

# Wild Lily, Prairie Fire

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CHINA'S ROAD TO DEMOCRACY,  
YAN'AN TO TIAN'ANMEN,

1942-1989

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

## DOCUMENT 2

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### WANG SHIWEI Politicians, Artists

This article appeared in the journal of the Yan'an Literary Resistance Association in February 1942. In June of that year, it was cited in a condemnation of Wang Shiwei by the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art: "We unanimously agree that Wang Shiwei's fundamental thought and activities are Trotskyite. They are anti-proletarian and harmful to the Communist Party and the revolutionary cause. . . . Wang Shiwei's "Wild Lily" and "Politicians, Artists" are propaganda reflecting his incorrect thought. It is inappropriate for the Literature and Art column of the *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation Daily) and *Guyu* (Spring Rain) to print them instead of exposing and criticizing them."<sup>2</sup>

THERE are two sides to the revolution: changing the social system, and changing people. Politicians are the revolution's strategists and tacticians; they unite, organize, and lead the revolution. Their main task is to transform the social system. Artists are the "engineers of the soul," and their main task is to transform people's heart, spirit, thinking, and consciousness. The filth and darkness in people's souls are the product of an irrational social system, and the soul's fundamental transformation is impossible until the social system has been fundamentally transformed. In the process of transforming the social system the soul too is transformed. . . . The tasks of the politician and the artist are complementary.

The politicians command the revolution's material forces; the artists arouse the revolution's spiritual forces. The politicians are generally cool, collected people, good at waging practical struggles to eliminate filth and darkness, and to bring about cleanliness and light. The artists are generally more emotional and more sensitive, good at exposing filth and darkness, and at pointing out cleanliness and light. . . .

The politicians understand that during the revolution the people in their own camp will be less than perfect, and things will rarely be done ideally. They take the broad view, making sure that the wheel of history advances and that the light wins. The artists, more passionate and more sensitive, long for people to be more lovable and things to be more splendid. When they write they take small things as their starting points: they hope to eliminate the darkness as far as they can so that the wheel of history can advance as fast as possible. As the practical transformers of the social system, the politicians take things more seriously; the artists as the soul's engineers, go even further in demanding perfection of people. In uniting, organizing, and leading the revolution and waging practical struggles, the politicians are superior. But the artists are better at plunging into the depths of the soul to change it—transforming our side in order to strengthen it, and transforming the enemies so as to undermine them.

The politicians and the artists each have their weak points. If the politicians are to attack the enemy successfully, establish links with allied forces, and strengthen our side, they must understand human nature and the ways of the world, be masters of tricks and devices, and be skilled in making and breaking alliances. Their weakness springs from these very strengths. When they use them for the revolutionary cause they become the most beautiful and exquisite "revolutionary art," but unless they are truly great politicians they are bound to make use of them for their own fame, position, and interest, thus harming the revolution. In this respect we must insist that cat's claws be used only for catching rats and not for seizing chickens. Here we must distinguish politicians from artists; and we must be ever on our guard against cats that are good not at catching rats but at taking chickens. The main weaknesses of most artists are pride, narrowness, isolation, inability to unite with others, and mutual suspicion and exclusion. Here we must ask the engineers of the soul to start by making their own souls clean and bright. This is hard and painful, but it is the only way to greatness.

The Chinese revolution is especially hard. The difficulties of changing the social system are well known, but few realize that changing people's souls is even harder. "The further east you go, the darker society becomes." Old China is full of gore and pus, darkness and filth, all of which have inevitably stained the Chinese who grew up in it. Even we, the revo-

lutionary fighters creating a new China, cannot escape this cruel fact. Only if we have the courage to look it in the face can we understand why we must be even more rigorous in our efforts to transform souls, so as to accelerate and win the struggle to change the social system.

Lu Xun was a fighter all his life, but anyone who understands him will know that at heart he was lonely. He struggled because he recognized the laws of social development and believed that the future was bound to be better than the present; he was lonely because he saw that even in the souls of his own comrades there was filth and darkness. He knew that the task of transforming old China could only be carried out by the sons and daughters of old China, despite their filth and darkness. But his great heart could not help yearning for his comrades to be more lovable.

