embracing passive sentimental attitudes to becoming crazy revolutionaries. (Hsia, 1968). The revolutionary fervour among writers then was a like the continuation of the mode of love and romance of the May Fourth Movement (Li, 2005).

However, there were intense discussions among left-wing writers on the correct choice of literary themes. Were themes centred on misery, individualism, mourning, and sentimental feelings to be subjugated by revolutionary subjects? Were writings on romance seen as a luxury or even an irresponsibility in the search for the new political "correctness"? According to Liu Jianmei (2008), most left-wing literary works dealt with themes on revolution and romance freely and openly during the initial stage of the revolutionary literary movement. The portrayal of the spirit of revolution among some of these works was often through the tales of the romantic, and even seductive, female revolutionaries. To some extent, the liberation of the female also symbolised a form of revolution

that was in keeping with the general trend of the revolutionary fervor of the time. For example, in left-wing author Hong Lingfei's 1930 novel entitled *Front Line*, the successful proposal of marriage of the young revolutionary Huo Zhiyuan to his girlfriend, was made in the form of "Love for revolution, but not sacrifice revolution for love! Revolution means liberation to humanity, while love means pursuit of gender equality. Both have eternal value" (J. M. Liu, 2008: 27).

Evidently, intellectuals at the time understood that happiness could only be realised and guaranteed through a collective revolutionary struggle, but the connection between revolution and romance was not to be separated. The works of Ding Ling (1904–1986) generally reflected this subtle relationship.

Research Objective

Ding Ling was a female writer of the May Fourth Movement who was proficient in women's writing and maintained her feminine stance (Qian et al., 1998). The factor that led to the uniqueness of Ding Ling's works in terms of the emotional outpouring of romance among the writers of the May Fourth Movement in general was not only due to the fact that she was a more outspoken and courageous woman than others, but also because she often associated the idea of supporting sexual freedom with the self-examination of women individually. Furthermore, Ding Ling was acutely aware of integrating these two aspects in her works. Ding Ling's assertive, self-conscious, active female character is vastly different from the passive as well as tortured victim of romance found in many works of her contemporaries (Feuerwerker, 1977).

Additionally, compared with other female writers of the time such as Bing Xin, Shi Pingmei, Lu Yin, and Ling Shuhua, Ding Ling was the only one whose life and work were closely related to the war and various social movements. Besides being a woman writer, she also engaged in Chinese national politics and was unique in relating her works with the demands of the revolution. Her life truly reflected the society and history of China in the throes of a revolution (Ding, 2011). Her unique experience as a person and writer had undeniably made her into an interesting subject of study among her contemporaries. This was not only because of her literary creations and achievements, but also her life and experience that were inseparable from the many challenges associated with the socio-cultural transformation of her time. According Yuan Liangjun (1990, p. 1):

"Ding Ling's miserable life is a model of modern Chinese society, showing deeply the blood and tears in our modern history, the pride and shame of our nation, the joys and sorrows of our people and the development and decline of our literature."

A study of Ding Ling and her works is therefore a study of an important facet of the history of the Chinese nation. Her works were a record of a semi-colonial China that was struggling to emerge from the crucible of revolutionary turmoil and change. Her writing career lasted for more than half a century that witnessed confronting governments that attempted to exert different brands of political ideologies. Her works successfully encapsulates the psychological feelings and changes in thought that were provoked by political encounters and confrontations.

The objectives of this study on Ding Ling's works are to examine the influence of the literary revolution on her creations; her role in the emerging proletariat literature of China;³ and her works that delve into women consciousness, feminine issues and romantic themes during this period. Selected texts are studied to gain insights in support of the subject being discussed. This scrutiny would call for interpretations to facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of the implied meanings behind particular verses or contents in the text. This historical analysis will objectively evaluate ideas or events that, through systematic, rational, and scientific considerations, will one to understand what, why and how something that happened in the past are relevant today. Additionally, contextual approaches are used to examine the extent to which political factors and socio-cultural background influenced Ding Ling's writings on women consciousness and political struggles.

The Life and Works of Ding Ling

Ding Ling's name is regularly mentioned in the discourse on modern Chinese literature. As a pioneer in the development of leftist literature, she was the first Chinese female writer to win the Stalin Literary Prize with her novel *Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* in 1948 (see Appendix B). This was the first novel that was based on the theme of land reform in Chinese history.