The revolutionary camp exists in old China, and the revolution's fighters have grown up in old China, which means that our souls are inevitably stained. The present revolution requires that we ally not only with the peasants and the urban petty bourgeoisie, but with even more backward classes and strata, and that we make concessions to them, thus becoming contaminated with yet more filth and darkness. This makes the artist's task of transforming the soul even more important, difficult, and urgent. To boldly expose and wash away all that is filthy and dark is as important as praising the light, if not more important. Exposing and cleansing is not merely negative, because when darkness is eliminated the light can shine even brighter. Some people think that revolutionary artists must "direct their fire outside," and that if we expose our weaknesses we give the enemy easy targets. But this is a short-sighted view. Though our camp is now strong enough for us to have no fears about exposing our shortcomings, it is not yet fully consolidated; self-criticism is the best way of consolidating it. As for the maggots and traitors in anti-Communist secret service organs, they would concoct rumors and slanders even if we were flawless; they even hope that we will hush up our faults and shun those who might cure them, so that the darkness grows.

Some who think highly of themselves as politicians smile sarcastically when they speak of artists. Others who pride themselves on being artists shrug their shoulders when they mention politicians. But there is always some truth in objective reflections: each would do well to use the other as a mirror. They should not forget that they are both children of old China.

A truly great politician must have a soul great enough to move the souls of others and cleanse them; thus a great politician is a great artist. An artist who has a truly great soul is bound to have a part to play in uniting, organizing, and leading the forces of revolution; thus a great artist is also a great politician.

Finally I would like to appeal warmly to artist comrades: be even more

effective in transforming the soul, and aim in the first place at ourselves and our own camp. In China transforming the soul will have an even greater effect on transforming society. It will determine not only how soon but even whether the revolution succeeds.

## DOCUMENT 3

## DING LING

## Thoughts on March 8 (Women's Day)

Ding Ling's (1904–1986) famous essay, condemned in 1942 as “narrowly feminist,” is remarkable for the light it throws on relations between men and women in Yan'an. Like Wang Shiwei, Ding Ling had been active in the revolution since the mid-1920s. After the execution of her husband by the Guomindang in 1931 she spent three years behind bars. She achieved early renown as a revolutionary writer, and was one of modern China's best-known women authors. She and the other writers, unlike Wang, quickly gave in to party pressure in 1942 and disavowed their heresies, so they escaped more lightly from the affair. But Ding Ling was back in trouble during the “anti-rightist” drive of 1957–1958: by then a member of the literary establishment, she was criticized and purged as an “inveterate anti-party element.” She was rehabilitated in 1979, when she became a senior member of the Writers' Association.

WHEN will it no longer be necessary to attach special weight to the word “woman” and to raise it specially?

Each year this day comes round. Every year on this day meetings are held all over the world where women muster their forces. Even though things have not been as lively these last two years in Yan'an as they were in previous years, it appears that at least a few people are busy at work here. And there will certainly be a congress, speeches, circular telegrams, and articles.

Women in Yan'an are happier than women elsewhere in China. So much so that many people ask enviously: “How come the women comrades get so rosy and fat on millet?” It doesn't seem to surprise anyone that women make up a big proportion of the staff in hospitals, sanatoria, and clinics, but they are inevitably the subject of conversation, as a fascinating problem, on every conceivable occasion. What's more, all kinds of women comrades are often the target of deserved criticism. In my view these reproaches are serious and justifiable.

People are always interested when women comrades get married, but that is not enough for them. It is impossible for women comrades to get onto friendly terms with a man comrade, even more so with more than

one. Cartoonists ridicule them: “A departmental head getting married too?” The poets say: “All the leaders in Yan'an are horsemen, and none of them are artists. In Yan'an it's impossible for an artist to find a pretty sweetheart.” In other situations they are lectured at: “Damn it, you look down on us old cadres and say we're country bumpkins. But if it wasn't for us country bumpkins, you wouldn't be coming to Yan'an to eat millet!” Yet women invariably want to get married. (It's even more of a sin not to marry, and single women are even more of a target for rumors and slanderous gossip.) So they can't afford to be choosy, anyone will do: whether he rides horses or wears straw sandals, whether he's an artist or a supervisor. After marriage, they inevitably have children. The fate of such children is various. Some are wrapped in soft baby wool and patterned felt and looked after by governesses. Others are wrapped in soiled cloth and left crying in their parents' beds, while their parents consume much of the child's allowance. But for this allowance (25 yuan a month, equivalent to just over three pounds of pork), many would probably never get a taste of meat. Whoever they marry, those women who are compelled to bear children will probably be publicly derided as “Noras who have returned home.”<sup>3</sup> Those women comrades in a position to employ governesses can go out once a week to a prim get-together and dance. Behind their backs there will also be the most incredible gossip and whispering campaigns, but wherever they go they cause a great stir and all eyes are glued to them. This has nothing to do with our theories, our doctrines, and the speeches we make at meetings. We all know this to be a fact, a fact that is right before our eyes, but it is never mentioned.