Ding Ling announced her entry into the literary world in the late 1920s with her *Mengke* and *The Diary of Miss Sophie*. Both delving into the world of women's consciousness, these works caused a stir in the Chinese literary world. Deeply influenced by the May Fourth movement, Ding Ling was encouraged to pursue her ideals to express her romantic feelings in literary creations. *The Diary of Miss Sophie* was a pioneering work in Chinese radical female writings in the modern era. The novel's description of the desire for heterosexual psychology and appreciation of male beauty were a clear break from the prevalent literary tradition of the time. Through the female protagonists in her novels, Ding Ling dissected the inner world of women to boldly reveal the secret psychology of the modern woman craving for happiness, looking forward to falling in love with the opposite sex, thinking about the relationship between the sexes and the value of life, and exploring the inner consciousness of women in depth. Indeed, Ding Ling was a theorist on and practitioner of women's consciousness. Her strong personality led her to a fruitful career in both literary achievements and personal emotional experiences (Mamatova, 2021).

However, from mid-1929 until she was detained by the Kuomintang (GMT) party in May 1933, Ding Ling's thinking and creativity began to change and veered towards the left-wing revolution. She soon emerged as one of the pioneers in writing about revolution and romance. The preoccupation with individualism in her early writings was replaced by the theme of collectivism. She tried to break free from the emphasis on personal emotions to that of political ideas and concepts connected with the revolution. Her new literary creations revealed glimpses of thoughts on women consciousness that differed from those in her earlier writings.

The Influence of Literary Revolution on Ding Ling's Works

Ding Ling arrived at the literary scene in the 1920s amidst vigorous debates on the nature and prospects of the literary revolution that was emerging in China. She was initially disinterested in the debate and focused her attention on sexuality and romance. Her works between 1927 and 1930 depicted almost all the women who, like her, were in a state of uncertainty. They emerged from the seclusion of their homes infused with a passion and a vision of the future, trying hard to integrate into the world by engaging in life and fighting against patriarchal dictatorship and society (Nie, 2019). Attention on feminine issues diminished in the 1930s as leftist sentiments gained greater ascendancy. Although the sensitive portrayal of sexuality and romance in works such as *The Diary of Miss Sophie* was more successful than those of other writers, the female characters were seen to be saddled with sadness and depression verging on mental illness. While her subtle depiction of depression among females could help to under this problem, she failed to identify the causes that had led to its existence. She succeeded in rendering literature as a medium of narration of feminine issues but failed to promote it to meet the larger needs of society (Xu, 2005).

It was in the 1930s that Ding Ling tried to transform her literary creations to conform to the practice of proletariat literature. The change was prompted by external as well as internal factors. The former is reflected in her claim that:

“In line with the development of the Chinese revolution, my work has evolved according to the demands of the Chinese nation and the people. Therefore, contents, characters and life are all Chinese” (Ding, 2001a, p. 215).

The change was also attributed to an internal factor. Feng (2001) claimed that Ding Ling had established her artistic foundation on *The Diary of Miss Sophie*. However, this work had also placed her in a dilemma in her writing life. She was faced with three options, namely, to maintain the same style of writing that was divorced from the revolutionary spirit of the time but at the risk of being marginalised; to pursue the true spirit of the left-wing inspired revolution; or to stop writing

altogether. She chose a path in keeping with her leftist inclination to embark on a new path in her creative career (Feng, 2001).

Ding Ling was aware of the need to broaden the scope and style of writing from mid-1929. This is evident in a remark expressed by the character Ruoquan in her novel:

“To my fellow colleagues, I hope they can take note and change their direction. Although at present [they find it] difficult to produce a successful work, [their actions] may be significant in the literature history in future” (Ding, 2001b, p. 270).

Embarkation on Leftist Literature

In order to conform to leftist tendencies in literature, Ding Ling read relevant works that were influenced by the revolution before she adopted the popular “revolutionary fiction” model of the time. The result was the publication of *Wei Hu* and *Shanghai, Spring 1930, I & II* with underlying romantic themes. *Wei Hu* appeared in 1930 and was one of the early works to portray the conflict between revolution and romance in modern Chinese literature. This novel marked a turning point in Ding Ling’s thinking and writing.

Wei Hu is a narrative on the failed romantic affairs between Qu Qiubai⁴ and Wang Jianhong as portrayed respectively by *Wei Hu* and *Lijia*. *Wei Hu* is an early member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and *Lijia* is an arrogant bourgeois female intellectual. *Wei Hu* is a young man in search of a future in his life and saddled with serious concerns over the fate of his country. His thinking gradually shifts to flow with the current of the transformation of the time. He has visited revolutionary Russia and has become a staunch revolutionary. Falling in love with *Lijia* turns out to be a tussle between romance and revolution that also becomes a source of torment to him (Ding, 2001c). In a wider context, it is also a reflection of the conflict between individualism and collectivism. Eventually, *Wei Hu* leaves *Lijia* to join the revolution. *Lijia* is dejected but decides to follow in *Wei Hu*’s path to pursue a meaningful career. The novel is the outcome of the influence of the revolution on Ding Ling through the medium of the female character.

Wei Hu symbolises Ding Ling’s ideological shift towards the prevalent trend in serving the proletariat. In view of her illusions of the revolution as well as the limited knowledge of the spirit of the revolutionary situation, her portrayal of the characters in her works tends to be too stereotypical to be seen as true proletariat literature. Despite her determination to keep to the spirit of the revolution, she was not able to escape from the influence of romantic themes. Adherence to the popular “Revolution and Romance” formula constrained her efforts to produce in-depth accounts of the emotional and behavioural conflicts arising from the lifestyles of *Wei Hu* and *Lijia*. Eventually, *Wei Hu* rejects *Lijia*’s love as he realises that the romantic relation is a hindrance to the advancement

of his career. The romantic and virtuous Lijia, however, similarly discards her traditional attitude and decides to join the revolutionary movement.

Wei Hu was the medium by which Ding Ling attempted to present her “progressive” thinking by acknowledging that the ideas concerning romance should be subordinated to the larger agenda of the revolution. The theme of the novel implies that she had freed herself from the mental agonies to enable her to embrace the revolution. Lijia’s act of escaping from the pain of losing her lover by embracing the revolution is in direct contrast to Wang Jianhong, her real-life counterpart, who lived a life languishing in dejection and despair.

Shanghai, Spring 1930, reaffirmed Ding Ling’s change in her leftish inclination and endorsement of socialist values of the revolution. The novel describes the transformation of and depression faced by the intellectuals in the new society. Compared to her earlier works, the backdrop of the stories of these two novels was broader and the revolutionary consciousness of the protagonists was more evident than before. This sentiment was expressed through the main character of the novel:

“When it comes to writing literature, I sometimes feel that there is no loss if I stop writing. Although some readers read the works we write, our work does not have any influence over time. ... Although some readers may have read a particular plot or word with a heavy heart, but who is it? They are the teenagers of the bourgeois class who easily feel sad. [Our] works are of interest to them because our stories express their depression. Now that I understand, we are doing something that hurts others, we are forcing these young people to follow our old path. Misery, individualism, mourning and unresolved sadness! ... What is the benefit to them? What is the good of society? Therefore, I am willing to stop writing” (Ding, 2001b, pp. 269–270).

It was clear that, Ding Ling and other intellectuals were embarking on a new path of literary creation. The romantic theme could no longer meet the needs of the age and changing trends mandated that she and like-minded writers must embrace the new era or run the risk of becoming irrelevant.

Ding Ling and Proletariat Literature

Despite Ding Ling’s interest on the revolution in her literary works, she was not directly engaged in the revolutionary movement. When her husband Hu Yepin succumbed to political repression in February 1931, she felt the cruelty of life and realised the weakness and helplessness of the individual to stand up to brute political force. She began to place hope on the strength of

the people and the company of like-minded persons. In May 1931, she attended a meeting of the League of Left-Wing Writers⁵ and met Lu Xun who was then an iconic figure in Chinese literary circle. Realising that her husband's death was not merely a personal loss but also an event that should have aroused the awareness of the people to be positive and responsible (Ding, 2001d), she soon set aside her sadness as she gained self-confidence and strength through engaging in the activities of the League. She sought the permission of the League to work in the Soviet area in Yan'an. In September 1931, she became the editor of the League's periodical magazine, *Big Dipper*. In the following year, she joined the CPC. At the swearing-in ceremony, she claimed:

“It's not enough to just be a party follower. I am willing to play the role of a screw, stay at the location as instructed and follow whatever instruction that assigned to me. My life, my heart, is no longer owned by me, but belongs to the party” (Ding, 2001e, p. 309).