It is the same with divorce. In general there are three conditions to observe when getting married. These are (1) political purity; (2) similar age and comparable looks; and (3) mutual help. Even though everyone is said to fulfill these conditions—as for (1), there are no open traitors in Yan'an; as for (3), you can call anything “mutual help,” including darn-ing socks, patching shoes, and even feminine comfort—everyone nevertheless makes a great show of giving thoughtful attention to them. And yet the pretext for divorce is invariably the wife's political backwardness. I am the first to admit that it is a shame when a man's wife is not progressive and retards his progress. But let us consider how backward they really are. Before marrying, they were inspired by the desire to soar in the heavenly heights and lead a life of bitter struggle. They got married partly through physiological necessity and partly as a response to sweet talk about “mutual help.” After that they are forced to toil away and become “Noras returned home.” Afraid of being thought “backward,” those who are a bit more daring rush round begging nurseries to take their children. They ask for abortions and risk punishment and even death by secretly swallowing potions to induce them. But the answer comes back:

"Isn't giving birth to children also work? You're just after an easy life, you want to be in the limelight. After all, what indispensable political work have you performed? Since you are so frightened of having children and so unwilling to take responsibility once you have had them, why did you get married in the first place? No one forced you to." Under these conditions how can women escape the destiny of "backwardness"? When women capable of working sacrifice their career for the joys of motherhood, people always sing their praises. But after ten years or so, they inevitably pay the tragic price (i.e., divorce) of "backwardness." Even from my point of view, as a woman, there is nothing attractive about such "backward" elements. Their skin is beginning to wrinkle, their hair is growing thin, and fatigue is robbing them of their last traces of attractiveness. It should be self-evident that they are caught up in a tragedy. But whereas in the old society they would probably have been pitied and considered unfortunate, nowadays their tragedy is seen as something self-inflicted, as their just deserts. Is there not a discussion going on in legal circles about whether divorce should be granted simply on the petition of one party or on the basis of mutual agreement? In the great majority of cases it is the husband who petitions for divorce. If the wife does so, she must be leading an immoral life, so of course she deserves to be cursed!

I myself am a woman, so I understand the failings of women better than others. But I also have a deeper understanding of what they suffer. Women are incapable of transcending the age they live in, of being perfect, or of being hard as steel. They are incapable of resisting all the temptations of society or all the silent oppression they suffer here in Yan'an. They each have their own past written in blood and tears, they have experienced great emotions—in elation as in depression, in the lone battle of life or in the humdrum stream of life. This is even truer of the women comrades who come to Yan'an, so I have much sympathy for those fallen and classed as criminals. What's more, I hope that men, especially those in top positions, and women themselves will consider women's mistakes in their social context. It would be better if there were less empty theorizing and more talk about real problems, so that theory and practice are not divorced, and if each Communist Party member were more responsible for his own moral conduct.

But we must also hope for a little more from our women comrades, especially those in Yan'an. We must urge ourselves on and develop our comradesly feeling.

People without ability have never been in a position to seize all. So if women want equality, they must first strengthen themselves. There is no need to stress this, we all know it. Today there are certain to be people who make fine speeches about the need first to acquire political power. I would simply mention a few things that any frontliner, whether a proletarian,

tarian, a fighter in the war of resistance, or a woman, should pay attention to in his or her everyday life:

1. Don't allow yourself to fall ill. A wild life can at times appear romantic, poetic, and attractive, but in today's conditions it is inappropriate. You are the best keeper of your life. There is nothing more unfortunate nowadays than to lose your health. It is nearest to your heart. Keep a close watch on it, pay careful attention to it, cherish it.

2. Make sure that you are happy. Only when you are happy can you be youthful, active, fulfilled in your life, and steadfast in the face of every difficulty; only then will you see a future ahead of you and know how to enjoy yourself. This sort of happiness is not a life of contentment, but a life of struggle and of advance. All of us should every day do some meaningful work and some reading, so that each of us is in a position to give something to others. Loafing about simply encourages the feeling that life is hollow, feeble, and in decay.