As she began to experience collective life of the revolutionary base, the transformation of the mind was accompanied by a major change in her literary ideology. She placed “writer's attitude” and “social class consciousness” in the forefront of her writings, and emphasised that the function of literature was mobilise the people to work for good causes. She was critical of young writers for being self-centred and indifferent to the changing mood of society, and urged them to emerge from their sheltered life and to become aware of the misery and destitution of the masses especially among workers, farmers, and soldiers and to understand their plight (Ding, 2001f).

The scope of Ding Ling's works was broadened to reflect life and work of the revolutionary movement and the bitterness of workers and peasants. Her passion for the revolution was mirrored by the publication of a series of works on the lives of peasants and workers including *Tian Family Village* in July 1931, *Floods* in September-November 1931, *Troubled Times* in January 1932, *A Certain Night* and *News* in June 1932, *Night Meeting* and *The Poet Alov* in September 1932, and *Flight* in March 1933.

Despite being a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers, Ding Ling's desire to engage in proletariat literature was handicapped by her lack of understanding of the revolution. Her first attempt was *Tian Family Village*. It could not present a practical revolutionary way to counter the politics of the bourgeois class and thus failed to impress left-wing literary critics (Bi, 2010). Feeling intensely despondent, she realised that her concern with “revolution and romance” was inappropriate to match the mood of the time (Ding, 2001e). Trapped in her old writing techniques, she confessed that she had failure to create a truly revolutionary work (Ding, 2001g).

The event that helped Ding Ling to break out of the old style of writing came in the form of a major flood 1931 that ravaged 16 provinces in 1931 (Xia & Kang, 2001). She visited the

disaster area and experienced the devastation and sufferings of the victims. This personal encounter inspired the completion of a short story called *Floods* that also heralded her entry into the arena of leftist literary ideology. The story relates how a group of suffering peasants had fled to the city and became embroiled in a quarrel with merchants who had lied to them. The encounter that pitted the poor against the rich convinced the peasants to place their hope and trust in the revolution. This work skillfully depicted the plight and mood of the rural masses of China at that time.

Floods was first published in *Big Dipper* magazine in 1931. It immediately attracted public attention and received encouraging reviews from left-wing literary writers. A leading literary figure, Mao Dun, claimed that *Floods* signaled “the end of the formula of ‘revolution and romance’” (Mao, 2001). In January 1932, Feng Xuefeng in a special essay in *Big Dipper* magazine entitled “Concerning the Birth of a New Fiction: A Criticism of Ding Ling’s ‘*Floods*’” hinted that it could be a new model for left-wing writers and an important contribution to the literary transformation that was taking place in China. The work was well received by readers for three main reasons. The first was Ding Ling’s use of a current subject, the second was the author’s firm and precise understanding of the social class struggle, and the last was that Ding Ling had successfully employed a new way of writing (He, 2001).

Despite the positive impact of *Floods* as Ding Ling steered away from writing on traditional subjects and adopted a new style of writing, she admitted that it fell short on artistic value (Ding, 2001h). Rather, this short piece was often likened to a sketch composed of several scenes of peasants facing disasters and became conscious of the need for a radical response to overcome their plight. The scenes were plain and simple and the characterisation was weak. The author’s unfamiliarity with the language of the peasants allowed only the use of short and simple dialogue. Evidently, the attempt to tackle an untried subject was a challenge that her rather confined personal life and experience was able to handle with competence. The quality of this work is inferior to previous works. Ultimately, it is recognised that *Floods* contributed little to literary innovation in modern Chinese literature (Pang, 2009).