3. Use your brain, and make a habit of doing so. Correct any tendency not to think and ponder, or to swim with the tide. Before you say or do anything, think whether what you are saying is right, whether that is the most suitable way of dealing with the problem, whether it goes against your own principles, whether you feel you can take responsibility for it. Then you will have no cause to regret your actions later. This is what is known as acting rationally. It is the best way of avoiding the pitfalls of sweet words and honeyed phrases, of being side-tracked by petty gains, of wasting our emotions and wasting our lives.

4. Resolution in hardship, perseverance to the end. Aware, modern women should identify and cast off all their rosy, compliant illusions. Happiness is to take up the struggle in the midst of the raging storm and not to pluck the lute in the moonlight or to recite poetry among the blossoms. In the absence of the greatest resolution, it is all too easy to falter in mid-path. Not to suffer is to become degenerate. The strength to carry on should be nurtured through the quality of "perseverance." People without great aims and ambitions rarely have the firmness of purpose that scorns petty advantages and a comfortable existence. Only those who have aims and ambitions for the benefit not of the individual but of humanity as a whole can persevere to the end.

*Dawn, August 3, 1942*

#### Postscript

On rereading this article, it seems to me that there is much room for improvement in the passage about what we should expect from women, but because I have to meet a deadline, I have no time to revise it. Yet I also feel that there are some things that, said by a leader before a big audience,

would probably evoke satisfaction. But when written by a woman, they are more than likely to be demolished. However, since I have written it, I offer it as I always intended, for the perusal of those with similar views.

## DOCUMENT 4

LUO FENG

It Is Still the Age of the *Zawen*

Luo Feng, a writer from Manchuria, argues here that the *zawen*—a laconic and fiercely critical essay form perfected by Lu Xun—is a useful tool for exposing the “dark side” of life in the Communist base areas of northern China, and should not just be reserved for attacking the Guomindang. Like Ding Ling, he quickly gave in to the criticism to which he was subjected for writing this essay. Of the 1942 *zawen*, Luo’s is closest in style to the original model. In 1957 Luo fell from grace a second time—mainly because of his activities in 1942—after the crushing of the Hundred Flowers movement.

IN OUR glorious border areas there are some people who claim that we are no longer in the age of the *zawen*. I too wish that there were no need for the *zawen* to stage a comeback, for if there were no *zawen*, there would be no more of that dreadful darkness or of those evil, nauseating abscesses. If there were no *zawen* all the world would be at peace and we would be certain of final victory in the anti-Japanese war of resistance. But facts are rarely as rounded as hopes, and however much effort we expend on making our thought as brilliant as the sun, it will still be easy as the years go by to find dark, dank corners, full of decaying curios.

Experts in the study of historical evolution point out that the old-fashioned ideas and forms of behavior handed down across the millennia are not easy to uproot at one go. Certain clever gentlemen exploit the gap opened up by this theory as a bolt-hole in which to indulge themselves, happily wallowing and submerging like pigs in a stinking, filthy pool of mud. Themselves not afraid of getting dirty, they see nothing wrong with smearing passers-by. In actual fact there is nothing at all “clever” about such crude behavior. Then there is the other sort of person who, though lurking in the same hole, is always bandying around phrases and making dazzlingly brilliant speeches. It would never occur to natural intelligence that inside that lustrous and armored shell there hides a lump of boneless, sluggardly, timorous flesh!

Generally speaking, it is easier to deal with things that are out in the open. For example, there are ways and means of removing an obstacle that impedes the road to progress. But if you are caught in a thick fog that

completely obscures your vision, you will inevitably feel confused and unsure of your footing. Those who have lived for a long time in the desolate mountains should realize that fogs of this sort not only appear frequently over Chongqing, but here in Yan’an too.

Yes, “Yan’an is the place with the highest level of political awareness.” But if you constantly wear the same elegant clothes and are too lazy to wash them, sooner or later they are bound to get dirty. It is a basic principle of human behavior to practice what you preach, and a revolutionary should pay even more attention to this principle. Why hang a sign round your neck saying “vigilance” if you are going along the wrong road? Your own fate may not be so important, but have some consideration for those following you!

I often think of Mr. Lu Xun when I am on this subject. The dagger he used to cut through the darkness and point the road ahead is already buried underground and rusty, and few know how to use it. But it is still the age of the *zawen*.

Comrade Ding Ling, editor of the Literature Column, plans to revive the *zawen*. She has already presented her own efforts in that column, though they lack strength. As a reader, I hope that from now on the column will change into a dagger to make people tremble with fear, and at the same time to gladden them.