To left-wing literary critics, *Floods* was appreciated for its symbolic significance in Ding Ling’s ideological transformation. It had conformed to the format and standards of the new fiction and literature set by the League of Left-Wing Writers which encouraged writers working on revolutionary subjects to have a new worldview and ideology. The literature of the May Fourth Movement led by Lu Xun represented the past and was not sustainable. Writings of this period had emphasised the liberation of bourgeois intellectual property and opposition to feudalism. This was seen as incompatible with the new age as literature had to focus on different themes and subjects.

The League of Left-Wing Writers endorsed *Floods* as a piece of work that indicated the new format and standard for the “new” literature. Ding Ling dealt with a vital and fundamentally realistic subject that fully fulfilled the League’s political beliefs. Left-wing critics looked upon *Floods* as a

major advancement in Ding Ling's transformation from distancing herself from society to getting close to it, and from dealing with the idealism of individualism to the revolution of the peasants and workers. For Ding Ling, it was the successful transition of a writer who had little awareness of the revolution to becoming politically conscious and directly engaging in proletarian literature.

That *Floods* was recognised as a new literary model by left-wing literary critics implied that it was a work of the revolution as envisaged by the League. There was a call by League that subjects concerning self-indulgence such as the "passion and frustration of revolution" or the "contradiction between romance and revolution" be discarded. Instead, the focus ought to be centred on the harsh realities of society from the worldview of the proletariat. The outcome of this development was that left-wing literature came in favour and works that emulated *Floods* began to appear (Wang & Shang, 1982).

Six years after the publication of *Floods*, Ding Ling was fully involved in the revolutionary work in Yan'an. She acknowledged the effect of *Floods* in a conversation with Helen Foster Snow⁶ in 1937: "After *Floods*, my writing style changed dramatically because my whole life has changed, and my philosophical outlook has changed. In the end, my way of thinking also changed into dialectics" (Bjorge, 1985 p. 104).

Following the resurgence of women consciousness and its theoretical exploration in China, the nature of Ding Ling's literary ideological transformation has frequently been examined by researchers. Caught in the mood of the time, Ding Ling seemed to have no choice. Literature based on city life was considered to be ideologically removed from the revolution and issues touching on women consciousness was largely ignored by the League of Left-Wing Writers. In effect, gender awareness began to be avoided by many female writers. The desire to advocate women consciousness and the need to de-emphasise this theme posed a dilemma in Ding Ling's literary life (Meng & Dai, 2004). Many other female intellectuals were in a similar situation. Political correctness of leftist ideology then was for writers to distance themselves from themes on women consciousness and related gender issues.

Women Consciousness in the "Revolution and Love" Works of Ding Ling

The publication of *Wei Hu* and *Shanghai, Spring 1930* heralded Ding Ling's switch from dwelling on a narrow focus concerning issues of women consciousness to the larger arena of writing on revolutionary themes. However, allusion to the romantic feelings of women such as Miss Sophie was still evident in her "revolution and romance" works (Chen, 2007). Liu Jingwei (2008) also discerned the reference to women consciousness in Ding Ling's works of the early 1930s as well as works such as *Mother*.

Undoubtedly, Ding Ling attempted to strike a balance in her stance. At times her portrayal of the revolution concealed traces of romance as she struggled to convey the joy and bitterness of

love, as evident in Wei Hu. But revolution was a force that could overcome the ideals of romance as writers agonised over storylines to put new literary concepts in correct perspective. Ding Ling's motives were to satisfy the demands of the left-wing literature without betraying a soul-searching yearning for championing the gender concept (Bi, 2010).

Indeed, Ding Ling continued to inculcate women self-awareness in the main female characters in her writings on "Revolution and Romance." In Wei Hu, Lijia had deep feelings for her lover after their separation. She sacrificed her life of self-indulgence and began to engage in social work to serve the community. In *Shanghai, Spring 1930 I*, Meilin was a petty-bourgeois woman who broke away from her feudal home to seek the freedom of love. She fell in love with Zibin because of her admiration for his talent and literary skills, but soon, under Ruoquan's revolutionary guidance, she abandoned her relations with Zibin to join the struggle of the workers. Mali in *Shanghai, Spring 1930 II* left the revolutionary Wangwei in search of self-gratification. These examples confirm the feminine tendency against men to project the psychological awareness of women not to submit their future to fate.

In *Mother*, which appeared in the middle of 1932, the allusion to women consciousness was obvious. The novel was an account of agricultural life after the 1911 Revolution to present an overview of the transformation of rural life. The traditional family with its feudalistic constraints on individual actions was showing signs of decline. The novel told of the struggle of the protagonist, Manzhen, who was born into a feudal family and who desired to break free from the shackles of feudalistic rituals⁷ in order to lead an independent life. Set in a locale similar to Ding Ling's hometown, the characterisation of Manzhen was inspired by the life and experience of her mother whose real name was Manzhen. Raised in an educated family and influenced by modern thinking, she began to pursue an independent life after her husband had passed away. Under the influence of the left-wing revolution, *Mother* reflected the changing focus of Ding Ling's discourse "from the personality of single women to the identity shared by revolutionary women" and "from women as an identity of sexuality to an identity that contains conventional, common and political brotherhood" (Barlow, 1989: 15). In the meticulous and delicate style of writing on women, Ding Ling revealed her true feelings and successfully depicted a vibrant image of Manzhen after she escaped the feudal trap of the traditional society. The portrayal of Manzhen as a woman of the new society was claimed to be more thorough and refreshing than previous attempts in modern Chinese literature (J. W. Liu, 2008).

In comparing the styles of Ding Ling and celebrated female writer Xiao Hong, Dai (2021) highlighted their different understanding of the significance of female emancipation. Ding Ling advocated the fight for gender equality through political struggle as the fundamental approach to female rights. This was in effect her personal experience and that was how she portrayed the new women of the revolution in her writings. Xiao Hong focused on the differences between the sexes and emphasised the obstacles that the male-oriented culture posed to the furtherance of the

advancement of women in society. Although Ding Ling had to work within the confines of political correctness in her bold exploration of female freedom, her commitment on highlighting issues of the plight of women played an influential role in advancing the cause of the women liberation movement. Her style was to influence many later female writers, including Zhang Ailing⁸ who was 16 years younger than Ding Ling.

Conclusion

The complexity of Ding Ling's works stems from her identity as a writer and a revolutionary. As a female writer, she was passionate, sensitive, resilient, confident, emotional and indefatigable. In particular, in portraying women, Ding Ling was able to get to the heart of the matter and speak out in a way that others dare not. However, on the other hand, Ding Ling could not forget the notion of the writer as a "politicised" person. Nevertheless, despite having to abide by revolutionary discipline, she was true to her independent character. Her distinctive personality and women's consciousness set her apart from other female writers and her literary works were unique among writers of her time. After the "left turn" and writing "literature in compliance with orders," she still retained, perhaps unconsciously, features of the life and aesthetic sensibilities of the intellectuals, and adhered to their independent thinking and critical spirit, rather than followed the beaten path and values of her contemporaries.

The portrayal of women in the works of female writers conveyed an image of women in modern China going through a process of change from focusing on the sense of femininity to that of the tussle with fate, and by undergoing sufferings before achieving success or meeting with new experiences. Unlike most female writers whose narratives were concerned with crafting an image of the woman at a certain stage of life, Ding Ling's creations chronicled the entire course of the modern woman's life experiences. That her female characters were set in the backdrop of different lifestyles and ideologies had enabled her to occupy an important place in the history of the development of female characters in twentieth-century Chinese literature. In effect, Ding Ling's life and her prominent works reflected the history of modern Chinese literature. It is in this that Ding Ling is considered as the epitome of outstanding female writers in modern Chinese literature.

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Notes

- 1 The literary revolution, also known as the the new literary movement and the vernacular language movement, was a literary and language reform movement in China that aimed to change the written Chinese language from classical Chinese to the vernacular.
- 2 The May Fourth Movement was an intellectual revolution and sociopolitical reform movement that occurred in China in 1917–1921. It was a movement driven by the purpose of fighting for national independence, emancipation of the individual, and rebuilding society and culture.
- 3 Proletariat literature refers to the literature of the poor working class. Being concerned with “intrinsically revolutionary” themes, proletariat literature was often published by communists or left-wingers. It was a powerful weapon of the proletariat in its class and line struggles, serving to overturn the bourgeoisie and the exploiting classes and to establish and reinforce the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- 4 Qu Qubai (1899–1935) was born in a scholarly family in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province on January

29, 1899. He was a revolutionary, writer, poet, translator and literary critic. He was one of the early leaders and founders of the Communist Party of China, serving twice as its de facto supreme leader (August 1927–July 1928; September 1930–January 1931) before being arrested and shot by the Nanjing Nationalist Government in Changting, Fujian in 1935 at the age of 36.

- 5 The League of Left-Wing Writers (左翼作家联盟), commonly known as Zuolian (左联) in Chinese, was an organisation of writers established in Shanghai, China, on 2 March 1930, at the suggestion of the Chinese Communist Party and the influence of the well-known author Lu Xun. Other outstanding members included Ding Ling, Hu Feng, and Mei Zhi. The aim of the League was to develop socialist realism in support of the Communist Revolution, and it finally became very influential in Chinese cultural circles.
- 6 Helen Foster Snow (1907–1997) was an American journalist who reported from China in the 1930s under the name Nym Wales on the progress of Chinese Civil War, the Korean independence movement and the Second Sino-Japanese War. In 1931, Helen Foster moved to China from Salt Lake City in the United States. She married American journalist Edgar Snow in China and involved in several publications. The Snows were interested to the revolutionaries in China. In 1937, they visited the communist wartime capital, Yan'an. Helen Snow interviewed Chinese Communist leaders, including Mao Zedong. Edgar Snow narrated the months that he spent with the Chinese Red Army in his book *Red Star Over China*, this book influenced Western perceptions of China and Western sympathy for Red China in the 1930s.
- 7 The plight of Chinese women in the 1920s and 1930s was also a subject of Western novelists. A celebrated example is Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* published in 1931 centring on the life of a peasant woman, O-Lan, who lived in an oppressive feudal system in which women were expected to labour and to look after the family throughout their lives. A former slave and a woman of few words, she was uneducated but hardworking and self-sacrificing and soon became the spiritual pillar of her family. She not only fought against patriarchy, but also proved by her own actions that women could take care of the family and performed outside the home better than men. As her husband became more prosperous, he bought himself concubine. Enduring the betrayal of her husband, her health and morale declined, and she finally died just after witnessing her first son's wedding, only for the husband to eventually appreciate her place in his life as he mourned her passing.
- 8 In 1936, Ding Ling was already all the rage and Zhang Ailing was in high school. The latter was a fan of the former and wrote a special essay expressing her reverence. The influence of Ding Ling's early works can be seen in Zhang Ailing's writings. For details, please see Li (2022).

Appendix A

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|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Bing Xin | 冰心 | Jiang Guangci | 蒋光慈 | Mao Dun | 茅盾 |
| Ding Ling | 丁玲 | Li Chuli | 李初梨 | Qu Qiubai | 瞿秋白 |
| Feng Naichao | 冯乃超 | Liang Shiqiu | 梁实秋 | Shi Pingmei | 石评梅 |
| Feng Xuefeng | 冯雪峰 | Ling Shuhua | 凌淑华 | Wang Jianhong | 王剑虹 |
| Guo Moruo | 郭沫若 | Lu Xun | 鲁迅 | Xiao Hong | 萧红 |
| Hu Yepin | 胡也频 | Lu Yin | 卢隐 | Zhang Ailing | 张爱玲 |

Appendix B

The Complete Literary Works of Ding Ling

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1927 Dec 《梦珂》 | <i>Mengke</i> |
| 1928 Feb 《莎菲女士的日记》 | <i>The Diary of Miss Sophie</i> |
| 1928 May 《暑假中》 | <i>Summer Vacation</i> |
| 1928 July 《阿毛姑娘》 | <i>Miss Amao</i> |
| 1928 Aug 《潜来了客的月夜》 | <i>A Secret Visitor on a Moonlit Night</i> |
| 1928 Dec 《自杀日记》 | <i>A Suicide's Diary</i> |
| 1928 Dec 《一个女人和一个男人》 | <i>A Woman and a Man</i> |
| 1929 Jan 《庆云里中的一间小房里》 | <i>A Small Room in Qingyun Lane</i> |
| 1929 Jan 《过年》 | <i>New Year's</i> |
| 1929 Feb 《岁暮》 | <i>The End of the Year</i> |
| 1929 March 《小火轮上》 | <i>On a Small Steamboat</i> |
| 1929 March 《他走后》 | <i>After He Left</i> |
| 1929 May 《日》 | <i>Day</i> |
| 1929 June 《野草》 | <i>Yecao</i> |
| 1930 Jan-May 《韦护》 | <i>Wei Hu</i> |
| 1930 June 《年前的一天》 | <i>The Day before New Year's</i> |
| 1930 Sept-Dec 《1930年春上海》 | <i>Shanghai, Spring 1930, I & II</i> |
| 1931 May 《从夜晚到天亮》 | <i>From Night till Daybreak</i> |
| 1931 July 《田家冲》 | <i>Tian Family Village</i> |
| 1931 Sept 《一天》 | <i>One Day</i> |
| 1931 Sept-Nov 《水》 | <i>Floods</i> |
| 1932 Jan 《多事之秋》 | <i>Troubled Times</i> |
| 1932 April 《法网》 | <i>The Net of the Law</i> |
| 1932 June 《某夜》 | <i>A Certain Night</i> |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1932 June 《夜会》 | <i>Night Meeting</i> |
| 1932 June 《消息》 | <i>News</i> |
| 1932 June-July 《母亲》 | <i>Mother</i> |
| 1932 Sept 《诗人亚洛夫》 | <i>The Poet Alov</i> |
| 1933 Jan 《给孩子们》 | <i>For the children</i> |
| 1933 March 《奔》 | <i>Flight</i> |
| 1933 Aug 《杨妈的日记》 | <i>Auntie Yang's Diary</i> |
| 1933 Sept 《不算情书》 | <i>Not Considered a Love Letter</i> |
| 1933 Oct 《莎菲日记第二部》 | <i>Sophie's Diary, Part 2</i> |
| 1936 April 《松子》 | <i>Songzi</i> |
| 1936 June 《陈伯祥》 | <i>Chen Boxiang</i> |
| 1936 July 《一月二十三日》 | <i>January Twenty-Third</i> |
| 1936 Aug 《八月生活》 | <i>Eight Months</i> |
| 1936 Sept 《团聚》 | <i>Reunion</i> |
| 1937 April 《一颗未出膛的枪弹》 | <i>A Bullet Not Yet Fired from Its Barrel</i> |
| 1937 June 《东村事件》 | <i>Incident at East Village</i> |
| 1939 Jan 《冀村之夜》 | <i>The Night at Ji Village</i> |
| 1939 Sept 《新的信念》 | <i>New Faith</i> |
| 1939 Sept 《县长家庭》 | <i>The Magistrate's Family</i> |
| 1939 Nov 《秋收的一天》 | <i>Harvest Day</i> |
| 1940 May 《入伍》 | <i>Enlistment</i> |
| 1941 June 《我在霞村的时候》 | <i>When I was in Xia Village</i> |
| 1941 June 《夜》 | <i>Night</i> |
| 1941 Nov 《在医院中》 | <i>In the hospital</i> |
| 1942 July 《十八个》 | <i>The Eighteen</i> |
| 1944 June 《二十把板斧》 | <i>Twenty Broad Axes</i> |
| 1944 June 《三日杂记》 | <i>Miscellaneous Notes of Three Days</i> |
| 1944 June 《田保霖》 | <i>Tian Baolin</i> |
| 1944 Aug 《记砖窑湾骡马大会》 | <i>Livestock Fair at Zhuanyaowan</i> |
| 1944 Oct 《民间艺人李卜》 | <i>The People's Artist Li Bu</i> |
| 1945 Jan 《袁广发》 | <i>Yuan Guangfa</i> |
| 1948 Sept 《太阳照在桑干河上》 | <i>Sun Shines over the Sanggan River</i> |
| 1953 Nov 《粮秣主任》 | <i>The Provisions Director</i> |
| 1956 March 《一个小红军的故事》 | <i>The Story of a Little Red Soldier</i> |
| 1956 Oct 《在严冬的日子里》 | <i>During the Coldest Days</i> |
| 1978 Aug 《杜晚香》 | <i>Du Wanxiang</i> |